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ARTICLE

# Veridical Flashbacks and Dreams of a Pre-Christian Life in Norway, Following a Near-Death Experience in Adulthood

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## HIGHLIGHTS

Following a near-death experience at 28 years old, a woman began to have visions of an apparent past life in the region of southern Norway where she lives presently, but set toward the end of the pre-Christian era, in the 900s CE.

## ABSTRACT

Following a near-death experience (NDE) at 28, a woman began to have visions of an apparent past life in the region of southern Norway where she lives presently but set toward the end of the pre-Christian era, in the 900s CE. Altogether, she had five flashbacks triggered by places or views, six memory dreams that may also have been triggered, and two related experiences, all pertaining to the life of a *vqlva*, a Viking sorceress or witch. One of the dreams, depicting a stone circle ritual, repeated nightly for six weeks. Given the great time depth involved, it is impossible to identify the apparent memories with any specific individual, but their general tenor conforms with what is known about Viking Age practices from archeological investigations and readings of Old Norse epic poems. This unusual reincarnation case demonstrates the importance of cuing in past-life memory retrieval and suggests that NDEs may play a role in this as well.

## KEYWORDS

Memory cues, memory sources of dreams, near-death experience after-effects, past-life memory retrieval, reincarnation case studies.

## INTRODUCTION

The standard view of neuropsychologists and philosophers that consciousness and memory are brain-dependent has not caught up with studies of non-human animals that have pushed consciousness and memory further and further down the phylogenetic tree (Andrews et al., 2024; Low, 2012). It has become clear that brains are required neither for the generation of consciousness nor for memory consolidation. Recent research with unicellular organisms, such as bacteria, has shown that even they

learn from experience and possess rudimentary forms of cognition (Levin, 2021; Lyon & Cheng, 2023; Reber, 2019; Reber et al., 2024).

Reber (2019; Reber et al., 2024) ascribe subconscious activity to prokaryotes and furthermore suggest that consciousness was an ingredient of the prebiotic “chowder” from which these creatures emerged. Holding firm to his own reductionism, Reber does not entertain the possibility that consciousness was added to the primordial soup from the outside, from a proto-consciousness that permeates the universe, as I have proposed (Matlock, 2019b). Yet



Reber takes us very close to that point, and it may not be long before biological science is forced to adopt something akin to my suggestion, whereupon the postmortem survival and reincarnation of consciousness become live possibilities and accounts of past-life memory cease to sound outlandish.

With this in mind, we may take up the extraordinary case of Astrid Hansen (not her real name), a Norwegian woman who began to have flashbacks and dreams of previous lives following a near-death experience (NDE) at 28. The life Astrid recalls best is set in the region of southern Norway where she lives presently, but toward the end of the pre-Christian Viking Age. Astonishingly, numerous elements of Astrid's memory claims conform to what is known about ancient Nordic ritual practices from archaeological investigations and from epic poems and sagas recorded in the European Medieval period (Gardeta et al. 2023b; Kvilhaug, 2020, 2023; Price, 2019), although given their time depth, it is not possible to identify Astrid's apparent recollections with a specific individual.

I learned about Astrid's case from a post in the Facebook group Signs of Reincarnation in September 2023 and immediately contacted her to ask if I might investigate it. We subsequently conducted a series of exchanges through Facebook Messenger and interviews on Zoom. I have also talked with historian Endre Wrånes,<sup>1</sup> with Astrid, and he accompanied her to several of the sites that triggered her flashbacks. Endre confirms the plausibility of Astrid's apparent recollections, including awareness of features of the landscape, which he is confident she could not have known had she not lived where she purports to have lived in the 900s CE.

## ASTRID HANSEN'S NDE

Astrid was born in January 1984 in eastern Kristiansand, Norway, a city with a population of around 116,000 in January 2020. She was brought up in a fundamentalist Protestant denomination with only 1,750 members in two small Norwegian cities. She was sent to a church-run school, yet was questioning the faith from an early age, thanks to an imaginary friend, who during her third and fourth years, repeatedly advised her to be suspicious of what she was being taught. Her imaginary friend informed Astrid that she was a witch, but witches were evil, according to her parents and school, leaving her fearful and confused.

When she was 5 or 6, Astrid told her imaginary friend that she could no longer spend time with him, because he wasn't real. Her parents believed imagination was sinful,

but beyond that, both her friend and her parents could not be right. One or the other must be lying, Astrid thought, and she did not want to believe her parents were prevaricators. But the seeds of doubt had been planted. Astrid rejected her parents' brand of Christianity in junior high school, after asking a teacher why other people followed other religions and being told that adherents of other religions were equally certain they were right. If the followers of other faiths were convinced of the correctness of their beliefs, she reasoned, how could one be confident of one's own?

From childhood, Astrid had occasional psychic experiences, then from around puberty, she became aware that people close to her had died suddenly. It happened first with a niece, then, 18 months later, with a nephew. On both occasions, she awoke suddenly with the conviction they had died, which turned out to be true.

In 2008, when she was 24, Astrid moved with a boyfriend to the Slettheia district on the western side of Kristiansand. Shortly thereafter, she began to practice yoga and meditate, following an Indian regimen. In 2009, she and her boyfriend moved to another location in Slettheia in view of the sea. Astrid began to experience déjà vu whenever she came to a certain place overlooking the water. She interpreted the feeling as signifying "this was meant to be," this is where she belonged, for some reason she could not fathom. She thought of the feeling as a consequence of the yoga. The possibility that she had been there in a previous life did not occur to her until after her NDE in July 2012.

The NDE came about in childbirth with her first daughter. Following the delivery, she began to hemorrhage and was carried to the hospital operating room. Suddenly, she felt her consciousness separate from her body. She described what occurred in a Zoom interview in November 2023.<sup>2</sup>

It was like all connections to, all interests in, my body, just died. It wasn't there. And so I had, like, no attachments to this body, or to the operating room and what was happening there. I remember seeing a nurse that I recognized. I recognized her face—I think she went to the same church I did when I was a kid.

And so I remember recognizing her face and not really caring. And I just, I didn't care about anything that was happening there. I started understanding, I think—or at first I was a little bit confused, and then I started understanding—that maybe I was dead. Then there was this

big—I don't know how to describe it, or what to call it, but it was something scary, terrifying—thing in front of me. It was like a tunnel with teeth or something. Yeah. It was really terrifying. I knew when I saw it that this was the road to Hell. I knew that just from looking at it. And I thought, first, I'm not going there, and second, I don't believe in you, and the moment I thought, I don't believe in you, I don't believe you exist, it just disappeared.

Then I found myself surrounded by a lot of entities. At first it was scary, then I recognized a face, the face of my childhood imaginary friend. When I recognized him, all the entities became less scary. My imaginary friend was wearing a cloak of a color that doesn't exist. And some of the others were wearing this color that doesn't exist. I realized they were all parts of me, and when I realized that, they also disappeared. I was left with just one entity, my *fylgja*. *Fylgja* literally means "follower," but also "helper," "guide," "higher self."<sup>3</sup> My *fylgja* told me that I was in the Hall of Choices, Valhalla. And he told me that I had to go back. I didn't want to go back. I felt no connection to anything in my life, not even my boyfriend, whom I loved. My *fylgja* said I could go on to my next life, if I wanted to, but I had to choose, and I said, I don't want to go, I just want to be here.

My *fylgja* showed me how he had helped me chose my parents. I was in a big hallway with all the souls that were looking for parents. We could see all the available parents—the mothers were pregnant, but didn't yet have babies—through, like, a glass floor, that wasn't glass, but something transparent that we could see through. And so with the help of my *fylgja*, I chose my parents. I felt drawn to them, but I can't say why. I was also aware of all my past lives, but they didn't interest me, so I paid no attention to them.

Then there was this kind of gate that wasn't a gate that opened. There was a light that really attracted me, so I went in, then I disappeared. I stopped existing. I forgot that bad things exist. Everything that was in some way bad or evil didn't exist, it stopped existing. It was pure bliss. It felt like I was there for ten thousand years, like time didn't exist. When I came back,

it was really, really hard to come out of it. It was like I was being pulled out, and as I was being pulled out, I remembered that bad things exist. That's like the worst feeling I have ever had, remembering that bad things exist.

I felt like I had been away for a really long time. My *fylgja* was there again, and he said, you're not allowed to stay there because you haven't yet earned the privilege to stay there. He told me again, I have to choose. But before I chose, I could see my life. I could see all the possibilities in this life, and I could see all the possibilities in that other life. So he showed me the life I have now, and the choices I have made, and all the choices I would be presented with, and what they would lead to, like branches on a tree, just going out and out. And I could see this both for this life and for the other life that he was, like, recommending, if I didn't want to go back to this one. And I didn't want to go back to this one, because I had broken all ties to our world.

Then he said, but if you don't go back, you should know that this choice will affect the people around you in this life. He showed me the choices that my newborn would be presented with in this life without me. I saw her life, like the branches of a tree. I could see all her choices, and I could see that in most of them without me, she would end up in a really bad place. I could see the big difference my presence would make for her. So that's when I decided to come back.

My *fylgja* also told me that the reason I could choose was that in this life so far, I had already accomplished the task I had been put here to do—the spiritual development I was supposed to have in this life. I had already reached that level, and that was why I could choose. He said that souls that are less aware have their lives chosen for them by their *fylgja*. He told me I would get a new purpose or a new challenge, a new spiritual challenge. And I would have this new challenge no matter what life I chose to go to. Even if I went back to this life, I would have this new spiritual challenge. He showed it to me, but I wasn't allowed to remember it. I just remember seeing it, but I wasn't allowed to remember it, because then it wouldn't be a challenge. I remember these images of, like, a

fork in the road somewhere in my life that will be really significant. But I have no idea what it is.

So I chose to come back to this body, and I came back into the body. I woke up in the ICU. Yeah, that's where I woke up. It was so painful, because to me, I had been out of the body for ten thousand years. So getting back into my body was, like, really uncomfortable, both physically and mentally, because it was like my mind became so small again.

When I woke up, the nurses came to check on me. They put this ultrasound machine on my stomach, and as they did that, I started bleeding again, and they wheeled me back into the operating room. The same thing happened again, only this time I went right into the Hall of Choices with my *fylgja*. And he said, "Did you forget your choice? You chose to go back to that body. You must stay in it, even if it's uncomfortable and painful, you must stay in it." He was saying this like I was trying to escape

the body, like I was trying to run away from the body. Yeah. And then it was, like, really fast, before I was back in my body again.

When I woke up, I had this feeling that everything was exactly as it should be, that everything in life, and in the world, was exactly as it should be. Everything was perfect. There was pain and suffering, but it was something we had to go through. And I was so happy. I was, like, really, really joyful for that whole experience. So no matter what the nurses said or did, I was happy. They said they had never seen anyone recover so fast from major surgery like this. They said I would probably have to stay in bed for at least a week and a half, maybe two weeks. But after only four days, I was literally jumping out of bed, over the railing. The nurses were astonished. "How did you do that?," they wanted to know. "Yoga," I told them.

Table 1 lists key events in Astrid's life, including the dates of her major past-life dreams and flashbacks.

**Table 1.** Key Events in Astrid Hansen's Life

Date	Event
January 13, 1984	Born in Randesund, eastern Kristiansand, Norway.
1984-2008	Grows up, lives in Søm, Randesund.
c. 1998	Loses faith in parents' fundamentalist Christian religion.
Summer 2008	Moves with boyfriend to Slettheia, western Kristiansand.
Fall 2008	Begins regular yoga and meditation.
Summer 2009	Changes location in Slettheia, begins to have regular déjà vu experiences.
July 30, 2012	Suffers NDE in childbirth with first daughter.
from September 2012	Has first past-life flashbacks and dream, in Slettheia (1-2).
Early 2014	Visits Nedre Timenes Nature Preserve in Randesund with boyfriend; has another apparent flashback (4).
March 2014	Separates from boyfriend.
August-September 2014	Has recurrent past-life dream of stone circle ritual, promoted by regularly passing Oddernes Church, which is next to her daughter's kindergarten (5).
September 2014	Dreams of bear cult ritual (6).
March 2015	Moves to Nedre Timenes.
Spring 2016	In Nedre Timenes Nature Preserve, has flashback of having given birth (8).
March 2017	Second daughter born.
August 2018	Begins working in daughter's kindergarten; has brief flashback upon touching "rune stone" (old standing stone) in Oddernes Church (7).
Spring 2021	Has flashback of nighttime procession in response to stone in Nedre Timenes Nature Preserve (9).
Spring 2021	Dreams about being a child riding with her father on horseback (10).
Summer 2021	Tells historian Endre Wrånes about her dreams and flashbacks; he confirms many as historically accurate for pre-Christian Viking period in Kristiansand.
Late Summer 2021	Has dream vision when sleeping over burial mound on island in lake (11).
Summer 2022	Has waking vision while chanting rune in bathtub at home (12).
September 1, 2023	Posts about experiences in Signs of Reincarnation Facebook group; investigation begins.

## FLASHBACKS AND DREAMS OF A PRE-CHRISTIAN VIKING LIFE

In the aftermath of her NDE, it quickly became apparent that Astrid's experience had reshaped her more profoundly than anything to that time. Memories of her childhood imaginary friend and his ministrations came flooding back. She began to open spiritually and to have an increasing number of psychic experiences, especially precognitive ones. She also began to have dreams and flashbacks.<sup>4</sup> and seemed to be events from previous lives. The first came six weeks after her NDE, as soon as doctors approved her leaving her house after her birthing ordeal. She was walking with her new daughter in her stroller, when she came to the place she had so often had the sense of *déjà vu* and was suddenly overtaken with a vision of a distant time.

**1A.** I was in a house that was shaped like an oval or something. I had the feeling that the house was in a village and that there were other people there, but in my memory, there were just two of my children, my husband, and me. I had the feeling that my husband had just returned from hunting. There were strange men there and they murdered first our two kids, and then me, and then my husband. He was forced to watch us being murdered. He was killed last.

After this flashback, Astrid dreamed the same scene repeatedly for several nights in a row, but with a sequel.

**1B.** After they killed me, I stayed around for a while and watched. My children's souls were there too, and I thought of my elder daughter. I saw her hiding in the forest, and I thought she was too close to the house. I could feel her feelings. She was terrified, but also very curious about what had happened to us; she didn't know that we were dead. I tried to tell her to run in the other direction, far away, but I was dead, so I couldn't, but I felt she knew my thoughts anyway. I stayed with her for a while, and I felt like she could feel my presence.

These dreams were unlike Astrid's regular dreams. They were more like memories than dreams, and she recalled them clearly on waking. They left her in tears for days, annoying her boyfriend, who could not understand why she was so emotional about something that did not concern their present lives. For Astrid, the images were

very much part of the present, because it was in the present that she was confronted with them. They provided a link to a past that suddenly had come to seem very real. When this first memory dream finally ceased recurring, another took its place.

**2.** I was standing on a hillside, like in Slettheia, with the same view that gave me that sense of *déjà vu*. With me were the two children from my earlier dream. One was strapped on my back; the other was a toddler. We were picking blackberries, and my toddler said, "Look, mom." He pointed out to sea, and I saw there were ships coming in. The ships had red sails, or, like, brown, red-brown sails. When I saw that color on the sails, I knew this meant that they were coming to hurt us; these were not safe people. So I told my kid, "Run as fast as you can back to the village and tell everybody." And I knew that all the men and my elder daughter and some of the other women were out hunting, and I had this, like, really big fear that they wouldn't be back in time for us to tell them before the ship people were there.

And I thought about this old woman saying that I shouldn't have a husband and children because my duty was to the spirit world; everything would be harder for me if I had a husband and children. In that moment, I understood that she was right.

This dream came only once, but was followed by a third dream that filled in more of the story.

**3.** I dreamed that I remembered having to go do this ritual, and after the ritual I had to do something with a low stone fence somewhere downhill from the village, downhill and a little east from where I was picking berries when I saw that ship. At least I think it was a fence. It was a man-made stone formation. Those structures are all over Nedre Timenes, where I live now, though I have never seen one in Slettheia. So I put something in there behind a rock. I think I was hiding something, something important.

This was after I got back to the village, before the men from the ship were there. When I had this dream, and still, it made no sense that I would go do something like this while I feared

for the lives of my children. Why did I not stay with them? But, anyway, I do not remember the ritual itself, only that I had to do it, and then put this thing in between the stones. And then I rushed back to the house, and when I came home, I saw strange men inside the house and they were holding my husband and my children. That was the end of this dream.

Before her NDE, Astrid had been absorbed in Indian mythology, but she now became preoccupied with Norse mythology, searching for information about Valhalla, the Hall of Choices, and ships with red-brown sails. She found internet postings by Maria Kvilhaug, a Norwegian writer concerned with pre-Christian Nordic religion. Kvilhaug had a blog, to which Astrid sent a lengthy account of her experiences, asking many questions about reincarnation. She thinks she may have gone on too long and shared too much, however, because, in the end, Kvilhaug did not allow the contribution to post and did not reply to it.

As she became more involved in her new role as mother, Astrid had less time for reading and gradually let her research go. At the same time, her relationship with her boyfriend was deteriorating. In an effort to work things out, they took long walks together. On one of these walks, early in 2014, they visited the Nedre Timenes Nature Preserve on the eastern side of Kristiansand, across a fjord arm just north of the area in which Astrid had grown up. The forested preserve was hidden from a road she had often traveled, and she had been unaware of it previously. When they got there, she was struck by the beauty of the area. As they passed an old farm, the sense that she had lived in the area before and would live there again washed over her. She told her boyfriend that she was going to live there someday. He thought she meant this metaphorically, that she really loved the place, but Astrid had had a vision of herself living there in the future. This sense of connection to the farm was accompanied by a second apparent flashback.

4. I had a memory of losing my virginity in that meadow. That I had, like, sex for the first time, as a very young woman or a teenager or something, in that meadow behind the farmhouse.

Astrid separated from her boyfriend in March 2014. She went to live with a friend, then with her brother, finally renting her own apartment, for about a year altogether. During this period, her daughter turned 2, and

Astrid enrolled her in a Waldorf daycare and kindergarten that happened to be located alongside Oddernes Church in Kristiansand.

The original Oddernes Church was erected in 1040, shortly after the official introduction of Christianity to Norway by King Olaf Haraldsson. The bus Astrid and her daughter rode daily stopped in front of the church, and they walked from there to the kindergarten. After several days of walking past the church and its associated cemetery, Astrid began to have a dream that repeated, unvaryingly, nightly, for six weeks.

5. I started having this dream about being part of a ritual taking place in a giant stone circle that was standing almost right outside the front door of the church that is there now. It was really big. The stones were enormous, and I was, like, one of the witches or *vqlvas*<sup>5</sup> taking part in this ritual. It was a midsummer ritual. There were things that I just knew, like that many of the *vqlvas* were painted with different colors, and I knew that the different colors meant that they were at different levels of initiation. I also knew what the colors meant. Now, I don't remember anymore.

This was my initiation, together with some other young women, maybe about fifteen of us. There were women at higher stages of initiation standing outside the circle, like in a ring outside the circle. They were the ones that had different colors painted on them. Some of them were beating on drums. In the middle of the circle, there was this very old *vqlva*. We were dressed in white and we were dancing, and as we danced, she sat motionless with her eyes closed, in the middle of the circle, right where the energies met and were at their most intense. Not all the women that were dancing went into trance; they weren't chosen by the goddess, or something. The old woman didn't need to dance to go into trance; she just sat there.

So, in my dream, I went into trance, and I went out of my body. I saw my body, lying there in the stone circle. I understood why the stones were there, because I could see the way the energies of the Earth were moving through the stones, and how the stones were amplifying the energies. It was like dancing lights moving in this pattern, a really beautiful pattern. And

this whole thing was, like, giving power to the rituals, so that we could more easily leave our bodies and experience things in the spiritual realms. And while I was out of my body, I saw this *vqlva* that was sitting in the middle of the circle. She greeted us when we left our bodies, so we were out-of-body with her in this place. And she lifted us up to see the world from above.

She showed us there was this darkness coming from the south. She showed us both how that looked from like a worldly cultural perspective, but also how it was—even though it was bad, it was like darkness and pain—how it was also necessary. We could see how it was necessary, for humanity. It felt like humanity was at a very, very young stage in its spiritual development. We had to pass through this darkness in order to learn, so we as witches could see how this darkness was necessary, even though we knew it would kill our culture and kill all these things we were doing. We could also see that we needed it to grow as humans, and as spiritual beings. So all the women that were there, we had this task that we had to do in order for—I don't remember all the details, I don't remember exactly what we were going to do, I just remember it was something that we were going to do. I think it has to do with memory, it feels like it has to do with memory.

The coming darkness would have been Christianity, which began to reach Norway in the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that the life Astrid was recalling transpired around that time, 1100 years before her present. Another dream, which continued the story of her initiation into the witches' cult, accompanied the stone circle dream on two occasions.

6. There was this ritual where there was an enormous fire and around the fire, there were all these men dressed in bear hides. They were dressed like bears. They had these bear heads on their heads and they had, like, this bear fur on them that they were covered in. So they looked like bears, and they were dancing around the fire. I didn't really understand, or I don't really understand, what the ritual was. It was some kind of competition, I think, some kind of competition among the men. They were dancing for a very long time. I think it was like,

maybe, who could do the dance the longest, or something like that.

But it was a competition, and the guy that won, he was going to get a head start. And what he was going to get a head start on was that, the number of men dancing around the fire was the same as the number of women dancing in that stone circle. We were wearing these white dresses, all the women, and we had to run into the forest, and then at one point, the men wearing bear costumes ran after us. I think it was, like, the guy that won could run first or something like that, but I don't really understand. I think this is maybe me putting my interpretation on it.

But yeah, there was first this competition ritual with the men, then we ran into the forest, then they ran after us. And so what they had to do was, they had to catch us, and when they caught us, we were to have sex with them. And we were not allowed to come out of the forest until the sun came up in the morning. I remembered that in the days before the ritual, I was walking around camp with my sister, and being in love with this guy who caught me. That was the end of our initiation, and I remember the bear skin he left me. That old woman in the circle that taught us all that stuff appeared and told me that I would bear his child, that I would have a daughter from this encounter. I always imagined that I was to give his bear skin to her, to that child. But that's just my imagination. That's not something I really remember. After this ritual, I never saw the guy again. I think he sailed west with the other men from the ritual.

Astrid took a job in her daughter's kindergarten in 2018. One day soon after, she went into the Oddernes Church for the first time, leading to another apparent flashback.

7. I was working with this child with special needs and I just took him for walks. And so I took him into the church, and that's when I saw the rune stone, as I'd heard it called. Now, in my mind, when I heard "rune stone," I thought about, like, a small stone, maybe a meter high with some runes on it.<sup>7</sup> This stone was more than two meters high, the top was way up above my head. It was enormous. And when I saw it,

I just knew it was one of the stones from the circle. I touched the stone, and when I touched it, I could smell smoke and hear drums, which was really strange. It was only for a moment, but it was like a really very strong sensational experience.

By now, Astrid had moved again. A coworker had told her about a friend, the historian Endre Wrånes, who was renting out a house on a farm in Nedre Timenes. When Astrid called Endre, she did not realize that the house was the farmhouse she had passed on the way to the nature preserve with her boyfriend the year before. She began to lease the house in March 2015, two and a half years after her NDE, fulfilling her premonition of living there in the future.

The forested nature preserve bordered the Wrånes farm to the north and east. Walking through the forest later prompted two additional flashbacks. The first came early in 2016, within a year after she moved to the farm, when she was exploring the preserve, seeking out new areas in it.

**8.** I hadn't been there before, because there wasn't a real path going in there. It's like an animal track, a very small animal track going in there. So when I came into this area, I got this really peaceful feeling. It's beautiful, with these really, really old trees covered in moss. And one side is like a hillside or mountainside, with that kind of slope. It's a super quiet and peaceful place and I just, I had this feeling that I had been there before. Then I came, like, further up between some of the big trees, and I saw this big rock against the slope and then I had this memory that I had given birth there, leaning up against this rock or holding my hands against this rock. I also remember seeing my mother from above as she birthed me, and knowing the baby being born was me. So, like, this was a place where I was both born myself and gave birth.

A later walk in the forest triggered another vision.

**9.** I remembered walking with a lot of people, like a whole village walking, like a snake in the forest, carrying torches. It was at night. I felt like it was a kind of celebration or something that was holy. There was this kind of, this reverent

feeling that we were performing something sacred. We were going to this rock that was there. I think seeing that rock is what made me remember this.

Early in 2021, Astrid had another dream.

**10.** I was sitting on my horse behind my father. I was about 6 or 8, something like that. We were coming home from a market, and I was, like, waking up, because I had fallen asleep on the horse, against my father's back. I was really sweaty and warm, and I woke up. We were home at the village, and I was really excited because we were bringing a new thing, like a new spice, that they had never seen before. And I was the one that was going to get to show it to everybody.

Astrid was not certain all these flashbacks and dreams pertained to the same past life, but she noticed them occurring with increasing frequency. In the summer of 2021, for the first time, she spoke with Endre Wrånes about them. He was astonished by their accuracy (see below), which inspired Astrid to resume her reading on Norse mythology. She found that Maria Kvilhaug now had a YouTube channel called *Lady of the Labyrinth*,<sup>8</sup> to which she subscribed.

Somewhere, Astrid came across mention of women sitting on the burial mounds of their ancestors at night, in order to receive wisdom from them. The practice was suppressed under Christianity, and she had not heard of it before, but she decided to give it a try. In Nedre Timenes, immediately south of the Wrånes farm, there is a lake (Drangsvann) connected by canals to fjords (Rona and Drangsvann) that are arms of Topdal Fjord, which run through Kristiansand. In Drangsvann Lake, there are three small islands with pre-Christian burial mounds. The mounds have been robbed, but they are still there. Astrid took her boat out to the first and smallest of the islands (Lyngholmen), a five-minute cruise.

**11.** I was, like, too lazy to sit outside all night, so I decided to sleep in a hammock over the mound. That's like the second-best thing, I thought. So I slept in a hammock above one of the mounds on that island. And the whole night, I dreamed about the woman that was lying in the mound. Her name was Arnhild. She was a witch, and this island was a sacred island. I saw the canal that

joins the lake to the fjord not as a canal, but as a tiny stream. It was a sacred stream. This was where many of the sacred women, the *vǫlvas*, performed rituals. And there were things strung all the way along there, on the trees. There were things like feathers and bones and things they had made, hung up on the trees, along the stream.

I had this sense that I was merging my mind with this lady Arnhild that was buried there, like she came to me and showed me how she lived, and what she did in that place. It was like she showed me a life I remembered, and I felt like I had, like, a soul connection to her somehow.

Astrid reports having many dreams featuring an old woman she thinks of as a senior witch who imparts various kinds of information. This is not the same witch who addressed the women in the stone circle. Her advice to chant runes in order to understand them led to a vision in which Astrid saw herself from the outside, from an observer perspective, unlike her memory dreams and flashbacks, which she experienced from an interior field perspective.

**12.** She just tells me random stuff usually. I have no idea who she is. I call her a witch because she's like one of the norms of Norse mythology, she's this old woman that represents the past. She's like the personification of the past. The first time I met her, the first dream, I was in a forest at night, and she approached me. She was a hunchback. She looked the way you would imagine a witch looking, exactly like a witch, and she was really scary. She was, like, her eyes were so intense. She was really freaking me out, and she spoke to me in a really strict and direct and, like, you have to do this, kind of way.

I'm not afraid of her in my dreams anymore, because I know she has no evil intentions. But she is really direct and straightforward and not afraid to hurt my feelings. The last time I dreamed about her, she said the brambles always grow close to a hill. Maybe it has to do with brambles used in healing or something, so you have to know where to find the brambles. I suffer from joint pains, and another time she told me I should take walnut oil for my joint pains.

So, in my dreams, she usually just shows up and tells me random stuff. Once, she told me that the runes, the old runes, are supposed to be chanted and that I needed to chant them if I wanted to get to know them. So I tried. A few days later, I tried. I was alone at home with no kids, and I got in the bathtub—I felt safe in the bathtub, and the warm water soothes my joint pain—and I tried.

I chanted this rune over and over and over, and after a while, it was like something took over my body. It was like, I couldn't stop the chant; even if I wanted to, I couldn't stop it. And while I was chanting, this room—it was like, I was a witch in the forest, doing a ritual with fire, dancing around the fire. And the ritual I was doing was to open a channel to myself in another life. So I remembered, I remembered being a witch in the forest, seeing myself in the future, which is my present, seeing myself sitting in this bathtub, chanting. And this room—I remembered feeling confused about the room, like the white walls and everything being just white. It gave me this uncomfortable feeling because it was, like, so cut off from everything I knew.

I have the feeling that all the runes have different energies and do different things. There is only one that can do this. I'm trying to remember which one it is. I'm not sure, actually. But, yeah, it was like I did this ritual to make myself remember something. And I think, or feel, that it has to do with the thing in the stone circle, the ritual that we did there and how this *vǫlva* told us that, like, everything we knew was going to disappear. It feels like it has to do with that. I have not tried it again. It kind of freaked me out, so I have not dared to try anything like that again.

## ASSESSING ASTRID'S PAST-LIFE MEMORY CLAIMS

Astrid believes that her flashbacks and dreams are genuine recollections of the past, but what support do they have? To the extent that they reflect established facts, how certain can we be that she did not retain this knowledge from her schooling or acquire it through reading web pages or watching videos?

Many of Astrid's flashbacks were triggered by places she visited. Her first flashback and her first two memory dreams came shortly after her NDE. Prior to the NDE, she had recurrent feelings of *déjà vu* on a certain hillside with a view of the sea, but after the NDE, she recalled events leading up to her murder by men who arrived by ship. The flashbacks and memory dreams relating to the Oddernes Church site and Nedre Timenes likewise arose when she was at those places. Astrid's flashbacks and dreams include many details that are not taught in Norwegian schools, she and Endre Wrånes have assured me, although they are consistent with archaeological studies and readings of epic poems and sagas (Gardeła et al., 2023b; Kvilhaug, 2020; Price, 2019).

Norway is a very rugged country, featuring numerous mountains and hills cut by rivers and fjords, with a good many lakes. This terrain is the result of the retreat of polar ice sheets around 10,000 BCE, at the transition from the Paleolithic to the Mesolithic Stone Age. Remains of people and their tools have been found from c. 7000 BCE in the area of Kristiansand, which has been continuously inhabited from that time, although the city was not founded until 1641 CE. It is not a large city—the distance from Slettheia in the west to Nedre Timenes in the east is only about 10 kilometers (6 miles), 13 kilometers (8 miles) on present-day roads. Regions of arable land in Norway are more confined than in many other countries, historically producing a settlement pattern of farms with one or more associated houses, rather than villages on the model of Central Europe and Great Britain. Kristiansand incorporates several Viking-Age farms, with no fewer than 80 burial mounds and many stone formations of the same period spread around them.

As the ice sheets receded, the land rebounded, with the consequence that the water level in Kristiansand is about two meters (six feet) lower today than in Viking times, and areas that were uninhabitable then are populated now. Among these areas is a large portion of the Wrånes farm, which has been in Endre's family since at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Endre resisted selling land for development and instead donated acreage to the nature preserve, which he helped create in 2011. Astrid was not aware of the farm before her visit to the preserve with her boyfriend three years later, even though she was born and raised in Randesund, just south of Nedre Timenes. According to Astrid's mother, the Hansen family also has lived here for many centuries. Furthermore, Astrid's mother says, all the old families of Randesund are related, at least through affinal links. It is, therefore, possible that the Wrånes and Hansen

families have ancient ties. Genealogical records go back no further than the 1400s, so their connection cannot be documented, however.

Astrid related her experiences to Endre only after she dreamed about riding with her father on horseback, in the Summer of 2021. Endre then walked around with her, having her point out where she believed things had happened, becoming strongly impressed by the accuracy of her visions in relation to the terrain. Astrid correctly placed events on higher ground and in places whose significance he recognized. At the time, Endre was not a believer in reincarnation, but he was so affected by Astrid's knowledge that he became convinced of it, he told me. Astrid is far from being an academic, he observed, yet she accurately related facts of which only a few academics were aware. Endre cannot understand how she could have known these things, had she not lived them.

Below, I discuss the historical correspondences of Astrid's flashbacks and dreams in more detail, arranged in their apparent order in the Viking life. For some items, I include photographs of the features that triggered Astrid's flashbacks.

**10.** Astrid dreamed of being a young girl on horseback seated behind her father, arriving at a settlement she called a village. When Endre asked her to show him where she envisioned this being, she pointed to a cultivated field about 100 meters (slightly over 100 yards) north of the road leading to the nature preserve (Figure 1). Endre recognized this as the site of a Viking-Age farm that has not yet been surveyed or excavated, so there was nothing to have tipped Astrid off about its existence. Astrid indicated that the path on which she and her father were riding was through present-day fields as well, an approach appropriate for Viking times.

**4.** The meadow in which Astrid visualized losing her virginity was on the ground that would have been exposed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

**5.** The Oddernes Church site that prompted Astrid's recurring dream of the stone circle ritual is located roughly two kilometers northeast of the center of Kristiansand. The city center, like the Slettheia district to the west, faces the Skagerrak Strait, across from Denmark. Two rivers run through Kristiansand from the north—the Otra on its western side, and the Topdal on its eastern. The Topdal River connects to the Topdal Fjord, which separates Randesund from the city's western boroughs.<sup>9</sup>

The region is hilly, yet not mountainous, no doubt adding to its appeal to early settlers. Although there is no



**Figure 1.** View of the site Astrid placed a Viking Age village. (Astrid Hansen, June 2025).

record of a stone circle where the Oddernes Church cemetery now stands, this was the ritual center of southern Norway for many centuries. Two other stone circles, dated from the Bronze Age to the Viking Age, are known from south-eastern Norway,<sup>10</sup> and Endre considers it more likely than not that one stood where Astrid's dream placed it in pre-Christian times.

Although I have not found a description of a ritual like the one in Astrid's dream, its basic elements are well-attested in sources on Viking-age ritual practices. *Vqlur* ("vqlvas") played a central role in Viking culture and religion. They practiced *seiðr*, a form of ritual magic that appears to have been shamanic in nature and involved going into trance and out-of-body to communicate with discarnate entities and animal spirits.<sup>11</sup> *Seiðr* was performed for various purposes, among them access to, or control over, future events (Price, 2019, p. 57). There are suggestions that it was performed, especially when crises were imminent, as a means of probing the course of things to come. *Seiðr* was preeminently associated with feminine energy and although men were not barred from participating, those that did were presumed to be gay (Price, 2019, p. 173).

7. The "rune stone" in Oddernes Church was brought indoors only recently, to curtail its deterioration. It is a tall rectangular stone, inscribed on two faces (Figure 2). The earlier inscription, a dedication to Tore, son of Nerid, has been dated to the late 900s. The later inscription, dated to c. 1040, may be translated as, "Eyvind, Olav the Holy's godson, built this church on his inherited land."<sup>12</sup>

Oddly, although the stone might well have been a standing stone from a stone circle, this has not been recognized by scholars. The earlier runic inscription is typically given as, "After Tore, Nerid's son, this stone is (erected)." The word *erected* is not included in the inscription, but is inserted because it seems to be implied.<sup>13</sup> However, the stone might well have already been in place when it was inscribed, its companions having been removed at or by that time. Unfortunately, because the church cemetery now occupies the ground where the circle would have stood, it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to find traces of it today. Endre reports that, despite its historical importance, much of Kristiansand—including the Oddernes Church surrounds—has never received a proper archeological survey, partly due to pressures of population growth and expansion from the 1940s onward.



**Figure 2.** Rune stone in Oddernes Church, 2016 (by Anders Feder - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=52160843>).

When she touched the stone, Astrid experienced a sensation of smoke and drumming. Both fire and drums were important in Viking ritual practices (Kvilhaug, 2020; Price, 2019), so their association with a stone circle performance would not be surprising.

6. Bears in Viking culture are most closely connected with berserkers (*berserkr*, sing. *berserkr*), men who dressed in bear hides (or nothing at all) and ran wild, often leading the charge in raids and warfare.<sup>14</sup> Price (2019, p. 319), however, noted a link between berserkers, ecstatic states, and shape-shifting, indicating that the berserker represented more than violence. I have found no references to berserkers initiating witches, as Astrid's dream depicts, although since *seiðr* and other Viking rituals had sexual connotations or components (Price, 2019, pp. 177-183), this possibility cannot be ruled out.

At the end of the night, in Astrid's dream, the initiate's lover leaves his bear-skin behind. Interestingly,



**Figure 3.** Vertical birthing stone in hollow. (Astrid Hansen, March 2024).

archaeologists have discovered bear hides in several first-millennium Norwegian burials, but only in the southern and western parts of the country, most often in women's interments (Grimm, 2013).<sup>15</sup> Although far from coercive evidence, this is consistent with a regional tradition involving berserkers in the initiation of witches, after which they donated their bear hides to them, as Astrid recalled in her dream. Perhaps of note as well, the men with whom the other initiates had intercourse sailed west upon departing from them.

8. Egeler (2023) discusses "rituals in the open landscape" during the Viking Age. Many rituals were performed in sacred groves and other outdoor spaces. Rocks and boulders acted as stage sets and props, perhaps because, as Endre explained to me, the receding glaciers that helped create the Norwegian landscape left behind stones in unusual places and positions. The stone on the hillside against which Astrid recalled being born and giving birth (Figure 3) is in a secluded hollow shaded by tall trees that would not have been there a millennium ago. For both Astrid and Endre, the hollow has the feeling of a sacred space. When Astrid described her flashback to Endre, he

thought he recognized the area, because he himself had often felt drawn to it. He had her take him there, and indeed it was the same.

9. When Astrid encountered a moss-covered boulder in a different section of the preserve, she had a flashback of walking with a group of people, in single-file, like a snake, through a forest at night, carrying torches. The boulder looked to her like no more than a rock, but when she told Endre about this experience, he recognized the site as a probable Viking-Age *hörgr*, a stone formation used for ritual purposes. The boulder (to the left in Figure 4) is a good example of a glacier-deposited rock that became imbued with special meaning. It is located on the top of a hill with a good view of a defunct fjord, an arm of the Topdal Fjord (to the right, out of frame). The thin, vertical slab to the right and the recumbent slab in the foreground (which might originally have been standing as well) serve to frame an area that is paved with smaller stones (some now disturbed).

Murphy and Nygaard (2023) describe two sorts of processions in Viking times, the circulatory and the

linear. Linear processions typically were funeral processions. Archaeologists who have been to this location have concurred with Endre that this almost certainly is a pre-Christian grave and/or a place for sacrifice, although it has not been excavated. Neither the location of this *hörgr* nor its details are widely known, as this site has not been published or information concerning it made public in any way. If the stone paving covers a grave, Astrid might have remembered the funeral procession of the person buried there, or else a ritual return to that site afterwards, but again, Endre cannot understand how she could have been aware of any of this before he told her about it.

2. In this dream, Astrid is picking berries on a slope with a view of the sea, when her toddler son directs her attention to an approaching ship with red-brown sails. This and the related dreams and flashbacks 1A, 1B, and 3 occurred when Astrid was living in Slettheia, in western Kristiansand. If these experiences depict an event that occurred in the same place, they carry the implication that the witch moved from Nedre Timenes in eastern Kristiansand to live with her husband when she married, which



**Figure 4.** Boulder that triggered Astrid's flashback of a snake-like procession. (Endre Wrånes, February 2024).



**Figure 5.** View from Slettheia toward Nedre Timenes, across inlet off Skagerrak Strait. (Astrid Hansen, March 2024).

fits the Viking norm of marital residence (Price, 2019). Figure 5 is a view similar to the view Astrid had in September 2012, but taken in March 2024.

Viking-Age farms are known to have existed a little to the south and north of Slettheia, but none have been documented in Slettheia itself, according to Endre. Nonetheless, Astrid reports occasionally finding plants like wild oregano and henbane,<sup>16</sup> which would have been cultivated originally, growing in Slettheia, suggesting that there was indeed a settlement there at some point in the past.

Endre tells me that ships' sails during the Viking Age were of various colors. The red-brown hue does not indicate to him anything about the provenance of the ship or why it would have signaled a threat. I have not found sources that provide insight into these issues, although given the Vikings' proclivity for raiding and slaughter, one can readily imagine the attack as an act of retribution.

Astrid's flashback was accompanied by the sense that her elder daughter and other women were out hunting with the men. From textual sources such as epic poems, this would appear to be realistic for the Vikings. Women

often accompanied men on hunting expeditions in support roles (Kvilhaug, 2020).

**3.** Astrid dreamed that after returning home, she left her younger children to perform a ritual and then to hide something in what looked like a rock fence downhill from the settlement in which she lived. Rock fences (low stone walls) regularly bordered Viking-Age farms (Price, 2019), so if there was a farm in this area, such a structure would be expected. However, no rock fences have survived in Slettheia, which has become highly developed and urbanized.

**1A.** Astrid's first flashback was of living in an oval-shaped house, which is historically accurate for the Vikings. Her killing, along with her husband and children, cannot be confirmed, however.

**1B.** In her dream, after the murder, Astrid observed the scene in the house and then left in search of her elder daughter. She found her in the forest and tried to communicate with her, but was unable to do so. Astrid neglected to tell me when she first related this dream that she had the sense that her elder daughter had been there when

she arrived back in the village, and that she had sent her to another settlement to warn people there of the danger. This would explain why the daughter was out of the house when the men arrived.

I have now analyzed each of Astrid's flashbacks and dreams of her Viking life, but there are two related experiences that deserve comment as well.

**11.** Viking-Age burial mounds are situated throughout Kristiansand. Typically, the mounds were placed on notable heights, by waterways or on islands, Endre tells me, so it is not surprising to find them on the Drangsvann Lake islands. Burial mounds stood out in the landscape and had important ritual functions in Viking times (Egeler, 2023, p. 103). Kvilhaug (2020, p. 252) mentions sitting on burial mounds to obtain visions, as part of initiation rituals.

During her dream, Astrid perceived the canal that joins Drangsvann Fjord to Drangsvann Lake as a small stream. When she related this impression to Endre, he apprised her that this would have been correct for Viking times. The canal was constructed in 1880 to broaden the stream to accommodate steamboats to serve Randesund. In Viking times, the water level was higher, but the lake was there, and in it were islands accessible by smaller boats.

Astrid dreamed that along the stream were hanging "feathers and bones and things that they had made." The Vikings are known to have employed charms, pendants, amulets, and other small objects for magic and divination. Often, these objects were carried by *vqlur*, sometimes in bags, and archeologists have discovered them in burials (Gardęta et al., 2023a; Price, 2019). I have found no mention of them strung on trees along streams, as in Astrid's dream, although this might well have been a ritual practice in Viking times.

**12.** Chanting played a significant role in *seiðr* and other rituals in the Viking world. In fact, *seiðr* may originally have served "as both the name of the ritual, a verb for its performance and as one of the possible chants used in its undertaking" (Price, 2019, p. 171). Kvilhaug (2023, pp. 279–284) describes chanting runes (or runic inscriptions), each with a specific meaning. Astrid reports that as she chanted the rune repeatedly, she had a vision of herself in the past, chanting to open a connection to herself in a future life (her present life). Old Norse reincarnation beliefs are attested in sagas and Eddic poems (Kvilhaug, 2020), and divination was a central function of the Viking witch's craft (Kvilhaug, 2020, 2023; Price, 2019, pp. 186–188).

Astrid's five flashbacks and six dreams of her Viking life are listed in Table 2 in the sequence employed in this

section. Her vision engendered by chanting runes in the bathtub (11) and her experience sleeping above the burial mound (12) are included at the end of the table. All flashbacks and dreams except for her first dream (1B), her dream of the stone circle ritual (which recurred nightly for six weeks; 5), and her dream of the bear dance (which came twice; 6) were single events. Seven are in some way veridical or possibly veridical. Four are impossible to evaluate, so they were judged as non-veridical. None of the flashbacks or dreams are demonstrably wrong in any of their details. Of the two additional experiences, both may have veridical aspects, but neither are demonstrably wrong in any way.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although many aspects of Astrid's memories cannot be corroborated, their overall consistency with what is known about Viking-Age culture in general and witchcraft, in particular, is astonishing. Details of the period are known to archaeologists and historians like Endre Wrånes, but not to the Norwegian public. Astrid took little interest in the Viking Age until after she started having her experiences, and when she did begin to study it, she turned to the web, not to scholarly books and journals. Maria Kvilhaug, to whose work Astrid was attracted, is a specialist in Old Norse epic poetry, not archaeology. Kvilhaug's work conveys nothing about the natural landscape and built environment in the Kristiansand area, the features of Astrid's memories that most impressed Endre. As unlikely as it may appear, the possibility that Astrid did indeed recall events from the distant past cannot be set aside lightly.

The Viking life is not the only apparent past life Astrid recalled, sometimes in waking visions, sometimes in hypnagogic reveries, sometimes in nocturnal dreams. Altogether, she believes she has recalled nine other lives. All came to her following her NDE; most came long after she had begun to recall the Viking life. None of these other lives are veridical, so we must be cautious in accepting them. As with memories of the Viking life, several were seemingly cued, when Astrid came into contact with places or people she felt she had known before. Only one and possibly two are set in Norway, well after Viking times. The others are scattered geographically—around the Mediterranean, one each perhaps in Siberia, India, and Great Britain. The dates are too uncertain to allow for their arrangement even in tentative chronological sequence, but if these other lives are credited, it is clear that Astrid's Viking life was not her most recent one, nor was it her earliest.

**Table 2.** Historical Correspondences to Astrid Hansen’s Dreams and Waking Flashbacks of a Viking Life, Arranged in Apparent Chronological Order.

Item No. Experience Type (cuing; veridicality)	Item Description	Historical Correspondence
10. Dream (possibly cued; partly veridical)	Coming into settlement on horseback with father.	Astrid pointed out to Wrånes the correct location of a Viking Age settlement, not yet excavated, buried under agricultural fields.
4. Flashback (cued; partly veridical)	Losing virginity in a meadow.	The location of this vision was on relatively high ground that would have been exposed in the late Viking Age.
5. Dream, recurring (cued; possibly veridical)	Stone circle ritual, first part of initiation into witches’ cult.	The existence of a stone circle at the Oddernes Church site is not confirmed, although it is plausible.
7. Flashback (cued; possibly veridical)	Touching stone produces sensation of smelling smoke and hearing drums.	The “rune stone” might well have been a standing stone in the circle; the sensation would be appropriate for a ritual there.
6. Dream (uncued; non-veridical, although possible)	Bear dance, followed by chase and sexual intercourse.	Although conceivably a regional practice, the bear dance is not attested in sources.
8. Flashback (cued; non-veridical, although possible)	Giving birth my vertical stone slab in hollow.	Although the hollow has the appearance and feeling of a sacred space, this cannot be documented.
9. Flashback (cued; possibly veridical)	Nighttime procession to rock formation.	The rock in question is part of a Viking Area that may mark a burial; the procession might have been funerary or a later walk to the grave for ritual purposes.
2. Flashback (cued; non-veridical)	Seeing arrival of ship with red-brown sails.	Although the flashback might be to an event that occurred, there are no records from that time in existence.
3. Dream (non-veridical)	Performing rituals by rock fence.	
1A. flashback (non-veridical)	Murder of children and herself in front of husband.	
1B. dream, recurring (non-veridical)	Murder of children and herself in front of husband, followed by seeing elder daughter in forest.	
11. Dream (partly veridical)	Communication from Arnhid, interred in burial mound on island in lake.	Present-day canal visualized as a small stream, as it would have been in the 900s.
12. Dream (possibly veridical)	Chanting runes in bathtub.	Although runes may have been chanted, no reference to this has been found.

Ten may seem an excessively large number of remembered lives, but it is not unusual for adults (more so than children) to recall multiple past lives. E.C. (Matlock, 2024a) recalled seven past lives, and Will (Wehrstein, 2019, 2021), fragments of as many as 30. Usually, one life is recalled much more fully than the others, and it is rare for more than one of multiple lives to be “solved” (the previous incarnation identified: Matlock, 2019b, p. 230). In this respect, Astrid’s experience is in line with other reincarnation cases that have been studied.

Although the past-life memories of young children tend to arise in the waking state, similar to the way memories of the present life enter conscious awareness, adult memories are more likely to involve non-ordinary states of consciousness (Lenz, 1979; Matlock, 2019b). Pasricha et al. (1978) described veridical past-life memories surfacing during a psychotic break. Uttara Huddar’s memories of Sharada presented in dissociative fugues (Steven-son, 1984). Adult past-life memories frequently appear

in dreams (Lenz, 1979),<sup>17</sup> but those memories rarely are veridical, and adult cases have been solved only rarely (Wehrstein, 2017). Hassler (2018) reported a solved German adult case involving dreams and flashbacks, similar to Astrid’s case. Rawat and Rivas (2021) described a Dutch child case and I (Matlock, 2022a, 2024b) highlight two American adult cases that were solved entirely on the basis of dreams. E.C.’s memories of an American Marine fatally wounded in Vietnam (Matlock, 2024a) included dreams as well as flashbacks, guided meditation, and past-life regression. Most of these cases involved violent deaths, as did the Viking witch’s death Astrid recalled, a feature of many past-life memories cross-culturally (Matlock, 2019, p. 179).

Cuing is important in drawing past-life memories into conscious awareness with both children and adults, although it becomes more obvious the older case subjects are when the memories first surface (Matlock, 1989). Examples include James Leining (Matlock, 2022b; Tucker,

2013), Rylann O'Bannion (Matlock, 2019b), Scott Perry (Matlock, 2022a), and E.C. (Matlock, 2024a). In all these cases, there was a period of subconscious incubation between the cue or cues and the appearance of the memories in conscious awareness. In E.C.'s case, although there were triggering events from early childhood, she did not become consciously aware of her memories until her 50s. It is not uncommon to hear of *déjà vu* experiences with adult subjects, as with Astrid before her NDE, but Astrid is unusual in having detailed flashbacks as immediate responses to triggers as an adult, something more commonly seen with children.<sup>18</sup>

Astrid's case is unique in its great time depth. There is no shortage of claims to remember lives in the distant past, but seldom are these claims veridical. There are very few solved cases with intermissions over a few decades in length. A.J. Stewart (1978) self-reported a solved case with an intermission of 416 years, less than half the duration of the intermission between Astrid's Viking life and her present life. Uttara Huddar's memories of Sharada (Stevenson, 1984) are officially unverified, but if this were a solved case, the intermission would be 106 or 107 years. Stevenson (1973) mentioned a solved Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) case with an intermission of 82 years. The next longest intermissions are found in a group of American cases that include James Leininger (Matlock, 2022b; 53 years) and Angela Grubbs (Matlock, 2024b; 48 years). In the overwhelming majority of cases, the intermission is much shorter. Stevenson (2001, p. 120) noted that in his large collection, the intermission was (with some exceptions) less than three years. In a series of 616 of his cases, the median length was only 15 months.

With intermissions longer than a few decades, there is a heightened possibility of intervening lives that are not recalled. There are other cases (e.g., Swarnlata Mishra: Stevenson, 1974) in which the past life recalled best is not the most recent life, but in none of these other cases are there multiple intervening lives, as with Astrid, much less so long a period between the best-recalled previous life and the present life. What accounts for the differences in Astrid's experience?

No doubt, an important factor is her living in the locations she remembered having lived before, which provided opportunity for the triggering of memories when she came near places she recognized subliminally. Another less obvious factor may be mental qualities cultivated in Viking life. Research has shown that the previous person's psychology must be taken into account in explaining a case subject's

experience (Matlock, 2019b, pp. 207-209). Thus, the Viking witch's familiarity with trance and her evident concern with remembering may have aided Astrid's recall by shaping her subconscious processing of stimuli, which carried over in her reincarnation. The Old Norse belief in reincarnation may have helped also, as it would have led the witch to expect to have future lives.

Additionally, there is the effect of Astrid's meditation practices and her NDE. Although her past-life memories did not become conscious until after the NDE, in early childhood, Astrid had an imaginary friend who told her she was a witch. Later, during the NDE, she recognized this imaginary friend as an aspect of herself, which implies that she had this knowledge all along, subliminally. The NDE itself has an Old Norse cast with its setting in Valhalla, which is significant because Astrid did not become interested in Old Norse mythology until after her NDE. During the NDE, she was aware that she had lived before, but was not interested in her earlier lives. She was guided by her *fylgja*, who showed her how he had helped her choose her present parents,<sup>19</sup> None of this was part of Astrid's conscious experience at the time, but following the NDE, it came to define her life.

Considerable attention has been paid to NDE after-effects (Noyes et al., 2009). Changes have included wide-ranging personal transformations, touching on all aspects of a person's life. Of particular interest to us here is an increased receptivity to psychic phenomena. Past-life memory retrieval is not, properly speaking, a psychic phenomenon—it has all the hallmarks of present-life memory retrieval (Matlock, 2019, pp. 123-136)—but it shares with psychic functioning a rooting in the subconscious mind. Readier access to the subconscious may make it easier for past-life memories to break into conscious awareness, and that may explain why NDEs might enhance past-life recall.

Astrid is not alone in this. Prior to an NDE at age 6, Rand Jameson Shields (2013) had no past-life memories, but soon after his NDE, he started having dreams that proved to be veridical and led to his identifying the person he was before. Alicja Heath (2023) had no past-life memories before her NDE at 15, but following it she experienced visions of what seemed to be seven previous lives. Before her NDE at 18, E.C. (Matlock, 2024a) displayed behaviors linked to past lives she eventually recalled, but although the behavioral identifications became more intense following the NDE, her memories did not become conscious until after she suffered another physical crisis decades later. Tikvah Feinstein (2023) had past-life memory dreams

before her NDE at 63, but they became clearer after it, enabling her to unearth new details and solve her case. Regardless of the age of the subject at the time of the NDE, the NDE is followed by an increased receptivity to past-life memory. Because this is not a regular consequence of NDEs, we cannot say that past-life memory as such is an NDE after-effect, but having an NDE does seem to facilitate past-life memory retrieval, especially in persons whose memories were close to the surface of conscious awareness beforehand (Matlock, in preparation).<sup>20</sup>

These factors combine to explain Astrid's experience, I believe. The effect of her NDE on her psychic constitution, coming into contact with the same places she had lived before, and the mental training of her previous life, all contributed to her ability to pull long-buried memories out of her subconscious. We do not need to posit an extra-sensory acquisition of information to explain past-life memory. All we need is an understanding of consciousness as duplex, involving a subconscious as well as supraliminal conscious awareness, along with a provision for consciousness to survive bodily death and subsequently to possess another physical body in reincarnation. Research suggests that after reincarnation, we continue to feel the influence of past-life experiences, and when conditions are right, memories of our earlier lives may enter our conscious awareness (Matlock, 2019b).

Three years after her NDE, Astrid was invited to join a women's circle in Kristiansand. The first day she was there, she recognized almost all the women as witches who had participated in the stone circle ritual. One approached Astrid and said she looked familiar—did she know her from somewhere? Astrid acknowledged that she seemed familiar to her too. They tried to figure out when they might have met, but became convinced it could not have been in their present lives.

All the women in the Kristiansand women's circle are spiritual, but most, including the woman who approached Astrid, have no memories of pre-Christian times. They are of various ages, but many of them—perhaps not coincidentally, Astrid supposes—are employed in the healing professions. The woman who approached Astrid is married to an indigenous South American man. She identifies as a shaman and, together with her husband, leads an international alliance of shamans that has an annual meeting in northern Norway. Astrid wonders if the women have come back together where they lived and practiced before because they sense the world is entering a new phase, when the contributions of wise women will once again be valued.

## IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

If Reber (2019; Reber, Baluska, & Miller, 2024) is right that the origins of consciousness are to be found in conditions that predated the appearance of unicellular organisms, it could well be that the postmortem survival and reincarnation of consciousness was a feature of life from the start. The implications of this conclusion cannot be overstated, but our sciences and culture are not yet prepared to acknowledge it. In order for that to change, the hold of materialist assumptions about consciousness and the foundations of memory must weaken to the point that they no longer determine what is considered feasible. At this juncture, there is no reason to expect Astrid Hansen's story to be received with anything but disdain by the mainstream, yet perhaps it, and other cases like it, eventually will come to be viewed in a different light. Should that come to pass, we may look back on our current situation as on the path to emergence from the darkness that the *vqlva* in Astrid's stone circle dream foresaw, and Astrid's experience as presaging a new dawn.

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This study would not have been possible without Astrid Hansen, who generously shared her story and responded to my many follow-up inquiries. I am also indebted to Endre Wrånes for taking the time to talk to me about Astrid's flashbacks and dreams. His historical expertise has been invaluable in my evaluation of her experience. Both Astrid and Endre read over this paper in draft and set me straight on points I initially misunderstood. Except for Figure 2, which I have drawn from the web, all photographs were contributed by Astrid and Endre, as indicated, and are used with their permission.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Endre Wrånes has worked with cultural heritage in the Agder region of Norway (which includes Kristiansand) since 2003. He has been a conservator at Kristiansand's Vest-Agder Museum since 2012. All interviews with him were conducted in English.
- <sup>2</sup> I interviewed Astrid in English. This and all quotations from her are lightly edited from Audext transcriptions of our Zoom conversations or from Facebook Messenger exchanges. Some quotations incorporate things she told me on separate occasions, but I have not introduced any language or information Astrid did not introduce herself.

She reviewed all quotations in their final form to ensure they preserved her voice and meaning.

<sup>3</sup> For a brief discussion of the *fylgja* concept (pl, *flygjur*), see Price (2019, p. 30).

<sup>4</sup> I use the term “flashback,” because it best conveys Astrid’s experience, although I do not assume that all her flashbacks represent genuine memories. Several of her flashbacks—and dreams, as well—have veridical aspects, but because it is impossible to identify a life to which they refer, we cannot determine to what extent they are true memories and to what extent imaginings. In keeping with the character of dreams incorporating past-life memory content generally (Hassler, 2018; Matlock, 2019a, 2022a, 2024a, 2024b; Rivas, under submission), Astrid’s past-life dreams were considerably clearer than her regular dreams, with accompanying emotions and sense of a different identity continuous her own. Unlike her regular dreams, they did not fade upon waking.

<sup>5</sup> Technically, the plural of *vølv* is *vølvur*. An alternate spelling is *völva* (pl., *völvur*).

<sup>6</sup> Norway was not officially converted to Christianity until Olaf Haraldsson seized the throne in 1015. He made Christianity the country’s official religion around 1020. However, archaeologists have found signs that some parts of southern Norway were shifting towards Christianity already in the later 900s, and many parts of Norway remained pagan long after 1020 (Endre Wrånes, personal communication).

<sup>7</sup> Runes may refer either to letters in runic alphabets used by Germanic peoples before the adoption of the Latin alphabet, or scripts utilizing these letters (Spurkland, 2005). Here, Astrid refers to runes in the latter sense. Some rune letters were ideographic, conveying meaning in their own right.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/user/ladyofthelabyrinth>.

<sup>9</sup> Randsund was a separate municipality until 1965 when it was incorporated into Kristiansand.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1354/exploring--norways-forgotten-stone-circles--petrog/>.

<sup>11</sup> Although this appears to be the most widely held view of *seiðr*, not all scholars agree (Price, 2019, pp. 171-172).

<sup>12</sup> Photographs of the stone, said by Spurkland (2005, p. 114) be three and a half meters (11.5 feet) tall, appear at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oddernes\\_stone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oddernes_stone), but with translations of the inscriptions and their dates different from those given by Spurkland. (For a photograph of the stone standing in the church cemetery before being moved into the church, see Spurkland, 2005, p. 116). Olav the Holy almost certainly refers to King Olaf Haraldsson, who brought Christianity to Norway, and was canonized by Pope Alexander III in 1164. However,

Spurkland’s reading of the rune (2005, p. 115) is different. According to Endre Wrånes, “Spurkland was one of the few rune researchers who believed that the runes on the Oddernes stone, which formed the epithet ‘the holy,’ should be interpreted in an alternative way (just a nickname for a local chief), which ruled out that this was about the well-known Olav the holy. The majority opinion today is that the runes really mean ‘the holy,’ which is also certainly the most logical in a historical context.”

<sup>13</sup> This is according to Endre Wrånes, who adds that, “We don’t know who these two persons [Tore and Nerid] were, there are no sources. But it is reasonable to assume that these were the landowners and nobility in the area.” Spurkland (2005, p. 144) endorses a simpler translation, “In memory of Þórir Neridsson [Tore Neridsson] is this stone.”

<sup>14</sup> The English adjective *berserk* is derived from the Old Norse noun *berserkr*.

<sup>15</sup> In northern Norway and Sweden, bear claws and teeth rather than bear hides appear in burials, and usually in association with men (Grimm, 2013). The grave goods found in association with the bear hides suggested important woman, although not necessarily *vølvur*. However, Price (2019, p. 310) remarks, “the very strong symbolic aspects of bears in the Viking thought-world would surely suggest that these burials [with bear skins] must have possessed other dimensions beyond the purely economic.”

<sup>16</sup> Henbane (*Hyoscyamus* sp.), an entheogenic plant, reportedly was an ingredient of witches’ brews and ointments, used to engender hallucinations, the sense of being out of body, and shape-shifting. It has been found in graves presumed to be those of *vølvur* (Price, 2019, pp. 111, 168).

<sup>17</sup> Autobiographical present-life memories also may be incorporated into dreams (Malinowski & Horton, 2014b), although episodic memories figure in only about 1-2% of dream reports (Fosse et al., 2003). Studies have not yet been done to show how commonly episodic past-life memories appear in dreams, although it appears that they follow the pattern of present-life memories in largely representing emotionally salient experiences (Malinowski & Horton, 2014a).

<sup>18</sup> In commenting on this, Astrid told me, “I do feel when I have these memories that there’s a reason why I have that exact memory. Like there’s something here I have to work with or in the moment you realize, you know, but you don’t remember.”

<sup>19</sup> Choosing parents, sometimes with the aid of assisting spirits, has been reported cross-culturally in memories of the intermission period (Matlock & Giesler-Petersen,

2016). If Astrid did choose her parents, her being born in Randesund just south of Nedre Timenes would not have been a coincidence. Other aspects of Astrid's NDE seem more influenced by popular metaphysical beliefs than research findings, but we do not know enough about Viking-Age beliefs to know to what extent Astrid's experiences might have been influenced by those.

<sup>20</sup> Several NDErs with past-life memories were practiced meditators (Matlock, under submission), so meditation could be a contributing factor in past-life memory retrieval as well. A reviewer of the present paper suggested testing for fantasy proneness, something that might be done in future reincarnation case studies in general.

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