

Norse Mythology

Norse Gods

A Wikipedia Compilation
by
Michael A. Linton

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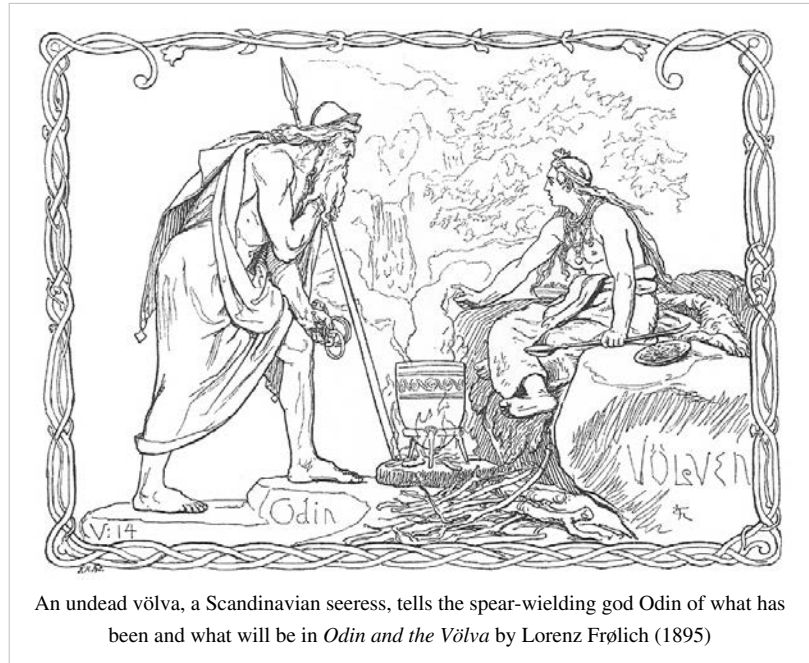
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Mythology

Norse mythology

Norse mythology or **Scandinavian mythology** is the body of mythology of the North Germanic peoples stemming from Norse paganism and continuing after the Christianization of Scandinavia and into the Scandinavian folklore of the modern period. The northernmost extension of Germanic mythology, Norse mythology consists of tales of various deities, beings, and heroes derived from numerous sources from both before and after the pagan period, including medieval manuscripts, archaeological representations, and folk tradition.



An undead völva, a Scandinavian seeress, tells the spear-wielding god Odin of what has been and what will be in *Odin and the Völva* by Lorenz Frølich (1895)

Numerous gods are mentioned in the source texts, such as the hammer-wielding, mankind-protecting god Thor, who unrelentingly pursues his foes; the one-eyed, raven-flanked god Odin, who craftily pursues knowledge throughout the worlds and bestowed among mankind the runic alphabet; the beautiful, seiðr-working, feathered cloak-clad goddess Freyja who rides to battle to choose among the slain; the vengeful, skiing goddess Skaði, who prefers the wolf howls of the winter mountains to the seashore; the powerful god Njörðr, who may calm both sea and fire and grant wealth and land; the god Freyr, whose weather and farming associations bring peace and pleasure to mankind; the goddess Iðunn, who keeps apples that grant eternal youthfulness; the mysterious god Heimdallr, who is born of nine mothers, can hear grass grow, has gold teeth, and possesses a resounding horn; the half-god Loki, who brings tragedy to the gods by engineering the death of the goddess Frigg's beautiful son Baldr; and numerous other deities.

Most of the surviving mythology centers on the plights of the gods and their interaction with various other beings, such as mankind and the jötnar, beings who may be friends, lovers, foes and/or family members of the gods. The cosmos in Norse mythology consist of Nine Worlds that flank a central cosmological tree; Yggdrasil. Units of time and elements of the cosmology are personified as deities or beings. Various forms of a creation myth are recounted, where the world is created from the flesh of the primordial being Ymir, and the first two humans are Ask and Embla. These worlds are foretold to be reborn after the events of Ragnarök, where an immense battle occurs between the gods and their enemies, and the world is enveloped in flames, only to be reborn anew. There the surviving gods will meet and the land will be fertile and green, and two humans will repopulate the world.

Norse mythology has been a discussion of scholarly interpretation and debate since the 17th century, when key texts were brought to the attention of the intellectual circles of Europe. By way of comparative mythology and historical linguistics, scholars have identified elements of Germanic mythology reaching as far back as Proto-Indo-European

mythology. In the modern period, the Romanticist Viking revival re-awoke an interest in the subject matter, and references to Norse mythology may now be found throughout modern popular culture. The myths have further been revived in a religious context among adherents of Germanic Neopaganism.

Sources

Norse mythology is primarily attested in dialects of Old Norse, a North Germanic language spoken by the Scandinavian peoples during the European Middle Ages, and the ancestor of modern Scandinavian languages. The majority of these Old Norse texts were created in Iceland, where the oral tradition stemming from the pre-Christian inhabitants of the island was collected and recorded in manuscripts. This occurred primarily in the 13th century. These texts include the *Prose Edda*, composed in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and the *Poetic Edda*, a collections of poems from earlier traditional material anonymously compiled in the 13th century.^[1]

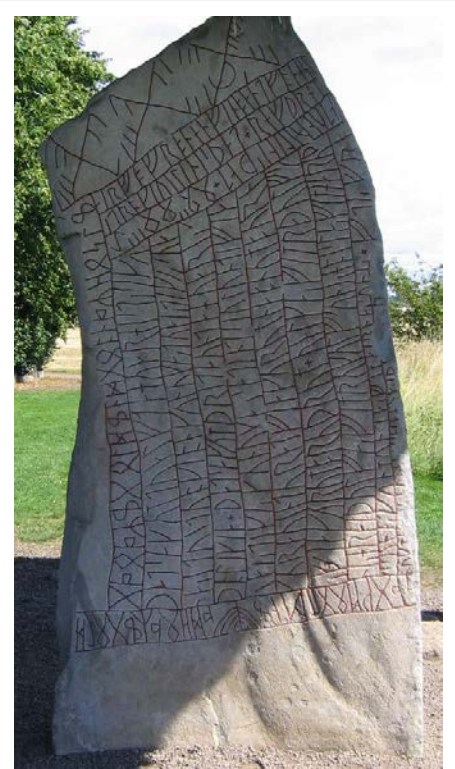
The *Prose Edda* was composed as a prose manual for producing skaldic poetry—traditional Old Norse poetry composed by skalds. Originally composed and transmitted orally, skaldic poetry utilizes alliterative verse, kennings, and various metrical forms. The *Prose Edda* presents numerous examples of works by various skalds from before and after the Christianization process and also frequently refers back to the poems found in the *Poetic Edda*. The *Poetic Edda* consists almost entirely of poems, with some prose narrative added, and this poetry—*Eddic* poetry—utilizes fewer kennings. In comparison to skaldic poetry, Eddic poetry is relatively unadorned.^[1]

The *Prose Edda* features layers of euhemerization, a process in which deities and supernatural beings are presented as having been either actual, magic-wielding humans beings who have been deified in time or beings demonized by way of Christian mythology.^[2] Texts such as *Heimskringla*, composed in the 13th century by Snorri and *Gesta Danorum*, composed in Latin by Saxo Grammaticus in Denmark in the 12th century, are the results of heavy amounts of euhemerization.^[3]

Numerous further texts, such the sagas, provide further information. The saga corpus consists of thousands of tales recorded in Old Norse ranging from Icelandic family histories (Sagas of Icelanders) to Migration period tales mentioning historic figures such as Attila the Hun (legendary sagas). Objects and monuments such as the Rök Runestone and the Kvinneby amulet feature runic inscriptions—texts written in the runic alphabet, the indigenous alphabet of the Germanic peoples—mention figures and events from Norse mythology.^[4]

Objects from the archaeological record may also be interpreted as depictions of subjects from Norse mythology, such as amulets of the god Thor's hammer Mjölfnir found among pagan burials and small silver female figures interpreted as valkyries or *dísir*, beings associated with war, fate, and/or ancestor cults.^[5] By way of historical linguistics and comparative mythology, comparisons to other attested branches of Germanic mythology (such as the Old High German Merseburg Incantations) may also lend insight.^[6] Wider comparisons to the mythology of other Indo-European peoples by scholars has resulted in the potential reconstruction of far earlier myths.^[7]

Of the mythical tales and poems that are presumed to have existed during the Middle Ages, Viking Age, Migration Period, and prior, only a tiny amount of poems and tales survive.^[8] Later sources reaching into the modern period, such as a medieval charm recorded as used by the Norwegian woman Ragnhild Tregagås—convicted of witchcraft in



The Rök Runestone (Ög 136), located in Rök, Sweden features a Younger Futhark runic inscription that makes various references to Norse mythology

Norway in the 14th century—and spells found in the 17th century Icelandic *Galdrabók* grimoire also sometimes make references to Norse mythology.^[9] Other traces, such as place names bearing the names of gods may provide further information about deities, such as a potential association between deities based on placement of locations bearing their names, their local popularity, and associations with geological features.^[10]

Mythology

Gods and other beings

Central to accounts of Norse mythology are the plights of the gods and their interaction with various other beings, such as with the *jötnar*, who may be friends, lovers, foes and/or family members of the gods. Numerous gods are mentioned in the source texts. As evidenced by records of personal names and place names, the most popular god among the Scandinavians during the Viking Age was Thor, who is portrayed as unrelentingly pursuing his foes, his mountain-crushing, thunderous hammer *Mjöllnir* in hand. In the mythology, Thor lays waste to numerous *jötnar* who are foes to the gods or mankind, and is wed to the beautiful, golden-haired goddess *Sif*.^[11]

The god Odin is also frequently mentioned in surviving texts. One-eyed, wolf and raven-flanked, and child-bearing, Odin pursues women throughout the worlds. In an act of self-sacrifice, Odin is described as having hung himself on the cosmological tree *Yggdrasil* to gain knowledge of the runic alphabet, which he passed on to mankind, and is associated closely with death, wisdom, and poetry. Odin has a strong association with death; Odin is portrayed as the ruler of *Valhalla*, where half of those slain in battle may be fetched to *Valhalla* by valkyries. Odin's wife is the powerful goddess *Frigg* who can see the future but tells no one, and together they have a beloved son, *Baldr*. After a series of dreams had by *Baldr* of his impending death, his death is engineered by the half-god *Loki*, and *Baldr* thereafter resides in *Hel*, a realm ruled over by a goddess of the same name.^[12]

Odin must share half of his share of the dead with a powerful goddess; *Freyja*. She is beautiful, sensual, wears a feathered cloak, and practices *seiðr*. She rides to battle to choose among the slain, and brings her chosen to her afterlife field *Fólkvangr*. *Freyja* weeps for her missing husband *Óðr*, and seeks after him in far away lands.^[13] *Freyja*'s brother, the god *Freyr*, is also frequently mentioned in surviving texts, and in his association with weather, royalty, human sexuality, and agriculture brings peace and pleasure to mankind. Deeply lovesick after catching sight of the beautiful *jötunn* *Gerðr*, *Freyr* seeks and wins her love, yet at the price of his future doom.^[14] Their father is the powerful god *Njörðr*. *Njörðr* is strongly associated with ships, rum, and seafaring, and so also wealth and prosperity. *Freyja* and *Freyr*'s mother is *Njörðr*'s sister (her name is unprovided in the source material). However, there is more information about his pairing with the skiing and hunting goddess *Skaði*. Their relationship is ill-fated, as *Skaði* cannot stand to be away from her beloved mountains and *Njörðr* the seashore.^[15] Together, *Freyja*, *Freyr*, and *Njörðr* form a portion of gods known as the *Vanir*. While they retain a distinct identification, their coming together is the result of a war, the *Æsir–Vanir War*.^[16]

While they receive less mention, numerous other gods and goddesses appear in the source material. Some of the gods we hear less about include the apple-bearing goddess *Iðunn* and her husband, the skaldic god *Bragi*; the gold-toothed, white-skinned god *Heimdallr*, born of nine mothers; the ancient god *Týr*, who lost a hand while binding great wolf *Fenrir*; and the goddess *Gefjon*, who formed modern day Zealand, Denmark.^[17]



The god Thor wades through a river while the Æsir ride across the bridge Bifröst in an illustration by Lorenz Frølich (1895)

Various beings outside of the gods are mentioned. Elves and dwarfs are commonly mentioned and appear to be connected, but their attributes are vague and the relation between the two is ambiguous. Elves are described as radiant and beautiful, whereas dwarfs often act as earthen smiths.^[18] A group of beings variously described as jötnar, thursar, and trolls (in English these are all often glossed as "giants") frequently appear. The beings may either aid, deter, or take their place among the gods.^[19] The norns, dísir, and aforementioned valkyries also receive frequent mention. While their functions and roles may overlap and differ, all are collective female beings associated with fate.^[20]

Cosmology

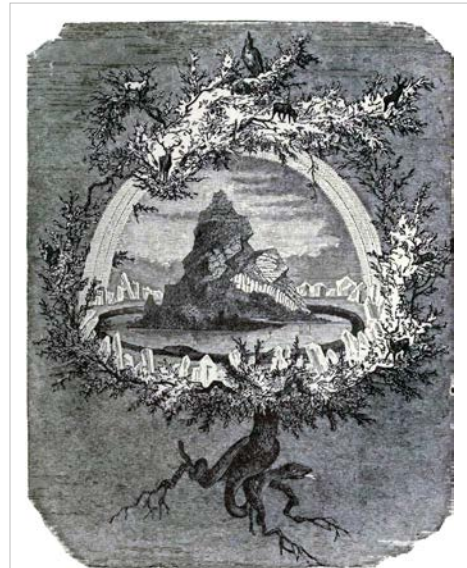
The cosmology of the worlds in which all beings inhabit—nine in total—centers around a cosmological tree, Yggdrasil. The gods inhabit the heavenly realm of Asgard whereas mankind inhabits Midgard, a region in the center of the cosmos. Outside of the gods, mankind, and the jötnar, these Nine Worlds are inhabited by a variety of beings, such as elves and dwarfs. Travel between the worlds is frequently recounted in the myths, where the gods and other beings may interact directly with mankind. Numerous creatures live on Yggdrasil, such as the insulting messenger squirrel Ratatoskr and the perching hawk Veðrfölnir. The tree itself has three major roots, and at the base of one of these roots live a trio of norns.^[21] Elements of the cosmos are personified, such as the Sun (Sól, a goddess), the Moon (Máni, a god), and Earth (Jörð, a goddess), as well as units of time, such as day (Dagr, a god) and night (Nótt, a jötunn).^[22]

The afterlife is a complex matter in Norse mythology. The dead may go to the murky realm of Hel—a realm ruled over by a female being of the same name, may be ferried away by valkyries to Odin's martial hall Valhalla, or may be chosen by the goddess Freyja to dwell in her field Fólkvangr.^[23] The goddess Rán may claim those that die at sea, and the goddess Gefjon is said to be attended by virgins upon their death.^[24] References to reincarnation are also made.^[25] Time itself is presented between cyclic and linear, and some scholars have argued that cyclic time was the original format for the mythology.^[26] Various forms of a cosmological creation story are provided in Icelandic sources, and references to a future destruction and rebirth of the world—Ragnarök—are frequently mentioned in some texts.^[27]

Mankind

According to *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá* and the *Prose Edda*, the first human couple consisted of Ask and Embla; driftwood found by a trio of gods and imbued with livelihood in the form of three gifts. After the cataclysm of Ragnarök, this process is mirrored in the survival of two humans from a wood; Líf and Lífþrasir. From these two humankind are foretold to repopulate the new, green earth.^[28]

Numerous heroes appear in Norse mythology and are celebrated in a variety of poems, songs, and narratives.



The cosmological, central tree Yggdrasil is depicted in "The Ash Yggdrasil" by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine (1886)



Sól, the Sun, and Máni, the Moon, are chased by the wolves Sköll and Hati in "The Wolves Pursuing Sol and Mani" by J. C. Dollman (1909)

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Notes

- [1] Faulkes (1995:vi—xxi) and Turville-Petre (1964:1—34).
- [2] Faulkes (1995:xvi—xviii).
- [3] Turville-Petre (1964:27—34).
- [4] Lindow (2001:11—12), Turville-Petre (1964:17—21), and MacLeod & Mees (2006:27—28, 216).
- [5] Regarding the *dísir*, valkyries, and figurines (with images), see Lindow (2001:95—97). For hammers, see Simek (2007:218—219) and Lindow (2001:288—289).
- [6] Lindow (2001:29—30, 227—228) and Simek (2007:84 & 278).
- [7] Puhvel (1989:189—221) and Mallory (2005:128—142).
- [8] Turville-Petre (1964:13).
- [9] Regarding Ragnhild Tregagås, see MacLeod & Mees (2006:37). For *Galdrabók*, see Flowers (1989:29).
- [10] Turville-Petre (1964:2—3, 178).
- [11] Lindow (2001:287—291).
- [12] Lindow (2001:128-129, 247—252).
- [13] Lindow (2001:118, 126—128).
- [14] Lindow (2001:121-122).
- [15] Lindow (2001:241-243).
- [16] Lindow (2001:311-312).

- [17] Lindow (2011:86-88, 135-137, 168-172, 198-199, 297-299)
- [18] Lindow (2001:99-102, 109-110) and Simek (2010:67-69, 73-74).
- [19] Simek (2010:108-109, 180, 333, 335).
- [20] Lindow (2001:95-97, 243-246). Simek (2010:62-62, 236-237, 349).
- [21] Lindow (2001:319-332). Simek (2010:375-376).
- [22] Lindow (2001:91-92, 205-206, 222-223, 278-280).
- [23] For Hel, see Lindow (2001:172) and Orchard (1997:79). For Valhalla, see Lindow (2001:308—309) and Orchard (1997:171—172). For Fólkvangr, see Lindow (2001:118) and Orchard (1997:45).
- [24] For Rán, see Lindow (2001:258—259) and Orchard (1997:129). For Gefjon, see Orchard (1997:52).
- [25] Orchard (1997:131).
- [26] Lindow (2001:42—43).
- [27] Lindow (2001:1—2, 40, 254—258).
- [28] Simek (2010:189).
- [29] http://books.google.com/books?id=gjq6rvoIRpAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_navlinks_s#v=onepage&q=&f=false
- [30] <http://books.google.com/books?id=g2-Lga0r62MC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Nordic+Religions+in+the+Viking+Age&lr=#v=onepage&q=&f=false>
- [31] http://books.google.com/books?id=KIT7tv3eMSwC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_navlinks_s#v=onepage&q=&f=false

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Æsir

Æsir

In Old Norse, *áss* (or *óss*, *ás*, plural *æsir*; feminine *ásynja*, plural *ásynjur*) is the term denoting a member of the principal pantheon in the indigenous Germanic religion known as Norse paganism. This pantheon includes Odin, Frigg, Thor, Balder and Tyr. The second pantheon comprises the Vanir. In Norse mythology, the two pantheons wage the Æsir-Vanir War, which results in a unified pantheon.

The cognate term in Old English is *ōs* (plural *ēse*) denoting a deity in Anglo-Saxon paganism. The Old High German is *ans*, plural *ensî*.^[1] The Gothic language had *ans-* (based only on Jordanes who glossed *anses* with uncertain meaning, possibly 'demi-god' and presumably a Latinized form of actual plural **anseis*).^[2] The reconstructed Proto-Germanic form is **ansuz* (plural **ansiwiz*). The **a-rune** 𐌰 was named after the *æsir*.



Æsir gathered around the body of Baldr. Painting by Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg 1817

Unlike the Old English word *god* (and Old Norse *goð*), the term *ōs* (*áss*) was never adopted into Christian use and survived only in a secularized meaning of "pole, beam, stave, hill" or "yoke".

Etymology

Æsir is the plural of *áss*, *óss* "god" (gen. *āsir*) which is attested in other Germanic languages, e.g., Old English *ōs* (gen. pl. *ēsa*) and Gothic (as reported by Jordanes) *anses* "half-gods". These all stem from Proto-Germanic **ansis* ~ *ansuz*, which itself comes from Proto-Indo-European **h₂énsus* (gen. *h₂énsús*) "life force" (cf. Avestan *aṇhū* "lord; lifetime", *ahura* "godhood", Sanskrit *ásu* "life force",^[3] *ásura* "god" (< **h₂énsuró*)). It is widely accepted that this word is further related to **h₂éns-* "to engender" (cf. Hittite *hass-* "to procreate, give birth", Tocharian B *ās-* "to produce").^[4]

Old Norse *áss* has the genitive *áss* or *ásar*, the accusative *æsi* and *ásu*. In genitival compounds, it takes the form *ása-*, e.g. in *Ása-Pórr* "Thor of the Aesir", besides *ás-* found in *ás-brú* "gods' bridge" (the rainbow), *ás-garðr*, *ás-kunnigr* "gods' kin", *ás-liðar* "gods' leader", *ás-mogin* "gods' might" (especially of Thor), *ás-móðr* "divine wrath" etc. *Landâs* "national god" (*patrium numen*) is a title of Thor, as is *allmáttki ás* "almighty god", while it is Odin who is "the" *ás*.

The feminine's *-ynja* suffix is known from a few other nouns denoting female animals, such as *apynja* "female monkey", *vargynja* "she-wolf". The word for "goddess" is not attested outside of Old Norse.

The latinization of Danish *Aslak* as *Ansleicus*^[5] indicates that the nasalization in the first syllable persisted into the 9th century.

The cognate Old English form to *áss* is *ōs*, preserved only as a prefix *Ōs-* in personal names (e.g. Oscar, Osborne, Oswald) and some place names, and as the genitive plural *ēsa* (*ēsa gescot* and *ylfa gescot*, "the shots of anses and of elves", *jaculum divorum et geniorum*). In Old High German and Old Saxon the word is only attested in personal and

place names, e.g. Ansebert, Anselm, Ansfrid, Vihans. Jordanes has *anses* for the gods of the Goths.^[6]

Norse mythology

The interaction between the Æsir and the Vanir has provoked an amount of scholarly theory and speculation. While other cultures have had "elder" and "younger" families of gods, as with the Titans versus the Olympians of ancient Greece, the Æsir and Vanir were portrayed as contemporaries. The two clans of gods fought battles, concluded treaties, and exchanged hostages (Freyr and Freyja are mentioned as such hostages).

An áss like Ullr is almost unknown in the myths, but his name is seen in a lot of geographical names, especially in Sweden, and may also appear on the 3rd century Thorsberg chape, suggesting that his cult was widespread in prehistoric times.

The names of the first three Æsir in Norse mythology, Vili, Vé and Odin all refer to spiritual or mental state, *vili* to conscious will or desire, *vé* to the sacred or numinous and *óðr* to the manic or ecstatic.

Æsir and Vanir

A second clan of gods, the *Vanir*, is also mentioned in Norse mythology: the god Njord and his children, Freyr and Freyja, are the most prominent Vanir gods who join the Æsir as hostages after a war between Æsir and Vanir. The Vanir appear to have mainly been connected with cultivation and fertility and the Æsir were connected with power and war. The Æsir and Vanir may correspond to the Indo-Iranian and vedic Asuras and Devas.

In the Eddas, however, the word *Æsir* is used for gods in general, while *Asynjur* is used for the goddesses in general. For example, in the poem *Skírnismál*, Freyr was called "Prince of the Æsir". In the Prose Edda, Njord was introduced as "the third among the Æsir", and among the *Asynjur*, Freyja is always listed second only to Frigg.

In surviving tales, the origins of many of the Æsir are unexplained. Originally, there are just three: Odin and his brothers Vili and Vé. Odin's sons by giantesses are naturally counted as Æsir. Heimdall and Ullr's connection with the Æsir is not clearly mentioned. Loki is a jötunn with no evidence of being worshipped, and Njord is a Vanir hostage, but they are often ranked among the Æsir.

Given the difference between their roles and emphases, some scholars have speculated that the interactions between the Æsir and the Vanir reflect the types of interaction that were occurring between social classes (or clans) within Norse society at the time.^[7] According to another theory, the Vanir (and the fertility cult associated with them) may be more archaic than that of the more warlike Æsir, such that the mythical war may mirror a half-remembered religious conflict.^[8] Another historical theory is that the inter-pantheon interaction may be an apotheosization of the conflict between the Romans and the Sabines.^[9] Finally, the noted comparative religion scholar Mircea Eliade speculated that this conflict is actually a later version of an Indo-European myth concerning the conflict between and eventual integration of a pantheon of sky/warrior/ruler gods and a pantheon of earth/economics/fertility gods, with no strict historical antecedents.^[10]

List of Æsir

Gylfaginning (20.ff) gives a list of twelve male aesir, not including Odin their chief, nor including Loki, "whom some call the backbiter of the asas":

Then said Gangleri: Which are the Æsir in whom it is man's duty to believe? Har answers: Twelve are the Æsir of the race of gods. Then said Jafnhar: The *Asynjur* are not less holy and they are not less capable. Then said Thrithi: Odin is the greatest and oldest of the Æsir. ... Frigg is his wife, and she knows the fate of men, although she tells not thereof. ...

1. (21.) Thor is the foremost of them. He is called Asa-Thor, or Oku-Thor. He is the strongest of all gods and men, and rules over the realm which is called Thrudvang.
2. (22.) Odin's second son is Balder

3. (23.) the third asa is he who is called Njord.
 4. (24.) Njord, in Noatun, afterward begat two children: a son, by name Freyr, and a daughter, by name Freyja. They were fair of face, and mighty. Freyr is arguably the most famous of the asas. He rules over rain and sunshine, and over the fruits of the earth. It is good to call on him for harvests and peace. He also sways the wealth of men. Freyja is the most famous of the goddesses. ...
 5. (25.) There is yet an asa, whose name is Tyr. He is very daring and stout-hearted. He sways victory in war, wherefore warriors should call on him.
 6. (26.) Bragi is the name of another of the asas. He is famous for his wisdom, eloquence and flowing speech.
 7. (27.) Heimdall is the name of one. He is also called the white-asa. He is great and holy; born of nine maidens, all of whom were sisters. He is also called Hallinskide and Gullintanne, for his teeth were of gold.
 8. (28.) Hoder hight one of the asas, who is blind, but exceedingly strong; and the gods would wish that this asa never needed to be named, for the work of his hand will long be kept in memory both by gods and men.
 9. (29.) Vidar is the name of the silent asa. He has a very thick shoe, and he is the strongest next after Thor. From him the gods have much help in all hard tasks.
 10. (30.) Ale, or Vale, is the son of Odin and Rindr. He is daring in combat, and a good shot.
 11. (31.) Ullr is the name of one, who is a son of Sif, and a step-son of Thor. He is so good an archer, and so fast on his skees, that no one can contend with him. He is fair of face, and possesses every quality of a warrior. Men should invoke him in single combat.
 12. (32.) Forseti is a son of Balder and Nanna, Nep's daughter. He has in heaven the hall which hight Glitner. All who come to him with disputes go away perfectly reconciled. Just to listen to People's Future. No better tribunal is to be found among gods and men. ...
- (33.) There is yet one who is numbered among the asas, but whom some call the backbiter of the asas. He is the originator of deceit, and the disgrace of all gods and men. His name is Loki, or Loft. ... His wife hight Sigyn, and their son, Nare, or Narfe.

Corresponding to the fourteen Æsir listed above, section 36 lists fourteen asynjur:

Ganglere asked: Which are the goddesses? Har answered:

1. Frigg is the first; she possesses the right lordly dwelling which is called Fensaler.
2. The second is Saga, who dwells in Sokvabek, and this is a large dwelling.
3. The third is Eir, who is the best leech.
4. The fourth is Gefjun, who is a may, and those who die maids become her hand-maidens.
5. The fifth is Fulla, who is also a may, she wears her hair flowing and has a golden ribbon about her head; she carries Frigg's chest, takes care of her shoes and knows her secrets.
6. The sixth is Freyja, who is ranked with Frigg. She is wedded to the man whose name is Oder; their daughter's name is Hnos, and she is so fair that all things fair and precious are called, from her name, Hnos. Oder went far away. Freyja weeps for him, but her tears are red gold. Freyja has many names, and the reason therefor is that she changed her name among the various nations to which she came in search of Oder. She is called Mardol, Horn, Gefn, and Syr. She has the necklace Brising, and she is called Vanadis.
7. The seventh is Sjöfn, who is fond of turning men's and women's hearts to love, and it is from her name that love is called Sjöfn.
8. The eighth is Lofn, who is kind and good to those who call upon her, and she has permission from Alfater or Frigg to bring together men and women, no matter what difficulties may stand in the way; therefore "love" is so called from her name, and also that which is much loved by men.
9. The ninth is Var. She hears the oaths and troths that men and women plight to each other. Hence such vows are called vars, and she takes vengeance on those who break their promises.
10. The tenth is Vör, who is so wise and searching that nothing can be concealed from her. It is a saying that a woman becomes vor (ware) of what she becomes wise.

11. The eleventh is Syn, who guards the door of the hall, and closes it against those who are not to enter. In trials she guards those suits in which anyone tries to make use of falsehood. Hence is the saying that "syn is set against it," when anyone tries to deny ought.
 12. The twelfth is Hlin, who guards those men whom Frigg wants to protect from any danger. Hence is the saying that he hlins who is forewarned.
 13. The thirteenth is Snotra, who is wise and courtly. After her, men and women who are wise are called Snotras.
 14. The fourteenth is Gna, whom Frigg sends on her errands into various worlds. She rides upon a horse called Hofvarpner, that runs through the air and over the sea. Once, when she was riding, some vanir saw her faring through the air. [...]
- Sol and Bil are numbered among the goddesses, but their nature has already been described.

The A-rune

The *a*-rune ᚦ, Younger Futhark ᚦ was probably named after the Æsir. The name in this sense survives only in the Icelandic rune poem as Óss, referring to Odin in particular, identified with Jupiter:

ᚦ Óss er algingautr / ok ásgarðs jöfurr, / ok valhallar vísi. / Jupiter oddviti.

"Óss is Aged Gautr / and prince of Asgard / and lord of Valhalla / chieftain Jupiter."

The name of ᚦ *a* in the Gothic alphabet is *ahsa*. The common Germanic name of the rune may thus have either been *ansuz* "God, one of the Æsir", or *ahsam* "ear (of corn)"

Asleikr

The personal names Old Norse *Ásleikr* (Latinized *Ansleicus*, modern *Axel*), Old English *Óslác* (modern "*Hasluck*") and Old High German *Ansleh* may continue the term for a sacrificial performance for the gods in early Germanic paganism (**ansu-laikom*). Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (s.v. "Leich") compares **laikom* to the meaning of Greek χορός, denoting first the ceremonial procession to the sacrifice, but also ritual dance and hymns pertaining to religious ritual. Hermann (1906)^[11] identifies as such **ansulaikom* the victory songs of the Batavi after defeating Quintus Petillius Cerialis in the Batavian rebellion of 69 AD (according to Tacitus' account), and also the "nefarious song" accompanied by "running in a circle" around the head of a decapitated goat sacrificed to (he presumes) Wodan, sung by the Lombards at their victory celebration in 579 according to the report of Pope Gregory the Great (*Dialogues* ch. 28).

Personal names

Theophoric Anglo-Saxon names containing the *os* element: *Osmund*, *Osburh*, *Oslac* (Danish *Axel*), *Oswald*, *Oswiu*, *Oswin*, *Osbert*, *Oswudu*, *Osred*, *Oslaf*, *Offa* (from *Osfrid*), *Oesa* (i-mutated from a **Ós-i-*), *Oscar* (Anglo-Saxon form of *Ásgeir*). These names were notably popular in the Bernician dynasty. Still-current are the surname *Osgood* and *Osborn*.

As occurs in many Scandinavian names: *Asbjørn*, *Asgeir* (*Asger*, *Asker*), *Asmund*, *Astrid*, *Asdís*, *Asgautr*, *Aslaug*, *Åse* etc. Gothic has *Ansila* and *Ansemund*, and Old High German *Anso*, *Anshelm*, *Anshilt*, *Anspald*, *Ansnôt*.

As also occurs in some English names. In 874, King Asketil was one of four Viking nobles who sacked Repton, the capital of Mercia, England. As 'ketil' means 'cauldron' (from whence the English word 'kettle' is derived), his name means 'God's cauldron'. The English surname *Astle* is derived from his name, however it is not related to the name *Astley*. Less common alternative spellings of *Astle* include *Astel*, *Astell*, *Astill*, *Astyll* and *Astull*.

Ásatrú

Ásatrú, meaning "faith in the Æsir", is a new religious movement of polytheistic reconstructionism based on Norse paganism. As of 2007, Ásatrú is a religion officially recognized by the governments of Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Wikipedia:Verifiability^[12] and Sweden.

In spite of the literal meaning of *Ásatrú*, most adherents do not emphasize worship of the Æsir in particular. The Icelandic *Ásatrúarfélagið* describes *Ásatrú* as "Nordic pantheism" involving "belief in the Icelandic/Nordic folklore" including all the "spirits and entities" besides "gods and other beings" this entails.^[13] The American Asatru Folk Assembly defines *Ásatrú* as "an expression of the native, pre-Christian spirituality of Europe" postulating it as "native European religion" in general "just as there is Native American religion and native African religion".^[14]

Notes

[1] Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*

[2] Grimm, ch. 2

[3] (<http://vedabase.net/a/asu>)

[4] D.Q. Adams, "King", in *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 330.

[5] the name of a Danish Viking converted to Christianity in AD 864 according to the *Miracles de St. Riquier*

[6] "" (ch. 13)

[7] Dumézil, 3-4, 18; Turville-Petre, 159-162.

[8] This argument was first suggested by Wilhelm Mannhardt in 1877 (as described in Dumézil, xxiii and Munch, 288). On a similar note, Marija Gimbutas argues that the Æsir and the Vanir represent the displacement of an indigenous Indo-European group by a tribe of warlike invaders (in following her Kurgan hypothesis). See her case in *The Living Goddess* for more details.

[9] Turville-Petre, 161. See especially ff. 37.

[10] See this pattern discussed in Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion* - Section II (30) - The Supplanting of Sky Gods by Fecundators. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958. Supporting this position, Turville-Petre notes, "In one civilization, and at one time, the specialized gods of fertility might predominate, and in another the warrior or the god-king. The highest god owes his position to those who worship him, and if they are farmers, he will be a god of fertility, or one of the Vanir" (162).

[11] Paul Hermann, *Deutsche Mythologie in Gemeinverständlicher Darstellung* (http://books.google.com/books?id=ABAYAAAAAAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (1906) p. 342; also in *Altdeutsche Kultgebräuche*, Jena (1928)

[12] Kirkeministeriet (<http://www.km.dk/trossamfundliste.html>)

[13] The Icelandic version has "*Ásatrú* is a pagan tradition based on tolerance, honesty, magnanimity and respect for nature and all life." (*Ásatrú eða heiðinn siður byggir á umburðarlyndi, heiðarleika, drengskap og virðingu fyrir náttúrunni og öllu lífi.*) (2006) (<http://web.archive.org/web/20061205064006/http://asatru.is/>)

[14] "The soul of Asatru, however, is not confined to the Scandinavian model, but encapsulates the belief of all the Germanic peoples. Indeed, Asatru reflects the deeper religiosity common to virtually all the nations of Europe." runestone.org (<http://runestone.org/home.html>), accessed December 2007

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External links

- Viktor Rydberg's "Teutonic Mythology: Gods and Goddesses of the Northland" e-book (<http://www.vaidilute.com/books/norroena/rydberg-contents.html>)
- W. Wagner's "Asgard and the Home of the Gods" e-book (<http://www.vaidilute.com/books/asgard/asgard-contents.html>)
- "Myths of Northern Lands" e-book (<http://www.vaidilute.com/books/guerber/guerber-contents.html>) by H. A. Guerber
- Peter Andreas Munch's "Norse Mythology: Legends of Gods and Heroes" e-book (<http://www.vaidilute.com/books/munch/munch-contents.html>)
- Bartleby: American Heritage Dictionary: Indo-European roots: anu (<http://www.bartleby.com/61/roots/IE19.html>)

Baldr

Baldr (also **Balder**, **Baldur**) is a god in Norse mythology.

In the 12th century, Danish accounts by Saxo Grammaticus and other Danish Latin chroniclers recorded a euhemerized account of his story. Compiled in Iceland in the 13th century, but based on much older Old Norse poetry, the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda contain numerous references to the death of Baldr as both a great tragedy to the Æsir and a harbinger of Ragnarök.

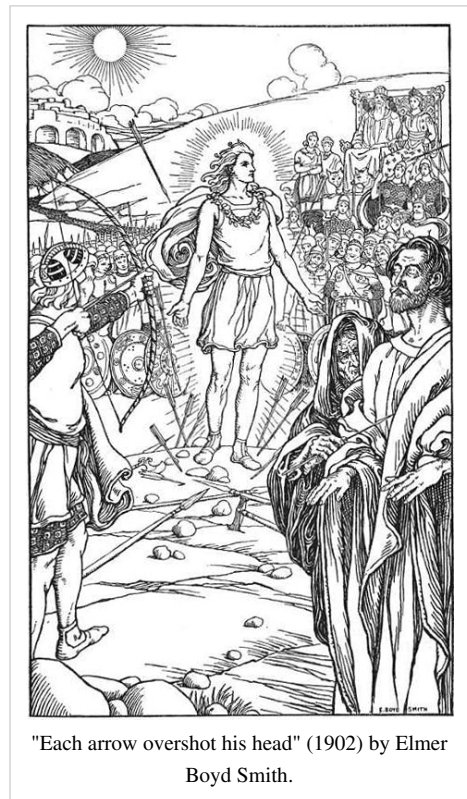
According to *Gylfaginning*, a book of Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda, Baldr's wife is Nanna and their son is Forseti. In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri relates that Baldr had the greatest ship ever built, named Hringhorni, and that there is no place more beautiful than his hall, Breidablik.

Name

Jacob Grimm in his *Teutonic Mythology* (ch. 11) identifies Old Norse *Baldr* with the Old High German *Baldere* (2nd Merseburg Charm, Thuringia), *Palter* (theonym, Bavaria), *Paltar* (personal name) and with Old English *bealdor*, *baldor* "lord, prince, king" (used always with a genitive plural, as in *gumena baldor* "lord of men", *wigena baldor* "lord of warriors", et cetera). Old Norse shows this usage of the word as an honorific in a few cases, as in *baldur î brynju* (Sæm. 272b) and *herbaldur* (Sæm. 218b), both epithets of heroes in general.

Grimm traces the etymology of the name to **balþaz*, whence Gothic *balþs*, Old English *bald*, Old High German *pald*, all meaning "bold, brave".^[1]

But the interpretation of Baldr as "the brave god" may be secondary. Baltic (cf. Lithuanian *baltas*, Latvian *balts*) has a word meaning "the white, the good", and Grimm speculates that the name may originate as a Baltic loan into Proto-Germanic. In continental Saxon and Anglo-Saxon tradition, the son of Woden is called not *Bealdor* but *Baldag*



(Sax.) and *Bældæg*, *Beldeg* (AS.), which shows association with "day", possibly with Day personified as a deity which, Grimm points out, would agree with the meaning "shining one, white one, a god" derived from the meaning of Baltic *baltas*, further adducing Slavic *Belobog* and German *Berhta*.^[2]

Attestations

Merseburg Incantation

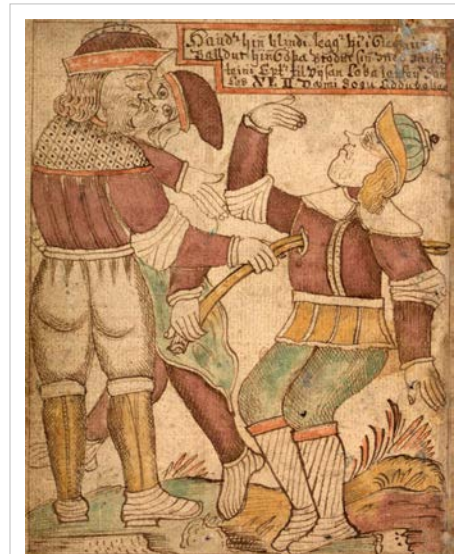
One of the two Merseburg Incantations names Balder, and mentions a figure named *Phol*, considered to be another name for Baldr (as in Scandinavian, *Falr*, *Fjalarr*; (in Saxo) *Balderus* : *Fjallerus*).^[3]

Poetic Edda

In the Poetic Edda the tale of Baldr's death is referred to rather than recounted at length. Among the visions which the Völva sees and describes in the prophecy known as the *Völuspá* is one of the fatal mistletoe, the birth of Váli and the weeping of Frigg (stanzas 31-33). Yet looking far into the future the Völva sees a brighter vision of a new world, when both Höðr and Baldr will come back (stanza 62). The Eddic poem *Baldr's Dreams* mentions that Baldr has bad dreams which the gods then discuss. Odin rides to Hel and awakens a seeress, who tells him Höðr will kill Baldr but Vali will avenge him (stanzas 9, 11).

Prose Edda

In *Gylfaginning*, Baldr is described as follows:



Baldr's death is portrayed in this illustration from an 18th-century Icelandic manuscript.

Annar sonur Óðins er Baldr, og er frá honum gott að segja. Hann er svá fagr álitum ok bjartr svá at lýsir af honum, ok eitt gras er svá hvítt at jafnat er til Baldrs brár. Þat er allra grasa hvítast, ok þar eptir máttu marka feigrð hans bæði á hár og á líki. Hann er vitrastr ása ok fegrst talaðr ok líknsamastr. En sú náttúra fylgir honum at engi má haldask dómr hans. Hann býr þar sem heita Breiðablik, þat er á himni. Í þeim stað má ekki vera óhreint[.]^[4]

The second son of Odin is Baldr, and good things are to be said of him. He is best, and all praise him; he is so fair of feature, and so bright, that light shines from him. A certain herb is so white that it is likened to Baldr's brow; of all grasses it is whitest, and by it thou mayest judge his fairness, both in hair and in body. He is the wisest of the Æsir, and the fairest-spoken and most gracious; and that quality attends him, that none may gainsay his judgments. He dwells in the place called Breiðablik, which is in heaven; in that place may nothing unclean be[.] — *Brodeur's translation*^[5]

Apart from this description Baldr is known primarily for the story of his death. His death is seen as the first in the chain of events which will ultimately lead to the destruction of the gods at Ragnarök. Baldr will be reborn in the new world, according to *Völuspá*.

He had a dream of his own death and his mother had the same dreams. Since dreams were usually prophetic, this depressed him, so his mother Frigg made every object on earth vow never to hurt Baldr. All objects made this vow except mistletoe.^[1] Frigg had thought it too unimportant and nonthreatening to bother asking it to make the vow (alternatively, it seemed too young to swear).



"Odin's last words to Baldr" (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

When Loki, the mischief-maker, heard of this, he made a magical spear from this plant (in some later versions, an arrow). He hurried to the place where the gods were indulging in their new pastime of hurling objects at Baldr, which would bounce off without harming him. Loki gave the spear to Baldr's brother, the blind god Höðr, who then inadvertently killed his brother with it (other versions suggest that Loki guided the arrow himself). For this act, Odin and the giantess Rindr gave birth to Váli who grew to adulthood within a day and slew Höðr.^[6]

Baldr was ceremonially burnt upon his ship, Hringhorni, the largest of all ships. As he was carried to the ship, Odin whispered in his ear. This was to be a key riddle asked by Odin (in disguise) of the giant Vafthrudnir (and which was, of course, unanswerable) in the poem *Vafthrudnismal*. The riddle also appears in the riddles of Gestumblindi in *Hervarar saga*.^[7]

The dwarf Litr was kicked by Thor into the funeral fire and burnt alive. Nanna, Baldr's wife, also threw herself on the funeral fire to await Ragnarök when she would be reunited with her husband (alternatively, she died of grief). Baldr's horse with all its trappings was also burned on the pyre. The ship was set to sea by Hyrrokin, a giantess, who came riding on a wolf and gave the ship such a push that fire flashed from the rollers and all the earth shook.

Upon Frigg's entreaties, delivered through the messenger Hermod, Hel promised to release Baldr from the underworld if all objects alive and dead would weep for him. All did, except a giantess, Þökk often presumed to be the god Loki in disguise, who refused to mourn the slain god. Thus Baldr had to remain in the underworld, not to emerge until after Ragnarök, when he and his brother Höðr would be reconciled and rule the new earth together with Thor's sons.

Gesta Danorum

Writing at about the end of the 12th century, the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus tells the story of Baldr (recorded as *Balderus*) in a form which professes to be historical. According to him, Balderus and Høtherus were rival suitors for the hand of Nanna, daughter of Gewar, King of Norway. Balderus was a demigod and common steel could not wound his sacred body. The two rivals encountered each other in a terrific battle. Though Odin and Thor and the rest of the gods fought for Balderus, he was defeated and fled away, and Høtherus married the princess.

Nevertheless Balderus took heart of grace and again met Høtherus in a stricken field. But he fared even worse than before. Høtherus dealt him a deadly wound with a magic sword, named Mistletoe,^[8] which he had received from Miming, the satyr of the woods; after lingering three days in pain Balderus died of his injury and was buried with royal honours in a barrow.

Chronicon Lethrense and Annales Lundenses

There are also two lesser known Danish Latin chronicles, the *Chronicon Lethrense* and the *Annales Lundenses* of which the latter is included in the former. These two sources provide a second euphemerized account of Höðr's slaying of Baldr.

It relates that Hother was the king of the Saxons and son of Hothbrod and the daughter of Hadding. Hother first slew Othen's (i.e. Odin) son Balder in battle and then chased Othen and Thor. Finally, Othen's son Both killed Hother. Hother, Balder, Othen and Thor were incorrectly considered to be gods.

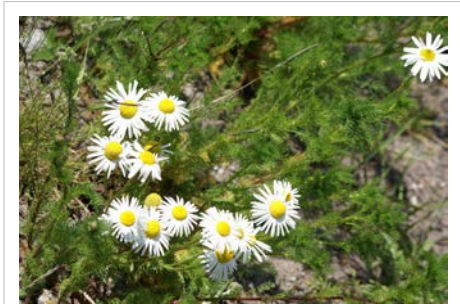
Utrecht Inscription

A Latin votive inscription from Utrecht, from the 3rd or 4th century C.E., has been theorized as containing the dative form *Baldruo*,^[9] pointing to a Latin nominative singular **Baldruus*, which some have identified with the Norse/Germanic god,^[10] although both the reading and this interpretation have been questioned.^{[11][12]}

Eponyms

Plants

As referenced in *Gylfaginning*, in Sweden and Norway, the scentless mayweed (*Matricaria perforata*) and the similar sea mayweed (*Matricaria maritima*) are both called *baldrsbrá* "Balder's brow" and regionally in northern England (*baldeybrow*).^[13] In Iceland only the former is found.^[13] In Germany lily-of-the-valley is known as *weisser Baldrian*; variations using or influenced by reflexes of *Phol* include *Faltrian* (upper Austria), *Villumfallum* (Salzburg), and *Fildron* or *Faldron* (Tyrol).



Baldr's brow (*Matricaria perforata*)

Toponyms

There are few old place names in Scandinavia that contain the name *Baldr*. The most certain and notable one is the (former) parish name Balleshol in Hedmark county, Norway: "a Balldrshole" 1356 (where the last element is *hóll* m "mound; small hill"). Others may be (in Norse forms) *Baldrsberg* in Vestfold county, *Baldrsheimr* in Hordaland county *Baldrsnes* in Sør-Trøndelag county — and (very uncertain) the Balsfjorden fjord and Balsfjord municipality in Troms county.

In Copenhagen, there is also a Baldersgade, or "Balder's Street." A street in downtown Reykjavík is called Baldursgata (Baldr's Street).

In Belgium, the name *Balder* is also used in dialect for a village called Berlaar and in another village (Tielon), the *Balderij* is a street and a swampy area next to it.

In Yorkshire there are Baldersby and Pule Hill (from *Phol*).^[14]

In Nottinghamshire there is a village called Balderton, originally a vineyard. This is also mentioned also in the Domesday book.

Baldr, Manitoba is a village in southern Manitoba, Canada. About 1890, Sigurdur Christopherson could not find a suitable flower in the district to name the town after, so he suggested the name of a beautiful Nordic God, namely Baldr, son of Odin.

Earlier reflexes of *Phol*, especially in Baldr's role as opener of wells, appear as Pholesbrunnen (Thuringia), Phulsborn (village, near Saale river), Falsbrunn (Steigerwald, Franconia), and the village Pfalsau (OHG *pholesauwa*, *pholesouwa*). Also, there are two Baldersbrunno (Eifel mountains; Rhine Palatinate) and a Baldr's Brönd on the

road between Copenhagen and Roeskilde (Saxo Grammaticus).^[15]

Modern influence

Baldr has been depicted in modern fiction.

- Balder the Brave is a character in comic books published by Marvel Comics, first appearing in *Journey into Mystery* #85 (October 1964).
- Shadow is the main character in the 2001 novel *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman; Shadow is the son of Mr Wednesday (Odin) and was confirmed to be Baldr in a sequel.
- Olaf Johnson is a character in the 2011 TV series *The Almighty Johnsons* featuring Norse gods in modern New Zealand. He is the incarnation of Baldr, the family oracle and apparently unaging.
- Baldur is the protagonist of the video game *Too Human* developed by *Silicon Knights*
- Baldur is a character on the TV show *Supernatural* appearing in the episode "Hammer of the Gods", in which he is responsible for bringing the pagan gods together to fight Lucifer.
- Baldr (spelled Beldr) is one of the antagonists in the 2009 game for Nintendo DS *Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor*.
- Baldr is the main antagonist of the novel *Krampus: The Yule Lord* by *Gerald Brom*, where he has been masquerading as Santa Claus for centuries.
- In the manhwa titled *Ragnarok* the main character, named Chaos, is the reincarnation of Baldr/Baldur.
- Baldur^[16] is also the name of a powerful druid Warlock in the miniature war game *Hordes*, published by Privateer Press^[17].
- In the video game, *Dark Souls*, a kingdom called "Balder" is mentioned, and enemies called "Balder Knights" are featured.

References

- [1] "*Baldrs* would in strictness appear to have no connexion with the Goth. *balþs* (bold, audax), nor *Paltar* with the OHG. *pald*, nor *Baldr* with the ON. *ballr* 'dangerous, dire'. As a rule, the Gothic *ld* is represented by ON. *ld* and OHG. *lt*: the Gothic *lp* by ON. *ll* and OHG. *ld*. But the OS. and AS. have *ld* in both cases, and even in Gothic, ON. and OHG. a root will sometimes appear in both forms in the same language; so that a close connexion between *balþs* and *Baldrs*, *pald* and *Paltar*, is possible after all."
- [2] "*Bæl-dæg* itself is white-god, light-god, he that shines as sky and light and day, the kindly *Bièlbôgh*, *Bèlbôgh* of the Slav system. It is in perfect accord with this explanation of *Bæl-dæg*, that the AS. tale of ancestry assigns to him a son *Brond*, of whom the Edda is silent, *brond*, *brand*, ON. *brandr* (fire brand or blade of a sword), signifying *jubar*, *fax*, *titio*. *Bældæg* therefore, as regards his name, would agree with *Berhta*, the bright goddess.
- [3] Calvin, Thomas. *An Anthology of German Literature*, D. C. Heath & Co. ASIN: B0008BTK3E,B00089RS3K. P5-6.
- [4] An online edition of the Old Norse text. (<http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/gg/ggupar17.html>)
- [5] Gylfaginning, XXII (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose/033036.php>)
- [6] Gylfaginning, XLIX (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose/069072.php>)
- [7] According to Carolyne Larrington in her translation of the *Poetic Edda* it is assumed that what Odin whispered in Baldr's ear was a promise of resurrection.
- [8] Davidson, H.R. Ellis (1964). *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*. Pelican Books. ISBN 0-14-013627-4
- [9] , p. 210 & pp. 218-20.
- [10] , p. 126.
- [11] , p. 43.
- [12] , p. 2.
- [13] Den virtuella floran (in Swedish) (<http://linnaeus.nrm.se/flora/di/astera/tripl/tripper.html>)
- [14] *Legends of the Northmen*, n.4: < (<http://midgleywebpages.com/northmen.html>)>.
- [15] William P. Reaves, "Frigg, Baldur's Mother", *Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology*, at Germanicmythology.com, [pdf], 2010, p.4: < (<http://www.germanicmythology.com/original/earthmother/odinswifebaldursmother.pdf>)>.
- [16] <http://privateerpress.com/hordes/gallery/circle-orboros/warlocks/baldur-the-stonesoul>
- [17] <http://privateerpress.com/>

Further reading

- Anatoly Liberman, "Some Controversial Aspects of the Myth of Baldr," (<http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~alvismal/11baldr.pdf>) *Alvíssmál* 11 (2004): 17-54.
- John Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance Among the Gods: Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology*. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia (1997), ISBN 951-41-0809-4.
- Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), chapter 11 "Paltar".

Dellingr

Dellingr (Old Norse possibly "the dayspring"^[1] or "shining one"^[2]) is a god in Norse mythology. Dellingr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In both sources, Dellingr is described as the father of Dagr, the personified day. The *Prose Edda* adds that, depending on manuscript variation, he is either the third husband of Nótt, the personified night, or the husband of Jörð, the personified earth. Dellingr is also attested in the legendary saga *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*. Scholars have proposed that Dellingr is the personified dawn, and his name may appear both in an English surname and place name.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

Dellingr is referenced in the *Poetic Edda* poems *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Hávamál*. In stanza 24 of *Vafþrúðnismál*, the god Odin (disguised as "Gagnráðr") asks the jötunn Vafþrúðnir from where the day comes, and the night and its tides. In stanza 25, Vafþrúðnir responds:

Delling hight he who the day's father is, but
 night was of Nörvi born; the new and waning moons the
 beneficent powers created, to count the years for men.^[3]

In *Hávamál*, the dwarf Þjóðrœrir is stated as having recited an unnamed spell "before Delling's doors":

For the fifteenth I know what the dwarf Thiodreyrir
 sang before Delling's doors.
 Strength he sang to the Æsir, and to the Alfar prosperity,
 wisdom to Hroptatyr.^[4]

In the poem *Fjölsvinnsmál*, Svipdagr asks "What one of the gods has made so great the hall I behold within?" Fjölsviðr responds with a list of names, including *Dellingr*.^[5] In a stanza of the poem *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, the appearance of Dagr, horse, and chariot are described, and Dagr himself is referred to as "the son of Delling."^[6]

Prose Edda

In chapter 10 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High states that Dellingr is a god and the third husband of Nótt. The couple have Dagr, who carries the features of his "father's people", which are described as "bright and beautiful". Odin placed both Dellingr's son, Dagr, and Dellingr's wife, Nótt, in the sky, so that they may ride across it with their horses and chariots every 24 hours.^[7]

However, scholar Haukur Thorgeirsson points out that the four manuscripts of *Gylfaginning* vary in their descriptions of the family relations between Nótt, Jörð, Dagr, and Dellingr. In other words, depending on the manuscript, either Jörð or Nótt is the mother of Dagr and partner of Dellingr. Haukur details that "the oldest manuscript, U, offers a version where Jörð is the wife of Dellingr and the mother of Dagr while the other manuscripts, R, W and T, cast Nótt in the role of Dellingr's wife and Dagr's mother", and argues that "the version in U came about accidentally when the writer of U or its antecedent shortened a text similar to that in RWT. The results of this accident made their way into the Icelandic poetic tradition".^[8]

Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks

Five riddles found in the poem *Heiðreks gátur* contained in the legendary saga *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* employ the phrase "Delling's doors" (Old Norse *Dellings durum*) once each. As an example, in one stanza where the phrase is used Gestumblindi (Odin in disguise) poses the following riddle:

What strange marvel
did I see without,
in front of Delling's door;
its head turning
to Hel downward,
but its feet ever seek the sun?
This riddle ponder,
O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. It is the leek; its head is fast in the ground, but it forks as it grows up.'^[9]

Theories

Jacob Grimm states that Dellingr is the assimilated form of *Deglingr*, which includes the name of Dellingr's son Dagr. Grimm adds that if the *-ling* likely refers to descent, and that due to this Dellingr may have been the "progenitor Dagr before him" or that the succession order has been reversed, which Grimm states often occurs in old genealogies.^[10] Benjamin Thorpe says that Dellingr may be dawn personified, similarly to his son Dagr, the personified day.^[11]

Regarding the references to "Delling's door" as used in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, Christopher Tolkien says that:

What this phrase meant to the maker of these riddles is impossible to say. In *Hávamál* 160 it is said that the dwarf Þjódrrörir sang before Delling's doors, which (in view of the fact that Delling is the father of Dag (Day) in *Vafþrúðnismál* 25) may mean that he gave warning to his people that the sun was coming up, and they must return to their dark houses; the phrase would then virtually mean 'at sunrise.' As regarding *døglings* for *Dellings* in *H*, and *Døglingar* were the descendants of *Dagr* (according to *SnE*. 183).^[12]

John Lindow says that some confusion exists about the reference to Dellingr in *Hávamál*. Lindow says that "Dellingr's doors" may either be a metaphor for sunrise or the reference may refer to the dwarf of the same name.^[13]

The English family name *Dallinger* has been theorized as deriving from *Dellingr*.^[14] The English place name Dalbury (south of Derbyshire) derives from *Dellingeberie*, which itself derives from *Dellingr*.^[15]

Notes

- [1] Bellows (1936:75).
- [2] Orchard (1997:32).
- [3] Thorpe (1907:13).
- [4] Thorpe (1907:47).
- [5] Thorpe (1907:100).
- [6] Thorpe (1866:31–32).
- [7] Byock (2005:19).
- [8] Haukur (2008:159—168).
- [9] Tolkien (1960:35).
- [10] Stallybrass (1883:735).
- [11] Thorpe (1851:143).
- [12] Tolkien (1960:34).
- [13] Lindow (2001:93).
- [14] Barber (1968:26).
- [15] Kerry (1897:63).

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Forseti

Forseti (Old Norse "the presiding one," actually "president" in Modern Icelandic and Faroese) is an Æsir god of justice and reconciliation in Norse mythology. He is generally identified with **Fosite**, a god of the Frisians. Jacob Grimm noted that if, as Adam of Bremen states, Fosite's sacred island was Heligoland, that would make him an ideal candidate for a deity known to both Frisians and Scandinavians, but that it is surprising he is never mentioned by Saxo Grammaticus.^[1]

Grimm took *Forseti*, "*praeses*", to be the older form of the name, first postulating an unattested Old High German equivalent **forasizo* (cf. modern German *Vorsitzender* "one who presides").^[2] but later preferring a derivation from *fors*, a "whirling stream" or "cataract", connected to the spring and the god's veneration by seagoing peoples.^[3] However, in other Old Norse words, for example *forboð*, "forbidding, ban", the prefix *for-* has a pejorative sense. So it is more plausible that *Fosite* is the older name and *Forseti* a folk etymology.^[4]



Forseti Seated in Judgment (1881) by Carl Emil Doepler

Norse Forseti

According to Snorri Sturluson in the Prose Edda,^[5] Forseti is the son of Baldr and Nanna. His home is Glitnir, its name, meaning "shining," referring to its silver ceiling and golden pillars, which radiated light that could be seen from a great distance. His is the best of courts; all those who come before him leave reconciled. This suggests skill in mediation and is in contrast to his fellow god Týr, who "is not called a reconciler of men."^[6] However, as de Vries points out, the only basis for associating Forseti with justice seems to have been his name; there is no corroborating evidence in Norse mythology.^[7] 'Puts to sleep all suits' or 'stills all strifes' may have been a late addition to the strophe Snorri cites, from which he derives the information.^[8]

The first element in the name *Forsetlund* (Old Norse *Forsetalundr*), a farm in the parish of Onsøy ('Odins island'), in eastern Norway, seems to be the genitive case of Forseti, offering evidence he was worshipped there.^{[8][9]}

Frisian Fosite

According to Alcuin's Life of St. Willebrord, the saint visited an island between Frisia and Denmark that was sacred to Fosite and was called Fositesland after the god worshipped there. There was a sacred spring from which water had to be drawn in silence, it was so holy. Willebrord defiled the spring by baptizing people in it and killing a cow there.^[8] Altfrid tells the same story of St. Liudger.^[10] Adam of Bremen retells the story and adds that the island was *Heiligland*, i.e., Heligoland.^[11]

There is also a legend of the origins of the *Lex Frisionum*, the written Frisian law. Wishing to assemble written lawcodes for all his subject peoples, Charlemagne summoned twelve representatives of the Frisian people, the *Āsegas* ('law-speakers'), and demanded they recite their people's laws. When they could not do so after several days,

he let them choose between death, slavery, or being set adrift in a rudderless boat. They chose the last and prayed for help, whereupon a thirteenth man appeared, with a golden axe on his shoulder. He steered the boat to land with the axe, then threw it ashore; a spring appeared where it landed. He taught them laws and then disappeared.^{[12][13]} The stranger and the spring are identified with Fosite and the sacred spring of Fositesland.

Fosite has been suggested to be a loan of Greek *Poseidon* into pre-Proto-Germanic, perhaps via Greeks purchasing amber (Pytheas is known to have visited the area of Heligoland in search of amber).^[14]

In popular culture

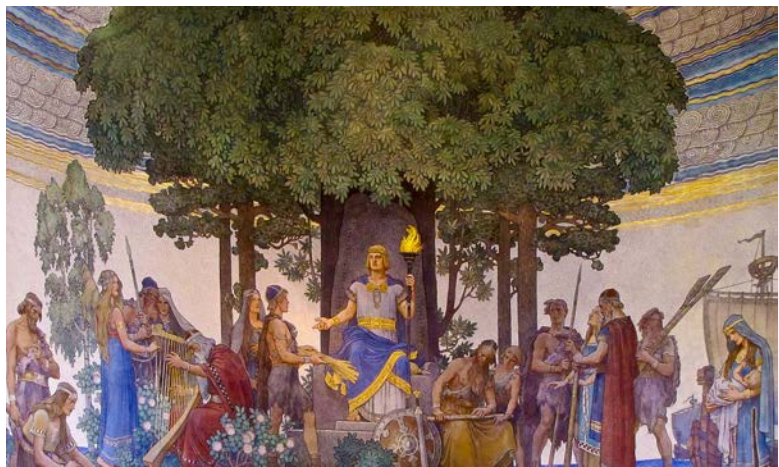
Forseti appears in the Dungeons & Dragons role-playing game's pantheon, and is often chosen as a patron god by paladins.

References

- [1] Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, tr. James Steven Stallybrass, volume 1 London: Bell, 1882, p. 231 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=q1gOAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA231&dq=Grimm+Stallybrass+Teutonic+Mythology+Fosite&lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=1#v=onepage&q=Heligoland&f=false>).
- [2] Grimm, p. 231 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=q1gOAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA231&dq=Grimm+Stallybrass+Teutonic+Mythology+Fosite&lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false>).
- [3] Grimm, p. 232, note 2 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=CIIJAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA232&dq=Grimm+Stallybrass+Teutonic+Mythology+\"whirling+stream\"&lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=CIIJAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA232&dq=Grimm+Stallybrass+Teutonic+Mythology+\)); volume 4 (Supplement, 1883) p. 1360 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=JmNJAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA1360&dq=Grimm+Stallybrass+Teutonic+Mythology+cataract&lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false>).
- [4] Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, volume 2, 2nd ed. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1957, repr. 1970, p. 283 .
- [5] *Gylfaginning* ch. 32: text and translation online at voluspa.org (<http://www.voluspa.org/gylfaginning31-40.htm>).
- [6] *Gylfaginning* ch. 25, tr. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, online at voluspa.org (<http://www.voluspa.org/gylfaginning21-30.htm>).
- [7] De Vries, p. 283.
- [8] Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, London: Pelican, 1964, repr. Penguin, 1990, ISBN 0-14-013627-4; repr. as *Gods and Myths of the Viking Age*, New York: Bell, 1981, ISBN 0-517-33644-8, p. 171.
- [9] E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, London, Weidenfeld, 1964, p. 238.
- [10] De Vries, p. 282.
- [11] *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* Book IV (*Descriptio insularum aquilonis*), ch. 3.
- [12] Ellis Davidson, pp. 171-72.
- [13] Thomas L. Mackey, *Frisian*, Trends in Linguistics, The Hague: Mouton, 1981, ISBN 90-279-3128-3, pp. 63-64 (http://books.google.com/books?id=nHfrA_Ss7VYC&pg=PA64&dq=twelve+Frisian+axe+law+spring&hl=en&ei=NWqpS6XiE4yescgPh2tGwAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CD0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=twelve+Frisian+axe+law+spring&f=false) calls this "the king Karl and King Redbad episode" and notes there are several versions.
- [14] The equation Greek *Poseidon* = Germanic *Fosite* was noted at least as early as 1977 in Franz Spilka, *Rätsel der Heimat* nr. 21.

Heimdallr

In Norse mythology, **Heimdallr** is a god who possesses the resounding horn Gjallarhorn, owns the golden-maned horse Gulltoppr, has gold teeth, and is the son of Nine Mothers. Heimdallr is attested as possessing foreknowledge, keen eyesight and hearing, is described as "the whitest of the gods", and keeps watch for the onset of Ragnarök while drinking fine mead in his dwelling Himinbjörg, located where the burning rainbow bridge Bifröst meets heaven. Heimdallr is said to be the originator of social classes among mankind and



Heimdallr brings forth the gift of the gods to mankind (1907) by Nils Asplund

once regained Freyja's treasured possession Brísingamen while doing battle in the shape of a seal with Loki. Heimdallr and Loki are foretold to kill one another during the events of Ragnarök. Heimdallr is additionally referred to as **Hallinskiði**, **Gullintanni**, and **Vindlér** or **Vindhlér**.

Heimdallr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional material; in the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, both written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; in the poetry of skalds; and on an Old Norse runic inscription found in England. Two lines of an otherwise lost poem about the god, *Heimdalgaldr*, survive. Due to the problematic and enigmatic nature of these attestations, scholars have produced various theories about the nature of the god, including his apparent relation to rams, that he may be a personification of or connected to the world tree Yggdrasil, and potential Indo-European cognates.

Names and etymology

Heimdallr also appears as **Heimdallr** and **Heimdali**. The etymology of the name is obscure, but 'the one who illuminates the world' has been proposed. *Heimdallr* may be connected to *Mardöll*, one of Freyja's names.^[1] *Heimdallr* and its variants are sometimes modernly anglicized as **Heimdall** (with the nominative *-r* dropped) or **Heimdal**.

Heimdallr is attested as having three other names; *Hallinskiði*, *Gullintanni*, and *Vindlér* or *Vindhlér*. The name *Hallinskiði* is obscure, but has resulted in a series of attempts at deciphering it. *Gullintanni* literally means 'the one with the golden teeth'. *Vindhlér* (or *Vindhlér*) translates as either 'the one protecting against the wind' or 'wind-sea'. All three have resulted in numerous theories about the god.^[2]

Attestations

Saltfleetby spindle whorl inscription

A lead spindle whorl bearing an Old Norse Younger Futhark inscription that mentions Heimdallr was discovered in Saltfleetby, England on September 1, 2010. The spindle whorl itself is dated from the year 1000 to 1100 AD. On the inscription, the god Heimdallr is mentioned alongside the god Odin and Þjálfí, a name of one of the god Thor's servants. Regarding the inscription reading, John Hines of Cardiff University comments that there is "quite an essay to be written over the uncertainties of translation and identification here; what are clear, and very important, are the names of two of the Norse gods on the side, Odin and Heimdallr, while Þjálfí (masculine, not the feminine in -a) is

the recorded name of a servant of the god Thor."^[3]

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, Heimdallr is attested in six poems; *Völuspá*, *Grímnismál*, *Lokasenna*, *Þrymskviða*, *Rígsþula*, and *Hrafnagaldr Óðins*.

Heimdallr is mentioned thrice in *Völuspá*. In the first stanza of the poem, the undead völva reciting the poem calls out for listeners to be silent and refers to Heimdallr:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

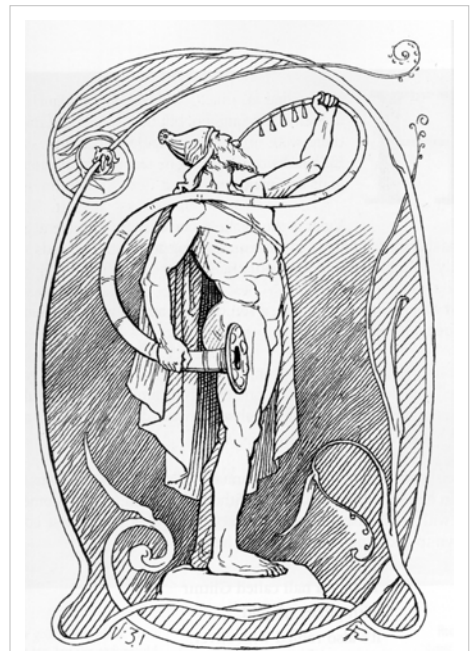
For silence I pray all sacred children,
great and small, sons of Heimdall.
they will that I Valfather's deeds recount,
men's ancient saws, those that I best remember.^[4]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Hearing I ask from the holy races,
From Heimdall's sons, both high and low;
Thou wilt, Valfather, that well I relate.
Old tales I remember of men long ago.^[5]

This stanza has led to various scholarly interpretations. The "holy races" have been considered variously as either mankind or the gods. The notion of mankind as "Heimdallr's sons" is otherwise unattested and has also resulted in various interpretations. Some scholars have pointed to the prose introduction to the poem *Rígsþula*, where Heimdallr is said to have once gone about mankind, slept between couples, and so doled out classes among them (see *Rígsthula* section below).^[6]

Later in *Völuspá*, the völva foresees the events of Ragnarök and the role in which Heimdallr and Gjallarhorn will play at its onset; Heimdallr will raise his horn and blow loudly. Due to manuscript differences, translations of the stanza vary:



Heimdallr blows Gjallarhorn in an 1895 illustration by Lorenz Frølich

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Mim's sons dance,
but the central tree takes fire,
at the resounding Gjallar-horn.
Loud blows Heimdall,
his horn is raised; Odin speaks with Mim's head.^[7]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Fast move the sons of Mim and fate
Is heard in the note of the Gjallarhorn;
Loud blows Heimdall, the horn is aloft,
In fear quake all who on Hel-roads are.^[8]

Regarding this stanza, scholar Andy Orchard comments that the name *Gjallarhorn* may here mean "horn of the river Gjöll" as "Gjöll is the name of one of the rivers of the Underworld, whence much wisdom is held to derive", but notes that in the poem *Grímnismál* Heimdallr is said to drink fine mead in his heavenly home Himinbjörg.^[9]

Earlier in the same poem, the *völva* mentions a scenario involving the hearing or horn (depending on translation of the Old Norse noun *hljóð*—translations bolded below for the purpose of illustration) of the god Heimdallr:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:	Henry Adams Bellows translation:	Carolyne Larrington translation:
She knows that Heimdall's horn is hidden	I know of the horn of Heimdall , hidden	She knows that Heimdall's hearing is hidden
under the heaven-bright holy tree.	Under the high-reaching holy tree;	under the radiant, sacred tree;
A river she sees flow, with foamy fall,	On it there pours from Valfather's pledge	she sees, pouring down, the muddy torrent
from Valfather's pledge.	A mighty stream: would you know yet more? ^[11]	from the wager of Father of the Slain; do you
Understand ye yet, or what? ^[10]		understand yet, or what more? ^[12]

Scholar Paul Schach comments that the stanzas in this section of *Voluspa* are "all very mysterious and obscure, as it was perhaps meant to be". Schach details that "*Heimdallar hljóð* has aroused much speculation. Snorri [in the *Poetic Edda*] seems to have confused this word with *gjallarhorn*, but there is otherwise no attestation of the use of *hljóð* in the sense of 'horn' in Icelandic. Various scholars have read this as "hearing" rather than "horn".^[13]

Scholar Carolyne Larrington comments that if "hearing" rather than "horn" is understood to appear in this stanza, the stanza indicates that Heimdallr, like Odin, has left a body part in the well; his ear. Larrington says that "Odin exchanged one of his eyes for wisdom from Mimir, guardian of the well, while Heimdall seems to have forfeited his ear."^[14]

In the poem *Grímnismál*, Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*), tortured, starved and thirsty, tells the young Agnar of a number of mythological locations. The eighth location he mentions is Himinbjörg, where he says that Heimdallr drinks fine mead:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:	Henry Adams Bellows translation:
Himinbiörg is the eighth, where Heimdall, it is said, rules o'er the holy fanes: there the gods' watchman, in his tranquil home, drinks joyful the good mead. ^[15]	Himingbjörg is the eight, and Heimdall there O'er men hold sway, it is said; In his well-built house does the warder of heaven The good mead gladly drink. ^[16]

Regarding the above stanza, Henry Adams Bellows comments that "in stanza the two functions of Heimdall—as father of mankind [. . .] and as warder of the gods—seem both to be mentioned, but the second line in the manuscripts is apparently in bad shape, and in the editions it is more or less conjecture".^[16]

In the poem *Lokasenna*, Loki flyts with various gods who have met together to feast. At one point during the exchanges, the god Heimdallr says that Loki is drunk and witless, and asks Loki why he won't stop speaking. Loki tells Heimdallr to be silent, that he was fated a "hateful life", that Heimdallr must always have a muddy back, and that he must serve as watchman of the gods. The goddess Skaði interjects and the flyting continues in turn.^[17]

The poem *Þrymskviða* tells of Thor's loss of his hammer, Mjöllnir, to the jötnar and quest to get it back. At one point in the tale, the gods gather at the thing and debate how to get Thor's hammer back from the jötnar, who demand the beautiful goddess Freyja in return for it. Heimdallr advises that they simply dress Thor up as Freyja, during which he is described as *hvítastr ása*—literally "whitest of the gods" (although Thorpe's translation below renders *hvítastr* as

"brightest")—and is said to have foresight like the Vanir, a group of gods:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Then said Heimdall, of Æsir brightest —
 he well foresaw, like other Vanir —
 Let us clothe Thor with bridal raiment,
 let him have the famed Brísinga necklace.
 "Let by his side keys jingle,
 and woman's weeds fall around his knees,
 but on his breast place precious stones,
 and a neat coif set on his head."^[18]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Then Heimdall spake, whitest of the gods,
 Like the Wanes he knew the future well:
 "Bind we on Thor the bridal veil,
 Let him bear the mighty Brisings' necklace;
 "Keys around him let there rattle,
 And down to his knees hang woman's dress;
 With gems full broad upon his breast,
 And a pretty cap to crown his head."^[19]

Regarding Heimdallr's whiteness and the comparison to the Vanir, scholar John Lindow comments that there are no other indications of Heimdallr being considered among the Vanir, and that Heimdallr's status as "whitest of the gods" has not been explained.^[20]

The introductory prose to the poem *Rígsþula* says that "people say in the old stories" that Heimdallr, described as a god among the Æsir, once fared on a journey. Heimdallr wandered along a seashore, and referred to himself as *Rígr*. In the poem, *Rígr*, who is described as a wise and powerful god, walks in the middle of roads on his way to steads, where he meets a variety of couples and dines with them, giving them advice and spending three nights at a time between them in their bed. The wives of the couples become pregnant, and from them come the various classes of mankind. Eventually a warrior home produces a promising boy, and as the boy grows older, *Rígr* comes out of a thicket, teaches the boy runes, gives him a name, and proclaims him to be his son. *Rígr* tells him to strike out and get land for himself. The boy does so, and so becomes a great war leader with many estates. He marries a beautiful woman and the two have many children and are happy. One of the children eventually becomes so skilled that he is able to share in runic knowledge with Heimdallr, and so earns the title of *Rígr* himself. The poem continues without further mention of the god.^[21]



Rig in Great-grandfather's Cottage (1908) by W. G. Collingwood

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda*, Heimdallr is mentioned in the books *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál*, and *Háttatal*. In *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High tells the disguised mythical king Gangleri of various gods, and, in chapter 25, mentions Heimdallr. High says that Heimdallr is known "the white As", is "great and holy", and that nine maidens, all sisters, gave birth to him. Heimdallr is called *Hallinskiði* and *Gullintanni*, and he has gold teeth. High continues that Heimdallr lives in "a place" called Himinbjörg and that it is near Bifröst. Heimdallr is the watchman of the gods, and he sits on the edge of heaven to guard the Bifröst bridge from the berg jötnar. Heimdallr requires less sleep than a bird, can see at night just as well as if it were day, and for over a hundred leagues. Heimdallr's hearing is also quite keen; he can hear grass as it grows on the earth, wool as it grows on sheep, and anything louder. Heimdallr possesses a trumpet, Gjallarhorn, that, when blown, can be heard in all worlds, and "the head is referred to as Heimdall's sword". High then quotes the above mentioned *Grímnismál* stanza about Himinbjörg and provides two lines from the otherwise lost poem about Heimdallr, *Heimdalargaldr*, in which Heimdallr proclaims himself to be the son of Nine Mothers.^[22]

In chapter 49, High tells of the god Baldr's funeral procession. Various deities are mentioned as having attended, including Heimdallr, who there rode his horse Gulltopr.^[23]

In chapter 51, High foretells the events of Ragnarök. After the enemies of the gods will gather at the plain Vígríðr, Heimdallr will stand and mightily blow into Gjallarhorn. The gods will awake and assemble together at the thing. At the end of the battle between various gods and their enemies, Heimdallr will face Loki and they will kill one another. After, the world will be engulfed in flames. High then quotes the above mentioned stanza regarding Heimdallr raising his horn in *Völuspá*.^[24]

At the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál*, Heimdallr is mentioned as having attended a banquet in Asgard with various other deities.^[25] Later in the book, *Húsdrápa*, a poem by 10th century skald Úlfr Uggason, is cited, during which Heimdallr is described as having ridden to Baldr's funeral pyre.^[26]

In chapter 8, means of referring to Heimdallr are provided; "son of nine mothers", "guardian of the gods", "the white As" (see *Poetic Edda* discussion regarding *hvítastr ása* above), "Loki's enemy", and "recoverer of Freyja's necklace". The section adds that the poem *Heimdalargaldr* is about him, and that, since the poem, "the head has been called Heimdall's doom: man's doom is an expression for sword". Heimdallr is the owner of Gulltoppr, is also known as Vindhlér, and is a son of Odin. Heimdallr visits Vágasker and Singasteinn and there vied with Loki for Brísingamen. According to the chapter, the skald Úlfr Uggason composed a large section of his *Húsdrápa* about these events and that *Húsdrápa* says that the two were in the shape of seals. A few chapters later, ways of referring to Loki are provided, including "wrangler with Heimdall and Skadi", and section of Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa* is then provided in reference:

Renowned defender [Heimdall] of the powers' way [Bifrost], kind of counsel, competes with Farbauti's terribly sly son at Singastein. Son of eight mothers plus one, might of mood, is first to get hold of the beautiful sea-kidney [jewel, Brisingamen]. I announce it in strands of praise.

The chapter points out that in the above *Húsdrápa* section Heimdallr is said to be the son of nine mothers.^[27]



The cock Gullinkambi atop his head and the burning rainbow bridge Bifröst in the background, Heimdallr blows into Gjallarhorn while holding a sword with a man's face on it (a reference to the "man's head" kenning).
Illustration (1907) by J. T. Lundbye.

Heimdallr is mentioned once in *Háttatal*. There, in a composition by Snorri Sturluson, a sword is referred to as "Vindhlér's helmet-filler", meaning "Heimdallr's head".^[28]

Heimskringla

In *Ynglinga saga* compiled in *Heimskringla*, Snorri presents a euhemerized origin of the Norse gods and rulers descending from them. In chapter 5, Snorri asserts that the Æsir settled in what is now Sweden and built various temples. Snorri writes that Odin settled in Lake Logrin "at a place which formerly was called Sigtúnir. There he erected a large temple and made sacrifices according to the custom of the Æsir. He took possession of the land as far as he had called it Sigtúnir. He gave dwelling places to the temple priests." Snorri adds that, after this, Njörðr dwelt in Nóatún, Freyr dwelt in Uppsala, Heimdall at Himinbjörg, Thor at Þrúðvangr, Baldr at Breiðablik and that to everyone Odin gave fine estates.^[29]

Archaeological record

A figure holding a large horn to his lips and clasping a sword on his hip appears on a stone cross from the Isle of Man. Some scholars have theorized that this figure is a depiction of Heimdallr with Gjallarhorn.^[30]

A 9th or 10th century Gosforth Cross in Cumbria, England depicts a figure holding a horn and a sword standing defiantly before two open-mouthed beasts. This figure has been often theorized as depicting Heimdallr with Gjallarhorn.^[31]



The Gosforth Cross panel often held to depict Heimdallr with Gjallarhorn

Theories and interpretations

Heimdallr's attestations have proven troublesome and enigmatic to interpret for scholars. Scholar Georges Dumézil summarizes the difficulties as follows:

The god Heimdallr poses one of the most difficult problems in Scandinavian mythography. As all who have dealt with him have emphasized, this is primarily because of a very fragmentary documentation; but even more because the few traits that have been saved from oblivion diverge in too many directions to be easily "thought of together," or to be grouped as members of a unitary structure.^[32]

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:135 and 202).
- [2] Simek (2007:122, 128, and 363).
- [3] Daubney (2010).
- [4] Thorpe (1866:3).
- [5] Bellows (1923:3).
- [6] See discussion at Thorpe (1866:3), Bellows (1923:3), and Larrington (1999:264).
- [7] Thorpe (1866:9).
- [8] Bellows (1923:20). See connected footnote for information on manuscript and editing variations.
- [9] Orchard (1997:57).
- [10] Thorpe (1866:7).
- [11] Bellows (1932:12).
- [12] Larrington (1999:7).
- [13] Schach (1985:93).
- [14] Larrington (1999:265).
- [15] Thorpe (1866:21).
- [16] Bellows (1923:90).
- [17] Larrington (1999:92).

- [18] Thorpe (1866:64).
- [19] Bellows (1923:178).
- [20] Lindow (2002:170).
- [21] Larrington (1999:246—252).
- [22] Faulkes (1995:25-26).
- [23] Faulkes (1995:50). See Faulkes (1995:68) for Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa* handling this.
- [24] Faulkes (1995:54).
- [25] Faulkes (1995:59).
- [26] Faulkes (1995:68).
- [27] Faulkes (1995:75—77).
- [28] Faulkes (1995:171).
- [29] Hollander (2007:10).
- [30] Lindow (2002:168).
- [31] Bailey (1996:86—90).
- [32] Dumézil (1973:126).

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Hermóðr

Hermóðr the Brave (Old Norse "war-spirit",^[1] anglicized as **Hermod**) is a figure in Norse mythology, the son of god Odin.

Attestations

Prose Edda

Hermóðr appears distinctly in section 49 of the Prose Edda book *Gylfaginning*. There, it is described that the gods were speechless and devastated at the death of Baldr, unable to react due to their grief. After the gods gathered their wits from the immense shock and grief of Baldr's death, Frigg asked the Æsir who amongst them wished "to gain all of her love and favor"^[2] by riding the road to Hel. Whoever agreed was to offer Hel a ransom in exchange for Baldr's return to Asgard. Hermóðr agrees to this and set off with Sleipnir to Hel.

Hermóðr rode Odin's horse Sleipnir for nine nights through deep and dark valleys to the Gjöll bridge covered with shining gold, the bridge being guarded by the maiden Móðguðr 'Battle-frenzy' or 'Battle-tired'.

Móðguðr told Hermóðr that Baldr had already crossed the bridge and that Hermóðr should ride downwards and northwards.

Upon coming to Hel's gate, Hermóðr dismounted, tightened Sleipnir's girth, mounted again, and spurred Sleipnir so that Sleipnir leapt entirely over the gate. So at last Hermóðr came to Hel's hall and saw Baldr seated in the most honorable seat. Hermóðr begged Hel to release Baldr, citing the great weeping for Baldr among the Æsir. Thereupon Hel announced that Baldr would only be released if all things, dead and alive, wept for him.

Baldr gave Hermóðr the ring Draupnir which had been burned with him on his pyre, to take back to Odin. Nanna gave a linen robe for Frigg along with other gifts and a finger-ring for Fulla. Thereupon Hermóðr returned with his message.

Hermóðr is called "son" of Odin in most manuscripts, while in the Codex Regius version—normally considered the best manuscript—Hermóðr is called *sveinn Óðins* 'Odin's boy', which in the context is as likely to mean 'Odin's servant'. However Hermóðr in a later passage is called Baldr's brother and also appears as son of Odin in a list of Odin's sons. See Sons of Odin.

Poetic Edda

The name Hermóð seems to be applied to a mortal hero in the eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* (stanza 2):

The favour of Heerfather seek we to find,
To his followers gold he gladly gives;
To Hermóð gave he helm and mail-coat,
And to Sigmund he gave a sword as gift.



Hermóðr rides to Hel on Sleipnir. He meets Hel and Baldr. From the 18th century Icelandic manuscript NKS 1867 4to.

Heerfather is a name for Odin.

Skaldic poetry

In the skaldic poem *Hákonarmál* (stanza 14) Hermóðr and Bragi appear in Valhalla receiving Hákon the Good. It is not certain that either Hermóðr or Bragi is intended to be a god in this poem.

Beowulf

In the Old English poem *Beowulf*, Heremod is a Danish king who was driven into exile and in Old English genealogies Heremod appears appropriately as one of the descendants of Scaefa and usually as the father of Scyld.

Interpretation

Accordingly, it is debated whether Hermóðr might not have been the name of one or more ancient heroes or kings as well as the name of a god or whether the god mentioned by Snorri was in origin the same as an ancient hero or king named Hermóðr.

Hermod sounds similar to Hermes, the Greek god of messengers. One of his jobs was to guide souls to Hades, the underworld.

As a mortal hero, Óðr enters Valhal. His myth is an Odinic initiation. In *Svipdagsmal*, his mother sings 9 spells over him to keep him safe on his way. He enters the land of the giants, rescues Freyja, and returns her to Asgard. Then he goes in quest of a sword found in the underworld, at the base of the world-tree, and struggles to bring it back to Asgard. He alone can do it. Odin (*Fjolsviðr*, cp. *Grimnismal* 47) meets him at the gate. As Skirnir, he goes back to Jotunheim in quest of Gerd on behalf of his brother-in-law Frey. Again, he carries the same sword. In the Edda, when the other gods are speechless, Herm-óðr alone acts. He mounts Sleipnir and rides to Hel in search of Baldur. Odin makes the same trip in the poem *Baldur's Dreams*. Both see Baldur's palace there, which is most likely Mimisholt (*Vafthrudnismal* 45). Odr-rerir, the name of the poetic mead, and of Mimir's well, means "the óðr-stirrer", "the óðr-mover". It forms a part of the name Herm-óðr.

In *Beowulf* Heremod is first mentioned by a bard immediately after the bard tells an episode from the life of the hero Sigmund and his nephew Fitela. In the Old Norse *Eiríksmál* it is Sigmund and his nephew Sinfjötli (= Fitela) who are sent to greet the dead King Eirík Bloodaxe and welcome him to Valhalla while in the *Hákonarmál* it is Bragi and Hermóðr who are sent to greet King Hákon the Good in the same situation, potentially suggesting an equivalence between the two was seen. In *Hyndluljóð* (stanza 2) Hermóðr and Sigmund are again paralleled:

To Hermód gave he helm and mail-coat,
And to Sigmund he gave a sword as gift.

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:83).

[2] Byock (2005:66).

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Hjúki and Bil

In Norse mythology, **Hjúki** (Old Norse, possibly meaning "the one returning to health"^[1]) and **Bil** (Old Norse, literally "instant"^[2]) are a brother and sister pair of children who follow the personified moon, Máni, across the heavens. Both Hjúki and Bil are solely attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Scholarly theories that surround the two concern their nature, their role as potential personifications of the craters on the moon or its phases, and their relation to later folklore in Germanic Europe. Bil has been identified with the **Bilwis**, an agriculture-associated figure that is frequently attested in the folklore of German-speaking areas of Europe.

Attestations

In chapter 11 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High states that two children by the names of Hjúki and Bil were fathered by Viðfinnr. Once while the two were walking from the well Byrgir (Old Norse "Hider of Something"^[3]) — both of them carrying on their shoulders the pole Simul (Old Norse, possibly meaning "eternal"^[4]) that held the pail Sæg between them — Máni took them from the earth, and they now follow Máni in the heavens, "as can be seen from the earth".^[5]

Hjúki is otherwise unattested, but Bil receives other mentions. In chapter 35 of *Gylfaginning*, at the end of a listing of numerous other goddesses in Norse mythology, both Sól (the personified sun) and Bil are listed together as goddesses "whose nature has already been described".^[6] Bil appears twice more in the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*. In chapter 75, Bil appears within another list of goddesses,^[7] and her name appears in chapter 47 in a kenning for "woman".^[8]

Theories

Identification and representation

As the two are otherwise unattested outside of Snorri's *Prose Edda*, suggestions have been made that Hjúki and Bil may have been of minor mythic significance, or that they were made up outright by Snorri, while Anne Holtmark (1945) posits that Snorri may have known or had access to a now lost verse source wherein Hjúki and Bil personified the waxing and waning moon. Holtmark further theorizes that Bil may have been a *dís* (a type of female deity).^[9]

Scholars have theorized that Hjúki and Bil may represent lunar activity, including that they may represent the phases of the moon or may represent the craters of the moon. 19th century scholar Jacob Grimm rejects the suggestion that Hjúki and Bil represent the phases of the moon, and states that Hjúki and Bil rather represent the craters on the moon seen from the earth. Grimm says that the evidence for this "is plain from the figure itself. No *change* of the moon could suggest the image of *two children with a pail slung over their shoulders*. Moreover, to this day the Swedish people see in the *spots* of the moon two persons carrying a big bucket on a pole."^[10] Grimm adds that:



Animation of the Moon as it cycles through its phases



A 19th century drawing of *The Man in the Moon* from folklore in areas of Germanic Europe

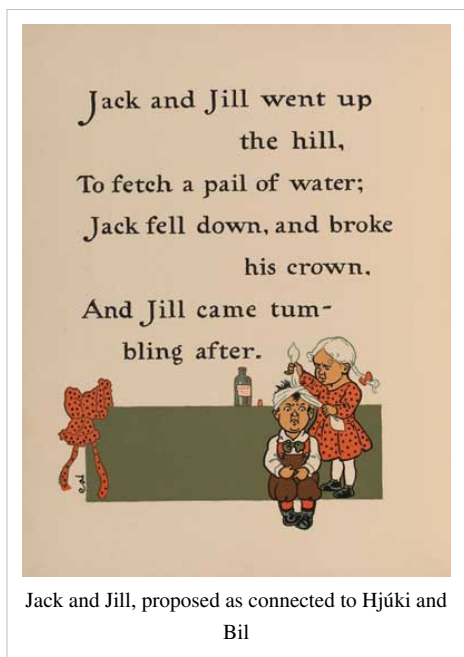
What is most important for us, out of the heathen fancy of a *kidnapping man of the moon*, which, apart from Scandinavia, was doubtless in vogue all over Teutondom, if not farther, there has evolved itself since a Christian adaptation. They say the man in the moon is a *wood-stealer*, who during church time on the holy sabbath committed a trespass in the wood, and was then transported to the moon as a punishment; there he may be seen with the *axe on his back* and the *bundle of brushwood* (dornwelle) *in his hand*. Plainly enough the water-pole of the heathen story has been transformed into the axe's shaft, and the carried pail into the thornbrush; the general idea of theft was retained, but special stress laid on the keeping of the christian holiday; the man suffers punishment not so much for cutting firewood, as because he did it on Sunday.^[10]

Grimm gives further examples from Germanic folklore up until the time of his writing (the 19th century) and notes a potential connection between the German word *wadel* (meaning the full moon) and the dialectal employment of the word for "brushwood, twigs tied up in a bundle, esp[ecially] fir-twigs, *wadeln* to tie up brushwood", and the practice of cutting wood out in the full moon.^[10] Benjamin Thorpe agrees with the theory of Hjúki and Bil as the personified shapes of moon craters.^[11]

Rudolf Simek states that the obscurity of the names of the objects in the tale of Hjúki and Bil may indicate that Snorri derived them from a folktale, and that the form of the tale of the Man in the Moon (featuring a man with a pole and a woman with a bushel) is also found in modern folklore in Scandinavia, England, and Northern Germany.^[12]

In both the story Hjúki and Bil found in the Icelandic *Prose Edda* and the English nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill", two children, one male and one female, fetch a pail of water, and the pairs have names that have been perceived as phonetically similar. These elements have resulted in theories connecting the two,^[13] and the notion has had some influence, appearing in school books for children from the 19th century and into the 20th century.^[14] A traditional form of the rhyme reads:

Jack and Jill went up the hill
to fetch a pail of water
Jack fell down and broke his crown
and Jill came tumbling after.
Up Jack got and home did trot
as fast as he could caper.
He went to bed to mind his head
with vinegar and brown paper.^[15]



Bilwis

A figure by the name of *Bilwis* is attested in various parts of German-speaking Europe starting in the 13th century. Scholar Leander Petzoldt writes that the figure seems to stem from the goddess and over time saw many changes, later developing "an elfin, dwarfish aspect and the ability to to cripple people or cattle with the shot of an arrow" (such as in Wolfram von Eschenbach's 13th century poem "Willehalm"). Petzoldt further surveys the development of the figure:

During the course of the thirteenth century, the Bilwis is less and less frequently treated as the personification of a supernatural power but becomes increasingly identified as a malevolent human being, a witch. Still later, with the rise of the witch persecution at the end of the Middle Ages, the Bilwis was demonized; she becomes an incarnation of the devil for the witch and sorcerer. A final development has taken place since the sixteenth century, especially in northeast Germany, the Bilwis has been conceived of as a grain spirit bringing wealth; yet this latest manifestation of the Bilwis has its harmful side, the Bilwis-cutter, who is blamed for the unexplained patters that are formed among the rows of standing grain. The cutter is a sorcerer or witch that cuts down the corn with sickles that are fastened to its feet. He is classified as an essentially malevolent Corn Spirit. Thus, the Bilwis is exceedingly polymorphous, taking on many appearances and meaning in all German-speaking areas throughout the Middle Ages. The Bilwis is one of the strangest and most mysterious beings in all folklore; its varying forms reflect the concerns of a farm culture, and it serves to explain the eerie appearance of turned-down rows of plants in cornfields.^[16]

Toponyms

The village of Bilsby in Lincolnshire, England (from which the English surname *Billing* derives) has been proposed as having been named after Bil.^[13]

Notes

[1] Simek (2007:151).

[2] Cleasby (1874).

[3] Byock (2005:156).

[4] Orchard (1997:147).

[5] Byock (2005:20).

[6] Byock (2005:44).

[7] Faulkes (1995:157).

[8] Faulkes (1995:47).

[9] Lindow (2001:78) referencing Holtsmark (1945:139–154).

[10] Grimm (1883:717).

[11] Thorpe (1851:143).

[12] Simek (2007:201).

[13] Streatfield (1884:68).

[14] Judd (1896:39–40) features such a retelling entitled "JACK AND JILL. A SCANDINAVIAN MYTH". The theory is repeated in the late 20th century by Jones (1998:6).

[15] Jones (1998:6).

[16] Petzoldt (2002:393–394).

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Höðr

Höðr (often anglicized as **Hod**, **Hoder**, or **Hodur**^[1]) is the brother of Baldr in Norse mythology. Tricked and guided by Loki, he shot the mistletoe arrow which was to slay the otherwise invulnerable Baldr.

According to the *Prose Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*, the goddess Frigg made everything in existence swear never to harm Baldr, except for the mistletoe which she found too young to demand an oath from. The gods amused themselves by trying weapons on Baldr and seeing them fail to do any harm. Loki, upon finding out about Baldr's one weakness, made a missile from mistletoe, and helped Höðr shoot it at Baldr. After this, Odin and the giantess Rindr gave birth to Váli, who grew to adulthood within a day and slew Höðr.

The Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus recorded an alternative version of this myth in his *Gesta Danorum*. In this version, the mortal hero **Høtherus** and the demi-god *Balderus* compete for the hand of Nanna. Ultimately, Høtherus slays Balderus.

The Prose Edda

In the *Gylfaginning* part of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* Höðr is introduced in an ominous way.



Höðr heitir einn ássinn, hann er blindr. Ærit er hann styrkr, en vilja mundu goðin at þenna ás þyrfti eigi at nefna, þvíat hans handaverk munu lengi vera höfð at minnum með goðum ok mönnum. - Eysteinn Björnsson's edition ^[2]

"One of the Æsir is named Höðr: he is blind. He is of sufficient strength, but the gods would desire that no occasion should rise of naming this god, for the work of his hands shall long be held in memory among gods and men." - Brodeur's translation ^[3]

Höðr is not mentioned again until the prelude to Baldr's death is described. All things except the mistletoe (believed to be harmless) have sworn an oath not to harm Baldr, so the Æsir throw missiles at him for sport.

En Loki tók mistiltein ok sleit upp ok gekk til þings. En Höðr stóð útarlíga í mannhringinum, þvíat hann var blindr. Þá mælti Loki við hann: "Hví skýtr þú ekki at Baldri?" Hann svarar: "Þvíat ek sé eigi hvar Baldr er, ok þat annat at ek em vápnlauð." Þá mælti Loki: "Gerðu þó í líking annarra manna ok veit Baldri sæmð sem aðrir menn. Ek mun vísa þér til hvar hann stendr. Skjót at honum vendi þessum."

"Loki took Mistletoe and pulled it up and went to the Thing.

Höðr tók mistiltein ok skaut at Baldri at tilvísun Loka. Flaug skotit í gögnum hann ok fell hann dauðr til jarðar. Ok hefir þat mest óhapp verit unnið með goðum ok mönnum. - Eysteinn Björnsson's edition ^[4]

Höðr stood outside the ring of men, because he was blind. Then spake Loki to him: 'Why dost thou not shoot at Baldr?' He answered: 'Because I see not where Baldr is; and for this also, that I am weaponless.' Then said Loki: 'Do thou also after the manner of other men, and show Baldr honor as the other men do. I will direct thee where he stands; shoot at him with this wand.' Höðr took Mistletoe and shot at Baldr, being guided by Loki: the shaft flew through Baldr, and he fell dead to the earth; and that was the greatest mischance that has ever befallen among gods and men." - Brodeur's translation ^[5]

The *Gylfaginning* does not say what happens to Höðr after this. In fact it specifically states that Baldr cannot be avenged, at least not immediately.

Þá er Baldr var fallinn, þá fellusk öllum ásum orðtök ok svá hendr at taka til hans, ok sá hverr til annars ok váru allir með einum hug til þess er unnið hafði verkit. En engi mátti hefna, þar var svá mikill gríðastaðr. - Eysteinn Björnsson's edition ^[4]

"Then, when Baldr was fallen, words failed all the Æsir, and their hands likewise to lay hold of him; each looked at the other, and all were of one mind as to him who had wrought the work, but none might take vengeance, so great a sanctuary was in that place." - Brodeur's translation ^[5]

It does seem, however, that Höðr ends up in Hel one way or another for the last mention of him in *Gylfaginning* is in the description of the post-Ragnarök world.

Því næst koma þar Baldr ok Höðr frá Heljar, setjask þá allir samt ok talask við ok minnask á rúnar sínar ok ræða of tíðindi þau er fyrrum höfðu verit, of Miðgarðsorm ok um Fenrisúlfr. - Eysteinn Björnsson's edition ^[6]

"After that Baldr shall come thither, and Höðr, from Hel; then all shall sit down together and hold speech with one another, and call to mind their secret wisdom, and speak of those happenings which have been before: of the Midgard Serpent and of Fenris-Wolf." - Brodeur's translation ^[7]

Snorri's source of this knowledge is clearly *Völuspá* as quoted below.

In the *Skáldskaparmál* section of the Prose Edda several kennings for Höðr are related.

Hvernig skal kenna Höðr? Svá, at kalla hann blinda ás, Baldrs bana, skjótanda Mistilteins, son Óðins, Heljar sinna, Vála dólg. - Guðni Jónsson's edition ^[8]

"How should one periphase Höðr? Thus: by calling him the Blind God, Baldr's Slayer, Thrower of the Mistletoe, Son of Odin, Companion of Hel, Foe of Váli." - Brodeur's translation ^[9]

None of those kennings, however, are actually found in surviving skaldic poetry. Neither are Snorri's kennings for Váli, which are also of interest in this context.

Hvernig skal kenna Váli? Svá, at kalla hann son Óðins ok Rindar, stjúpson Friggjar, bróður ásanna, hefniás Baldrs, dólg Haðar ok bana hans, byggvanda fjóurtófta. - Guðni Jónsson's edition ^[10]

"How should Váli be periphased? Thus: by calling him Son of Odin and Rindr, Stepson of Frigg, Brother of the Æsir, Baldr's Avenger, Foe and Slayer of Höðr, Dweller in the Homesteads of the Fathers." - Brodeur's translation ^[9]

It is clear from this that Snorri was familiar with the role of Váli as Höðr's slayer, even though he does not relate that myth in the *Gylfaginning* prose. Some scholars have speculated that he found it distasteful since Höðr is essentially innocent in his version of the story.

The Poetic Edda

Höðr is referred to several times in the Poetic Edda, always in the context of Baldr's death. The following strophes are from *Völuspá*.

<p><i>Ek sá Baldri, blóðgom tívur, Óðins barni, ørlög fólgin: stóð um vaxinn völlum hæri mjór ok mjök fagr mistilteinn. Varð af þeim meiði, er mær sýndisk, harmflaug hættlig: Höðr nam skjóta. Baldrs bróðir var of borinn snemma, sá nam, Óðins sonr, einnætr vega. Þó hann æva hendr né höfuð kembði, áðr á bál um bar Baldrs andskota. En Frigg um grét í Fensölum vá Valhallar - vituð ér enn, eða hvat? - Eysteinn Björnsson's edition ^[11]</i></p>	<p>I saw for Baldr, the bleeding god, The son of Othin, his destiny set: Famous and fair in the lofty fields, Full grown in strength the mistletoe stood. From the branch which seemed so slender and fair Came a harmful shaft that Hoth should hurl; But the brother of Baldr was born ere long, And one night old fought Othin's son. His hands he washed not, his hair he combed not, Till he bore to the bale-blaze Baldr's foe. But in Fensalir did Frigg weep sore For Valhall's need: would you know yet more? - Bellows' translation ^[12]</p>	<p>I saw for Baldr— for the bloodstained sacrifice, Óðinn's child— the fates set hidden. There stood full-grown, higher than the plains, slender and most fair, the mistletoe. There formed from that stem which was slender-seeming, a shaft of anguish, perilous: Höðr started shooting. A brother of Baldr was born quickly: he started—Óðinn's son— slaying, at one night old. He never washed hands, never combed head, till he bore to the pyre Baldr's adversary— while Frigg wept in Fen Halls for Valhöll's woe. Do you still seek to know? And what? - Ursula Dronke's translation</p>
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This account seems to fit well with the information in the Prose Edda, but here the role of Baldr's avenging brother is emphasized.

Baldr and Höðr are also mentioned in *Völuspá*'s description of the world after Ragnarök.

<p><i>Munu ósánir akrar vaxa, böls mun alls batna, Baldr mun koma. Búa þeir Höðr ok Baldr Hropts sigtóptir vel, valtívar - vituð ér enn, eða hvat? - Eysteinn Björnsson's edition ^[11]</i></p>	<p>Unsown shall the fields bring forth, all evil be amended; Baldr shall come; Höðr and Baldr, the heavenly gods, Hropt's glorious dwellings shall inhabit. Understand ye yet, or what? - Thorpe's translation ^[13]</p>
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The poem *Vafþrúðnismál* informs us that the gods who survive Ragnarök are Viðarr, Váli, Móði and Magni with no mention of Höðr and Baldr.

The myth of Baldr's death is also referred to in another Eddic poem, *Baldrs draumar*.

Óðinn kvað:

"Þegj-at-tu, völv,
þik vil ek fregna,
unz alkunna,
vil ek enn vita:
Hverr mun Baldri
at bana verða
ok Óðins son
aldri ræna?"

Völva kvað:

"Höðr berr hávan
hróðrbaðm þinig,
hann mun Baldri
at bana verða
ok Óðins son
aldri ræna;
nauðug sagðak,
nú mun ek þegja."

Óðinn kvað:

"Þegj-at-tu, völv,
þik vil ek fregna,
unz alkunna,
vil ek enn vita:
Hverr mun heift Heði
heft of vinna
eða Baldrs bana
á bál vega?"

Völva kvað:

Rindr berr Vála
í vestsölum,
sá mun Óðins sonr
einnætr vega:
hönd of þvær
né höfuð kembir,
áðr á bál of berr
Baldrs andskota;
nauðug sagðak,
nú mun ek þegja." - Guðni Jónsson's edition ^[14]

Vegtam

"Be thou not silent, Vala!
I will question thee,
until I know all.
I will yet know
who will Baldr's
slayer be,
and Odin's son
of life bereave."

Vala

"Höðr will hither
his glorious brother send,
he of Baldr will
the slayer be,
and Odin's son
of life bereave.
By compulsion I have spoken;
I will now be silent."

Vegtam

"Be not silent, Vala!
I will question thee,
until I know all.
I will yet know
who on Hödr vengeance
will inflict
or Baldr's slayer
raise on the pile."

Vala

"Rind a son shall bear,
in the western halls:
he shall slay Odin's son,
when one night old.
He a hand will not wash,
nor his head comb,
ere he to the pile has borne
Baldr's adversary.
By compulsion I have spoken;
I will now be silent." - Thorpe's translation ^[15]

Höðr is not mentioned again by name in the Eddas. He is, however, referred to in *Völuspá in skamma*.

Váru ellifu
 æsir talðir,
 Baldr er hné,
 við banaþúfu;
 þess lézk Váli
 verðr at hefna,
 síns of bróður
 sló hann handbana. - Guðni Jónsson's edition ^[16]

There were eleven
 Æsir reckoned,
 when Baldr on
 the pile was laid;
 him Vali showed himself
 worthy to avenge,
 his own brother:
 he the slayer slew. - Thorpe's translation ^[17]

Skaldic poetry

The name of Höðr occurs several times in skaldic poetry as a part of warrior-kennings. Thus *Höðr brynju*, "Höðr of byrnie", is a warrior and so is *Höðr víga*, "Höðr of battle". Some scholars have found the fact that the poets should want to compare warriors with Höðr to be incongruous with Snorri's description of him as a blind god, unable to harm anyone without assistance. It is possible that this indicates that some of the poets were familiar with other myths about Höðr than the one related in *Gylfaginning* - perhaps some where Höðr has a more active role. On the other hand the names of many gods occur in kennings and the poets might not have been particular in using any god name as a part of a kenning.

Gesta Danorum



In Saxo's version of the story Hotherus meets wood maidens who warn him that Balderus is a demi-god who can't be killed by normal means.

In *Gesta Danorum* **Hotherus** is a human hero of the Danish and Swedish royal lines. He is gifted in swimming, archery, fighting and music and Nanna, daughter of King Gevarus falls in love with him. But at the same time Balderus, son of Othinus, has caught sight of Nanna bathing and fallen violently in love with her. He resolves to slay Hotherus, his rival.

Out hunting, Hotherus is led astray by a mist and meets wood-maidens who control the fortunes of war. They warn him that Balderus has designs on Nanna but also tell him that he shouldn't attack him in battle since he is a demigod. Hotherus goes to

consult with King Gevarus and asks him for his daughter. The king replies that he would gladly favour him but that Balderus has already made a like request and he does not want to incur his wrath.

Gevarus tells Hotherus that Balderus is invincible but that he knows of one weapon which can defeat him, a sword kept by Mimingus, the satyr of the woods. Mimingus also has another magical artifact, a bracelet that increases the wealth of its owner. Riding through a region of extraordinary cold in a carriage drawn by reindeer, Hotherus captures the satyr with a clever ruse and forces him to yield his artifacts.

Hearing about Hotherus's artifacts, Gelderus, king of Saxony, equips a fleet to attack him. Gevarus warns Hotherus of this and tells him where to meet Gelderus in battle. When the battle is joined, Hotherus and his men save their missiles while defending themselves against those of the enemy with a testudo formation. With his missiles exhausted, Gelderus is forced to sue for peace. He is treated mercifully by Hotherus and becomes his ally. Hotherus

then gains another ally with his eloquent oratory by helping King Helgo of Hålogaland win a bride.

Meanwhile Balderus enters the country of king Gevarus armed and sues for Nanna. Gevarus tells him to learn Nanna's own mind. Balderus addresses her with cajoling words but is refused. Nanna tells him that because of the great difference in their nature and stature, since he is a demigod, they are not suitable for marriage.

As news of Balderus's efforts reaches Hotherus, he and his allies resolve to attack Balderus. A great naval battle ensues where the gods fight on the side of Balderus. Thoro in particular shatters all opposition with his mighty club. When the battle seems lost, Hotherus manages to hew Thoro's club off at the haft and the gods are forced to retreat. Gelderus perishes in the battle and Hotherus arranges a funeral pyre of vessels for him. After this battle Hotherus finally marries Nanna.

Balderus is not completely defeated and shortly afterwards returns to defeat Hotherus in the field. But Balderus's victory is without fruit for he is still without Nanna. Lovesick, he is harassed by phantoms in Nanna's likeness and his health deteriorates so that he cannot walk but has himself drawn around in a cart.

After a while Hotherus and Balderus have their third battle and again Hotherus is forced to retreat. Weary of life because of his misfortunes, he plans to retire and wanders into the wilderness. In a cave he comes upon the same maidens he had met at the start of his career. Now they tell him that he can defeat Balderus if he gets a taste of some extraordinary food which had been devised to increase the strength of Balderus.

Encouraged by this, Hotherus returns from exile and once again meets Balderus in the field. After a day of inconclusive fighting, he goes out during the night to spy on the enemy. He finds where Balderus's magical food is prepared and plays the lyre for the maidens preparing it. While they don't want to give him the food, they bestow on him a belt and a girdle which secure victory.

Heading back to his camp, Hotherus meets Balderus and plunges his sword into his side. After three days, Balderus dies from his wound. Many years later, Bous, the son of Othinus and Rinda, avenges his brother by killing Hotherus in a duel.

Chronicon Lethrense and Annales Lundenses

There are also two lesser-known Danish–Latin chronicles, the *Chronicon Lethrense* and the *Annales Lundenses*, of which the latter is included in the former. These two sources provide a second euhemerized account of Höðr's slaying of Balder.

It relates that Hother was the king of the Saxons, son of Hothbrod, the daughter of Hadding. Hother first slew Othen's (i.e., Odin's) son Balder in battle and then chased Othen and Thor. Finally, Othen's son Both killed Hother. Hother, Balder, Othen, and Thor were incorrectly considered to be gods.

Rydberg's theories

According to the Swedish mythologist and romantic poet Viktor Rydberg,^[18] the story of Baldr's death was taken from *Húsdrápa*, a poem composed by Ulfr Uggason around 990 AD at a feast thrown by the Icelandic Chief Óláfr Höskuldsson to celebrate the finished construction of his new home, Hjarðarholt, the walls of which were filled with symbolic representations of the Baldr myth among others. Rydberg suggested that Höðr was depicted with eyes closed and Loki guiding his aim to indicate that Loki was the true cause of Baldr's death and Höðr was only his "blind tool." Rydberg theorized that the author of the *Gylfaginning* then mistook the description of the symbolic artwork in the *Húsdrápa* as the actual tale of Baldr's death.

Notes

- [1] The name *Höðr* is thought to be related to *höð*, "battle", and mean something like "killer". This would seem to fit with the god's mythological role. In the standardized Old Norse orthography the name is spelled " *but the letter* is frequently replaced with the Modern Icelandic 'ö' for reasons of familiarity or technical expediency.
- The name can be represented in English texts as *Hod*, *Hoder*, *Hodur*, *Hodr*, *Hödr*, *Höd* or *Hoth* or less commonly as *Hödur*, *Hödhr*, *Höder*, *Hothr*, *Hodhr*, *Hodh*, *Hother*, *Höthr*, *Höth* or *Hödh*. In the reconstructed pronunciation of Old Norse *Høðr* is pronounced , while the Icelandic pronunciation is , corresponding to the Icelandic spelling *Höður*. The various anglicizations are pronounced in an ad hoc fashion according to the taste and dialect of the speaker.
- [2] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/gg/ggrpar23.html>
- [3] <http://www.voluspa.org/gylfaginning21-30.htm>
- [4] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/gg/ggrpar49.html>
- [5] <http://www.voluspa.org/gylfaginning41-50.htm>
- [6] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/gg/ggrpar51.html>
- [7] <http://www.voluspa.org/gylfaginning51-54.htm>
- [8] <http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Skaldskaparmál>
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- [11] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/ugm/vsp3.html>
- [12] <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe03.htm>
- [13] http://books.google.com/books?id=JcYLA AAAAIAAJ&pg=PP1&dq=Benjamin+Thorpe,+Edda&hl=en&ei=FCE2TayQFJGrrAfH1-zbCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Unsown%20shall%20the%20fields%20bring%20forth&f=false
- [14] <http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/vegtamskvida.php>
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- [16] <http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/voluspainskamma.php>
- [17] http://books.google.com/books?id=JcYLA AAAAIAAJ&pg=PP1&dq=Benjamin+Thorpe,+Edda&hl=en&ei=FCE2TayQFJGrrAfH1-zbCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=him%20Vali%20showed%20himself%20worthy%20to%20avenge&f=false
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Preceded by Rolvo Krake	King of Denmark in <i>Gesta Danorum</i>	Succeeded by Rørikus
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Hœnir

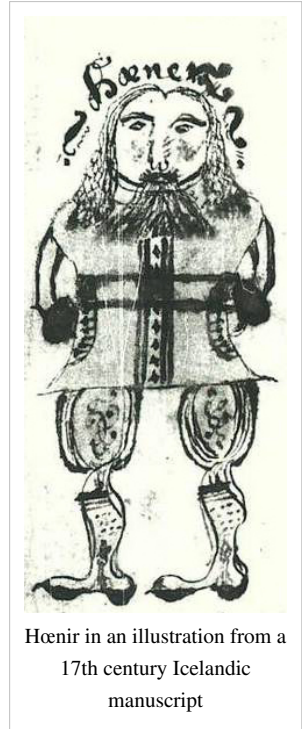
In Norse mythology, **Hœnir** is one of the Æsir. He is mentioned as the one who helped Odin to create humans.

Attestations

In *Ynglinga saga*, along with Mímir, he went to the Vanir as a hostage to seal a truce after the Æsir-Vanir War. There, Hœnir was indecisive and relied on Mímir for all of his decisions, grunting noncommittal answers when Mímir was absent.

In *Völuspá*, at the creation of the first human beings, Ask and Embla, Hœnir and Lóðurr help Odin. According to the *Prose Edda*, Hœnir is said to have given reason to man.^[1] In *Gylfaginning*, Vili and Vé are mentioned instead. As Snorri knew *Völuspá*, it is possible that Hœnir was another name for Vili. Also according to *Völuspá*, Hœnir was one of the few gods that would survive Ragnarök.

Hœnir also has a minor role in *Haustlög* and *Reginismál*. Hœnir crater on Callisto is named after him.



Hœnir in an illustration from a 17th century Icelandic manuscript

Notes

[1] MacCulloch, J.A.(2005). The Celtic and Scandinavian Religions. Cosimo, Inc. ISBN 1-59605-416-6.

Kvasir

In Norse mythology, **Kvasir** was a being born of the saliva of the Æsir and the Vanir, two groups of gods. Extremely wise, Kvasir traveled far and wide, teaching and spreading knowledge. This continued until the dwarfs Fjalar and Galar killed Kvasir and drained him of his blood. The two mixed his blood with honey, resulting in the Mead of Poetry, a mead which imbues the drinker with skaldship and wisdom, and the spread of which eventually resulted in the introduction of poetry to mankind.

Kvasir is attested in the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, both written by Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century, and in the poetry of skalds. According to the *Prose Edda*, Kvasir was instrumental in the capture and binding of Loki, and an euhemerized account of the god appears in *Heimskringla*, where he is attested as the wisest among the Vanir.

Scholars have connected Kvasir to methods of beverage production and peacemaking practices among ancient peoples, and have pointed to a potential basis in Proto-Indo-European myth by way of Sanskrit tales involving the holy beverage Soma and its theft by the god Indra.

Etymology

The root *kvas-* in *Kvas-ir* likely stems from the Proto-Germanic base **kvass-*, meaning to “squeeze, squash, crush, bruise”. Regarding this etymology, linguist Albert Morey Sturtevant comments that “fluids may result from the crushing or pressing of an object (cf. Dan. *kvase* ‘to crush something in order to squeeze out the juice’). Hence we are justified in assuming the stem syllable in *kvas-ir* has reference to the fluid (saliva) out of which he was created and that the name *Kvas-ir* denotes the person who possesses the characteristic qualities inherent in this fluid, viz., poetic inspiration and wisdom.”^[1]

Attestations

In the *Prose Edda*, Kvasir appears in the books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*. Kvasir is mentioned a single time in *Gylfaginning*; in chapter 50, where the enthroned figure of High tells Gangleri (Gylfi in disguise) of how Loki was caught by the gods after being responsible for the murder of the god Baldr. In the chapter, High says that while Loki was hiding from the gods, he often took the form of a salmon during the day and swam in the waterfall Franangrsfors. Loki considered what sort of device that the gods might craft to catch him there, and so, sitting in his four-door mountain lookout house, knotted together linen thread in “which ever since the net has been”. Loki noticed that the gods were not far away from him, and that Odin had spotted him from Hliðskjálf. Loki sat before a fire, and when he noticed the gods were coming near him, he threw the net into the fire and jumped up and slipped into the river. The gods reached Loki’s house, and the first to enter was Kvasir, who High describes as “the wisest of all”. Kvasir saw the shape of the net in the ash of the fire, and so realized its purpose; to catch fish. And so Kvasir told the gods about it. The gods used the shape found in the ash as their model, and with it flushed Loki out of the river, resulting in his binding.^[2]

In *Skáldskaparmál*, Kvasir is mentioned several times. In chapter 57 of the book, Ægir asks the skaldic god Bragi where the craft of poetry originates. Bragi says that the Æsir once wrangled with the Vanir but eventually came together to make peace. The two groups decided to form a truce by way of both sides spitting into a vat. After they left, the gods kept the vat as a symbol of their truce, “and decided not to let it be wasted and out of it



Honey combs; upon his death, Kvasir’s blood was drained and mixed with honey, which became the Mead of Poetry

made a man". The man was named Kvasir, and he was extremely wise; he knew the answer to any question posed to him. Kvasir traveled far and wide throughout the world teaching mankind and spreading his vast knowledge. In time, two dwarfs, Fjalar and Galar, invited Kvasir to their home for a private talk. Upon Kvasir's arrival, the two dwarfs killed him, and drained his blood into three objects. Two of the objects were vats, called Són and Boðn, and the third was a pot called Óðrerir. Fjalar and Galar mixed the blood with honey and the mixture became mead, and whomever partakes of it becomes a poet or scholar (Kvasir's blood had become the Mead of Poetry). The two dwarfs explained to the Æsir that Kvasir died by way of "suffocat[ion] in intelligence", as there were none among them who were so well educated as to be able to pose him questions. Bragi then tells how the Mead of Poetry, by way of the god Odin, ultimately came into the hands of mankind.^[3]

In chapter 3 *Skáldskaparmál*, poetic ways of referring to poetry are provided, including "Kvasir's blood". In reference, part of *Vellekla* by the 10th century Icelandic skald Einarr skálaglamm is provided, where the term "Kvasir's blood" for 'poetry' is used.^[4] Further, in chapter 3, a prose narrative mentions that the Kvasir's blood was made into the Mead of Poetry.^[5]

Kvasir is mentioned in an euhemerized account of the origin of the gods in chapter 4 of *Ynglinga saga*, contained within *Heimskringla*. The chapter narrative explains that Odin waged war on the Vanir, yet the Vanir could not be defeated, and so the two decided to exchange hostages in a peace agreement. Kvasir, here a member of the Vanir and described as the "cleverest among them", is included among the hostages.^[6]

Theories and interpretations

Scholar Rudolf Simek comments that *kvasir* likely originally referred to juice squeezed from berries and then fermented. In some ancient cultures, berries were communally chewed before being spat into a container, which, Simek points out, exactly parallels Kvasir's mythical creation. Simek says that Snorri's description is further proven faithful by way of the (above mentioned) 10th century skaldic kenning "Kvasir's blood" (Old Norse *Kvasis dreya*), and that strong parallels exist between the Old Norse tale of the theft of the Mead of Poetry by Odin (in the form of an eagle) and the Sanskrit tale of the theft of Soma—beverage of the gods—by the god Indra (or an eagle), and that these parallels point to a common Proto-Indo-European basis. Further, Simek comments, the mixing of spit in a vat between the two groups of gods points to an ancient basis for the myth, as the customs of mixing spittle and the group drinking of intoxicating beverage are well rooted in traditional peacemaking and group binding customs among various ancient peoples.^[7]

Modern influence

A Norwegian search engine, Kvasir, takes its name from the god.^[8]

Notes

[1] Sturtevant (1952:1149—1150).

[2] Faulkes (1995:51—52).

[3] Faulkes (1995:61—64).

[4] Faulkes (1995:70).

[5] Faulkes (1995:72).

[6] Hollander (2007:7—8).

[7] Simek (2007:184-185).

[8] Kvasir Search Engine (<http://kvasir.no/>); see About Kvasir (<http://kvasirbeta.no/blogg/om-kvasir/>) for additional information

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Lóðurr

Lóðurr is a god in Norse mythology. In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá* he is assigned a role in animating the first humans, but apart from that he is hardly ever mentioned, and remains obscure. Scholars have variously identified him with Loki, Vé, Vili and Freyr, but consensus has not been reached on any one theory.

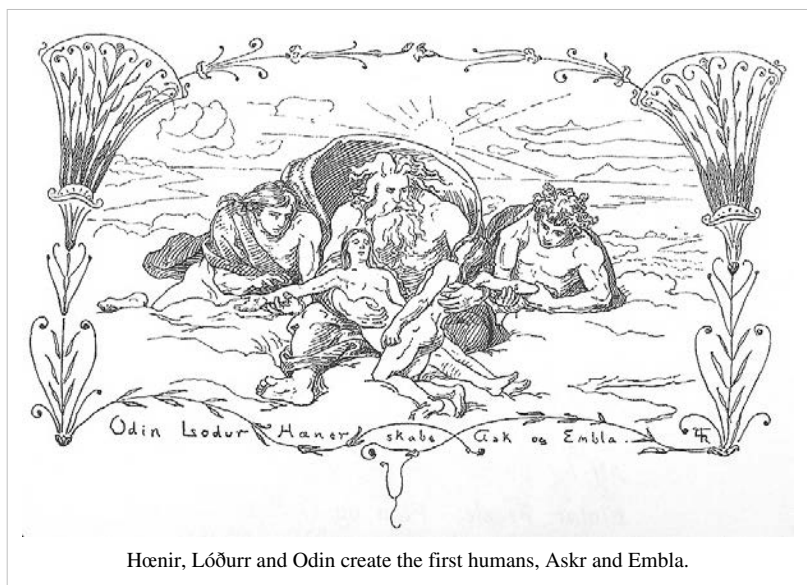
Name and etymology

The name's meaning is unknown. It has been speculatively linked to various Old Norse words, such as *lóð*, "fruit, land", *ljóðar*, "people" and *laða*,

"to attract". The Gothic words *liudan*, "to grow" and *laudi*, "shape", as well as the German word *lodern*, "to blaze", have also been mentioned in this context.

The metrical position of Lóðurr's name in the skaldic poem *Íslendingadrápa*, composed in the strict dróttkvætt metre, indicates that it contains the sound value /ó/ rather than /o/. This evidence, while strong, is not incontrovertible and some scholars have held out for a *Loðurr* reading.

Lóðurr's name can be represented or anglicized as *Lóður*, *Lódur*, *Lódur*, *Lóthurr*, *Lóthur*, *Lódhurr*, *Lódhur*, *Lodurr*, *Lodur*, *Lothurr*, *Lothur*, *Lodhurr*, *Loðurr*, *Loður* or *Lodhur*.



Hænir, Lóðurr and Odin create the first humans, Ask and Embla.

Attestations

Völuspá

In the Poetic Edda the name *Lóðurr* occurs only once; in *Völuspá*, where the gods animate the first humans.

17. <i>Unz þrír kvámu</i>	17. Until three came	17. Until there came three
<i>ór því liði</i>	out of that company,	mighty and benevolent
<i>öflgír ok ástgír</i>	mighty and loving	Æsir to the world
<i>æsir at húsi,</i>	Æsir to a house.	from their assembly.
<i>fundu á landi</i>	They found on land,	They found on earth,
<i>lít megandi</i>	little capable,	nearly powerless,
<i>Ask ok Emblu</i>	Ash and Embla,	Ask and Embla,
<i>þrlöglausa.</i>	without destiny.	void of destiny.
18. <i>Önd þau né áttu,</i>	18. Breath they had not,	18. Spirit they possessed not,
<i>óð þau né höfðu,</i>	spirit they had not,	sense they had not,
<i>lá né læti</i>	no film of flesh nor cry of voice,	blood nor motive powers,
<i>né litu goða.</i>	nor comely hues.	nor goodly colour.
<i>Önd gaf Óðinn,</i>	Breath Óðinn gave,	Spirit gave Odin,
<i>óð gaf Hænir,</i>	spirit Hænir gave,	sense gave Hoenir,
<i>lá gaf Lóðurr</i>	film of flesh Lóðurr gave	blood gave Lodur,
<i>ok litu goða. — Normalized text</i>	and comely hues. — <i>Dronke's translation</i>	and goodly colour. — <i>Thorpe's translation</i>

The precise meaning of these strophes and their context in *Völuspá* is debated. Most relevant for the present discussion are Lóðurr's gifts of *lá* and *litu goða*. The word *lá* is obscure and the translations "film of flesh" and "blood" are just two of the many possibilities that have been suggested. The phrase "litu goða" is somewhat less difficult and traditionally interpreted as "good colours", "good shape" or even "good looks".

The 19th-century Swedish scholar Viktor Rydberg proposed a reading of *litu goða*, meaning "shape of gods", and saw the line as indication that the gods created human beings in their own image. While the manuscripts do not distinguish between the phonemes /o/ and /ó/, most other scholars have preferred the /ó/ reading for metrical reasons. The metrical structure of *Völuspá's* fornyrðislag is, however, not very rigid and in 1983 Rydberg's theory was championed again by Gro Steinsland. It remains debated.

Other attestations

Apart from the strophe in *Völuspá*, Lóðurr's name occurs only twice in the original sources. The name is found in the skaldic poems *Háleygjatal* and *Íslendingadrápa* where "Lóðurr's friend" is used as a kenning for Odin. This seems consistent with Lóðurr's role in *Völuspá*.

In Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, Lóðurr is conspicuously absent. Here the creation of humans is attributed to the sons of Borr, whom Snorri names elsewhere as Odin, Vili and Vé.

Normalized text of the R manuscript ^[1]

*Þá er þeir Bors synir gengu með sævarströndu, fundu þeir tré
tvau, ok tóku upp tréin ok sköpuðu af menn. Gaf hinn fyrsti [ö]nd
ok líf, annarr vit ok hræring, þriði ásjónu, málit ok heyrn ok sjón;
gáfu þeim klæði [ok] nöfn. Hét karlmaðrinn Askr en konan Embla,
ok ólusk þaðan af mannkíndin, þeim er byggðin var gefin undir
Miðgarði.*

Brodeur's translation

When the sons of Borr were walking along the sea-strand, they found two trees, and took up the trees and shaped men of them: the first gave them spirit and life; the second, wit and feeling; the third, form, speech, hearing, and sight. They gave them clothing and names: the male was called Askr, and the female Embla, and of them was mankind begotten, which received a dwelling-place under Midgard.

Snorri often quotes *Völuspá* in his work, but in this case he does not. We cannot know whether he knew the strophes above or whether he was working entirely from other sources.

Nordendorf fibula

Another source sometimes brought into the discussion is the Nordendorf fibula. This artifact, dating from about 600 CE, contains the runic inscription **logaporewodanwigiponar**. This is usually interpreted as *Logapore Wodan Wigiponar*, where *Wodan* is Odin and *Wigiponar* probably is Thor. It would be natural for *logapore* to be the name of a third god, but there is no obvious identification in Norse mythology as we know it. Both Lóðurr and Loki have been proposed, but the etymological reasoning is tenuous, and firm conclusions cannot be reached.

Theories

Since the *Prose Edda* mentions the sons of Borr in the same context as *Völuspá* does Hœnir and Lóðurr, some scholars have reasoned that Lóðurr might be another name for either Vili or Vé. Viktor Rydberg was an early proponent of this theory, but recently it has received little attention.

A more popular theory proposed by the scholar Ursula Dronke is that *Lóðurr* is "a third name of Loki/Loptr". The main argument for this is that the gods Odin, Hœnir and Loki occur as a trio in *Haustlöng*, in the prose prologue to *Reginismál* and also in the *Loka Táttur* a Faroese ballad which is a rare example of the occurrence of Norse gods in folklore. The Odin-kenning "Lóðurr's friend" furthermore appears to parallel the kenning "Loptr's friend" and Loki is similarly referred to as "Hœnir's friend" in *Haustlöng*, strengthening the trio connection. While many scholars agree with this identification, it is not universally accepted. One argument against it is that Loki appears as a malevolent being later in *Völuspá*, seemingly conflicting with the image of Lóðurr as a "mighty and loving" figure.

An identification with Freyr has also been proposed. This theory emphasizes the possible fertility-related meanings of Lóðurr's name but otherwise has little direct evidence to support it.

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 [4] http://books.google.com/books?id=s_kqAAAAMAAJ&

Loki

In Norse mythology, **Loki**, **Loptr**, or **Hveðrungr** is a god or jötunn (or both). Loki is the son of Fárbauti and Laufey, and the brother of Helblindi and Býleistr. By the jötunn Angrboða, Loki is the father of Hel, the wolf Fenrir, and the world serpent Jörmungandr. By his wife Sigyn, Loki is the father of Narfi and/or Nari. And by the stallion Svaðilfari, Loki is the mother—giving birth in the form of a mare—to the eight-legged horse Sleipnir. In addition, Loki is referred to as the father of Váli in the *Prose Edda*.

Loki's relation with the gods varies by source. Loki sometimes assists the gods and sometimes causes problems for them. Loki is a shape shifter and in separate incidents he appears in the form of a salmon, mare, seal, a fly, and possibly an elderly woman. Loki's positive relations with the gods end with his role in engineering the death of the god Baldr. Loki is eventually bound by the gods with the entrails of one of his sons.

In both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, the goddess Skaði is responsible for placing a serpent above him while he is bound. The serpent drips venom from above him that Sigyn collects into a bowl; however, she must empty the bowl when it is full, and the venom that drips in the mean time causes Loki to writhe in pain, thereby causing earthquakes. With the onset of Ragnarök, Loki is foretold to slip free from his bonds and to fight against the gods among the forces of the jötnar, at which time he will encounter the god Heimdallr and the two will slay each other.

Loki is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; the Norwegian Rune Poems, in the poetry of skalds, and in Scandinavian folklore. Loki may be depicted on the Snapton Stone, the Kirkby Stephen Stone, and the Gosforth Cross. Loki's origins and role in Norse mythology, which some scholars have described as that of a trickster god, have been much debated by scholars.



Loki as depicted on an 18th-century Icelandic manuscript

Names

The etymology of the name *Loki* has yet to be solved. It may be related to Old Norse *luka*, meaning "close" (potentially pointing to Loki's role at Ragnarök).^[1]

In various poems from the *Poetic Edda* (stanza 2 of *Lokasenna*, stanza 41 of *Hyndluljóð*, and stanza 26 of *Fjölsvinismál*), and sections of the *Prose Edda* (chapter 32 of *Gylfaginning*, stanza 8 of *Haustlög*, and stanza 1 of *Þórsdrápa*) Loki is alternately referred to as *Loptr*, which is generally considered derived from Old Norse *lopt* meaning "air", and therefore points to an association with the air.^[2]

The name *Hveðrungr* (Old Norse 'roarer') is also used in reference to Loki, occurring in names for Hel (such as in *Ynglingatal*; *hveðrungrs mæri*) and in reference to Fenrir (as in *Völuspá*).^[3]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, Loki appears (or is referenced) in the poems *Völuspá*, *Lokasenna*, *Þrymskviða*, *Reginismál*, *Baldrs draumar*, and *Hyndluljóð*.

Völuspá

In stanza 35 of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, a völva tells Odin that, among many other things, she sees Sigyn sitting very unhappily with her bound husband, Loki, under a "grove of hot springs".^[4] In stanza 51, during the events of Ragnarök, Loki appears free from his bonds and is referred to as the "brother of Býleistr" (here transcribed as *Byleist*):

A ship journeys from the east, Muspell's people are coming,

over the waves, and Loki steers

There are the monstrous brood with all the raveners,

The brother of Byleist is in company with them.^[5]

In stanza 54, after consuming Odin and being killed by Odin's son Víðarr, Fenrir is described as "Loki's kinsman".^[6]

Lokasenna

The poem *Lokasenna* (Old Norse "Loki's Quarrel") centers around Loki flyting with other gods; Loki puts forth two stanzas of insults while the receiving figure responds with a single stanza, and then another figure chimes in. The poem begins with a prose introduction detailing that Ægir, a figure associated with the sea, is hosting a feast in his hall for a number of the gods and elves. There, the gods praise Ægir's servers Fimafeng and Eldir. Loki "could not bear to hear that," and kills the servant Fimafeng. In response, the gods grab their shields, shrieking at Loki, and chase him out of the hall and to the woods. The gods then return to the hall, and continue drinking.^[7]

Entrance and rejection



Loki and Sigyn (1863) by Mårten Eskil Winge



Loki taunts Bragi (1908) by W. G. Collingwood

Loki comes out of the woods, and meets Eldir outside of the hall. Loki greets Eldir (and the poem itself begins) with a demand that Eldir tell him what the gods are discussing over their ale inside the hall. Eldir responds that they discuss their "weapons and their prowess in war" and yet no one there has anything friendly to say about Loki. Loki says that he will go into the feast, and that, before the end of the feast, he will induce quarrelling among the gods, and "mix their mead with malice." Eldir responds that "if shouting and fighting you pour out on" to the gods, "they'll wipe it off on you." Loki then enters the hall, and everyone there falls silent upon noticing him.^[8]

Re-entrance and insults

Breaking the silence, Loki says that, thirsty, he had come to these halls from a long way away to ask the gods for a drink of "the famous mead." Calling the gods arrogant, Loki asks why they are unable to speak, and demands that they assign him a seat and a place for him at the feast, or tell him to leave. The skaldic god Bragi is the first to respond to Loki by telling him that Loki will not have a seat and place assigned to him by the gods at the feast, for the gods know what men they should invite.^[9] Loki does not respond to Bragi directly, but instead directs his attention to Odin, and states:

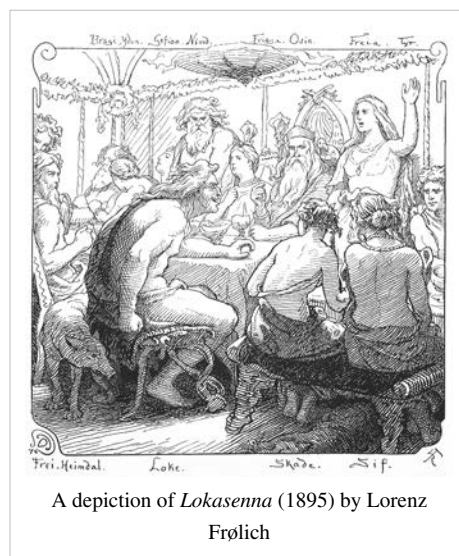
Do you remember, Odin, when in bygone days
we mixed our blood together?
You said you would never drink ale
unless it were brought to both of us.^[9]

Odin then asks his silent son Víðarr to sit up, so that Loki (here referred to as the "wolf's father") may sit at the feast, and so that he may not speak words of blame to the gods in Ægir's hall. Víðarr stands and pours a drink for Loki. Prior to drinking, Loki declaims a toast to the gods, with a specific exception for Bragi. Bragi responds that he will give a horse, sword, and ring from his possessions so that he does not repay the gods "with hatred." Loki responds that Bragi will always be short of all of these things, accusing him of being "wary of war" and "shy of shooting." Bragi responds that, were they outside of Ægir's hall, Bragi would be holding Loki's head as a reward for his lies. Loki replies that Bragi is brave when seated, calling him a "bench-ornament," and that Bragi would run away when troubled by an angry, spirited man.^[10]

The goddess Iðunn interrupts, asking Bragi, as a service to his relatives and adopted relatives, not to say words of blame to Loki in Ægir's hall. Loki tells Iðunn to be silent, calling her the most "man-crazed" of all women, and saying that she placed her washed, bright arms around her brother's slayer. Iðunn says that she won't say words of blame in Ægir's hall, and affirms that she quietened Bragi, who was made talkative by beer, and that she doesn't want the two of them to fight. The goddess Gefjun asks why the two gods must fight, saying that Loki knows that he is joking, and that "all living things love him." Loki responds to Gefjun by stating that Gefjun's heart was once seduced by a "white boy" who gave her a jewel, and who Gefjun laid her thigh over.^[11]

Odin says that Loki must be insane to make Gefjun his enemy, as her wisdom about the fates of men may equal Odin's own. Loki says that Odin does a poor job in handing out honor in war to men, and that he's often given victory to the faint-hearted. Odin responds that even if this is true, Loki (in a story otherwise unattested) once spent eight winters beneath the earth as a woman milking cows, and during this time bore children. Odin declares this perverse. Loki counters that Odin once practiced seiðr on the island of *Samsey* (now Samsø, Denmark), and, appearing as a wizard, traveled among mankind, which Loki condemns as perverse.^[12]

Frigg, a major goddess and Odin's wife, says that what Loki and Odin did in the ancient past should not be spoken of in front of others, and that ancient matters should always remain hidden. Loki brings up that Frigg is the daughter of



A depiction of *Lokasenna* (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Fjörgyn, a personification of the earth, and that she had once taken Odin's brothers Vili and Vé into her embrace. Frigg responds that if there was a boy like her now-deceased son Baldr in the hall, Loki would not be able to escape from the wrath of the gods. Loki reminds Frigg that he is responsible for the death of her son Baldr.^[13]

The goddess Freyja declares that Loki must be mad, stating that Frigg knows all fate, yet she does not speak it. Loki claims each of the gods and elves that are present have been Freyja's lover. Freyja replies that Loki is lying, that he just wants to "yelp about wicked things" that gods and goddesses are furious with him, and that he will go home thwarted. In response, Loki calls Freyja a malicious witch, and claims that Freyja was once astride her brother Freyr, when all of the other laughing gods surprised her, Freyja then farted. This scenario is otherwise unattested. Njörðr (Freyja and Freyr's father) says that it is harmless for a woman to have a lover or "someone else" beside her husband, and that what is surprising is a "pervert god coming here who has borne children."^[13]

Loki tells Njörðr to be silent, recalling Njörðr's status as once having been a hostage from the Vanir to the Æsir during the Æsir-Vanir War, that the "daughters of Hymir" once used Njörðr "as a pisspot," urinating in his mouth (an otherwise unattested comment). Njörðr responds that this was his reward when he was sent as a hostage to the Æsir, and that he fathered his son (Freyr), whom no one hates, and is considered a prince of the Æsir. Loki tells Njörðr to maintain his moderation, and that he won't keep it secret any longer that Njörðr fathered this son with his sister (unnamed), although one would expect him to be worse than he turned out.^[14]

The god Tyr defends Freyr, to which Loki replies that Tyr should be silent, for Tyr cannot "deal straight with people," and points out that it was Loki's son, the wolf Fenrir, who tore Tyr's hand off. (According to the prose introduction to the poem Tyr is now one-handed from having his arm bitten off by Loki's son Fenrir while Fenrir was bound.) Tyr responds that while he may have lost a hand, Loki has lost the wolf, and trouble has come to them both. Further, that Fenrir must now wait in shackles until the onset of Ragnarök. Loki tells Tyr to be silent a second time, and states that Tyr's wife (otherwise unattested) had a son by Loki, and that Tyr never received any compensation for this "injury," further calling him a "wretch."^[15]

Freyr himself interrupts at this point, and says that he sees a wolf lying before a river mouth, and that, unless Loki is immediately silent, like the wolf, Loki shall also be bound until Ragnarök. Loki retorts that Freyr purchased his consort Gerðr with gold, having given away his sword, which he will lack at Ragnarök. Byggvir (referred to in the prose introduction to the poem as a servant of Freyr) says that if he had as noble a lineage and as an honorable a seat as Freyr, he would grind down Loki, and make all of his limbs lame. Loki refers to Byggvir in terms of a dog, and says that Byggvir is always found at Freyr's ears, or twittering beneath a grindstone. Byggvir says that he's proud to be here by all the gods and men, and that he's said to be speedy. Loki tells him to be silent, that Byggvir does not know how to apportion food among men, and that he hides among the straw and dais when men go to battle.^[15]

The god Heimdallr says that Loki is drunk and witless, and asks Loki why he won't stop speaking. Loki tells Heimdallr to be silent, that he was fated a "hateful life," that Heimdallr must always have a muddy back, and serve as watchman of the gods. The goddess Skaði says that while Loki now appears light-hearted and "playing" with his "tail-wagging," he will soon be bound with his ice-cold son's guts on a sharp rock by the gods. Loki says that, even if this is his fate, that he was "first and foremost" with the other gods at the killing of Skaði's father, jötunn Þjazi. Skaði says that, with these events in mind, "baneful advice" will always come from her "sanctuaries and plains" to Loki. Loki says that Skaði was once gentler in speech to him (referring to himself as the "son of Laufey") when Skaði once invited him to her bed (an event that is unattested elsewhere), and that such events must be mentioned if they are to recall "shameful deeds."^[15]

Sif, wife of Thor, goes forth and pours Loki a glass of mead into a crystal cup in a prose narrative. Continuing the poem, Sif welcomes Loki and invites him to take a crystal cup filled with ancient mead, and says that among the children of the Æsir, she is singularly blameless. Loki "takes the horn," drinks it, and says that she would be, if it were so, and states that Sif had a lover beside Thor, namely, Loki himself (an event that is otherwise unattested). Beyla (referred to in the prose introduction to the poem as a servant of Freyr) says that all of the mountains are shaking, that she thinks Thor must be on his way home, and when Thor arrives he will bring peace to those that

quarrel there. Loki tells Beyla to be silent, that she is "much imbued with malice," that no worse female has ever been among the "Æsir's children," and calling her a bad "serving-wench."^[16]

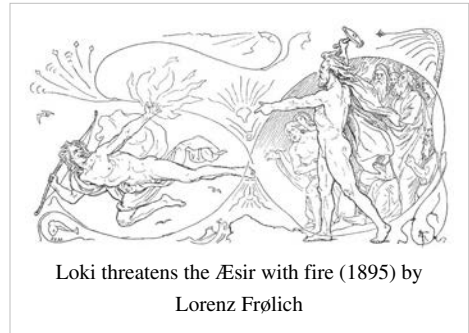
The arrival of Thor and the bondage of Loki

Thor arrives, and tells Loki to be silent, referring to him as an "evil creature," stating that with his hammer Mjöllnir he will silence Loki by hammering his head from his shoulders. Acknowledging that Thor has arrived, Loki asks Thor why he is raging, and says that Thor won't be so bold to fight against the wolf when he swallows Odin at Ragnarök. Thor again tells Loki to be silent, and threatens him with Mjöllnir, adding that he will throw Loki "up on the roads to the east," and thereafter no one will be able to see Loki. Loki states that Thor should never brag of his journeys to the east, claiming that there Thor crouched cowering in the thumb of a glove, mockingly referring to him as a "hero," and adding that such behaviour was unlike Thor. Thor responds by telling Loki to be silent, threatening him with Mjöllnir, and adding that every one of Loki's bones will be broken with it. Loki says he intends to live for a long while yet despite Thor's threats, and taunts Thor about an encounter Thor once had with the jötnar Skrymir (Útgarda-Loki in disguise). Thor again commands Loki to be silent, threatens Loki with Mjöllnir, and says he will send Loki to Hel, below the gates Nágrind.^[17]

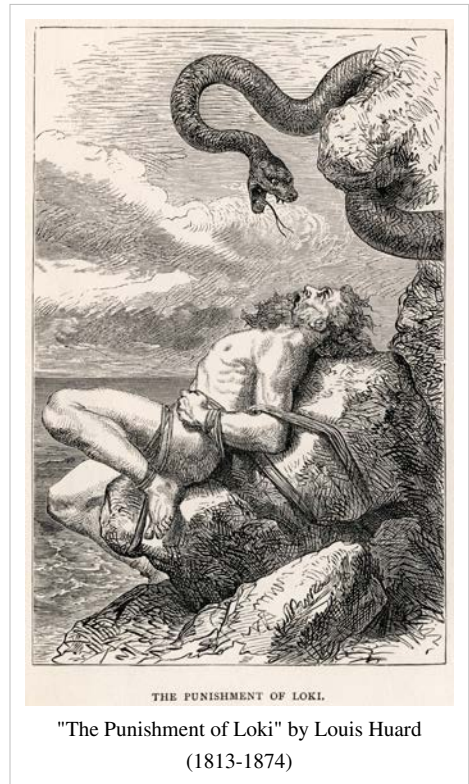
In response to Thor, Loki says that he "spoke before the Æsir," and "before the sons of the Æsir" what his "spirit urged" him to say, yet before Thor alone he will leave, as he knows that Thor does strike. Loki ends the poetic verses of *Lokasenna* with a final stanza:

Ale you brewed, Ægir, and you will never again hold a
feast;
all your possessions which are here inside—
may flame play over them,
and may your back be burnt!^[18]

Following this final stanza a prose section details that after Loki left the hall, he disguised himself as a salmon and hid in the waterfall of Franangrsfors, where the Æsir caught him. The narrative continues that Loki was bound with the entrails of his son Nari, and his son Narfi changed into a wolf. Skaði fastened a venomous snake over Loki's face, and from it poison dripped. Sigyn, Loki's wife, sat with him holding a basin beneath the dripping venom, yet when the basin became full, she carried the poison away; and during this time the poison dripped on to Loki, causing him to writhe with such violence that all of the earth shook from the force, resulting in what are now known as earthquakes.^[18]



Loki threatens the Æsir with fire (1895) by
Lorenz Frølich



THE PUNISHMENT OF LOKI.
"The Punishment of Loki" by Louis Huard
(1813-1874)

Þrymskviða

In the poem *Þrymskviða*, Thor wakes and finds that his powerful hammer, Mjöllnir, is missing. Thor turns to Loki first, and tells him that nobody knows that the hammer has been stolen. The two then go to the court of the goddess Freyja, and Thor asks her if he may borrow her feather cloak so that he may attempt to find Mjöllnir. Freyja agrees, saying she'd lend it even if it were made of silver and gold, and Loki flies off, the feather cloak whistling.^[19]

In Jötunheimr, the jötunn Þrymr sits on a burial mound, plaiting golden collars for his female dogs, and trimming the manes of his horses. Þrymr sees Loki, and asks what could be amiss among the Æsir and the Elves; why is Loki alone in the Jötunheimr? Loki responds that he has bad news for both the elves and the Æsir - that Thor's hammer, Mjöllnir, is gone. Þrymr says that he has hidden Mjöllnir eight leagues beneath the earth, from which it will be retrieved, if Freyja is brought to him as his wife. Loki flies off, the feather cloak whistling, away from Jötunheimr and back to the court of the gods.^[19]

Thor asks Loki if his efforts were successful, and that Loki should tell him while he's still in the air as "tales often escape a sitting man, and the man lying down often barks out lies." Loki states that it was indeed an effort, and also a success, for he has discovered that Þrymr has the hammer, but that it cannot be retrieved unless Freyja is brought to Þrymr as his wife. The two return to Freyja, and tell her to dress herself in a bridal head dress, as they will drive her to Jötunheimr. Freyja, indignant and angry, goes into a rage, causing all of the halls of the Æsir to tremble in her anger, and her necklace, the famed Brísingamen, falls from her. Freyja pointedly refuses.^[20]

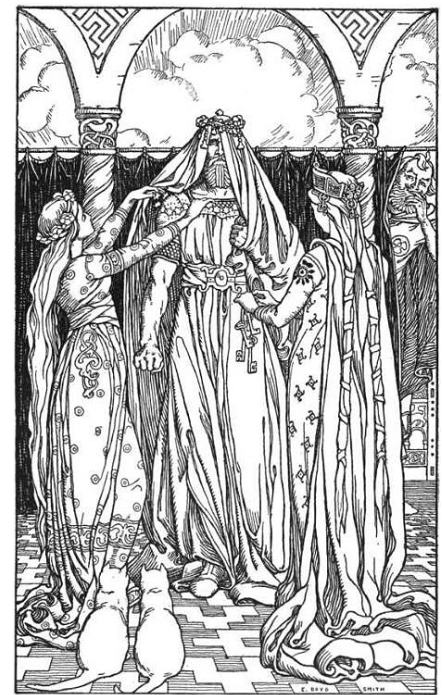
As a result, the gods and goddesses meet and hold a thing to discuss and debate the matter. At the thing, the god Heimdallr puts forth the suggestion that, in place of Freyja, Thor should be dressed as the bride, complete with jewels, women's clothing down to his knees, a bridal head-dress, and the necklace Brísingamen. Thor rejects the idea, and Loki (here described as "son of Laufey") interjects that this will be the only way to get back Mjöllnir, and points out that without Mjöllnir, the jötnar will be able to invade and settle in Asgard. The gods dress Thor as a bride, and Loki states that he will go with Thor as his maid, and that the two shall drive to Jötunheimr together.^[21]

After riding together in Thor's goat-driven chariot, the two, disguised, arrive in Jötunheimr. Þrymr commands the jötnar in his hall to spread straw on the benches, for Freyja has arrived to be his wife. Þrymr recounts his treasured animals and objects, stating that Freyja was all that he was missing in his wealth.^[22]

Early in the evening, the disguised Loki and Thor meet in the with the Þrymr and the assembled jötnar. Thor eats and drinks ferociously, consuming entire animals and three casks of mead. Þrymr finds the behaviour at odds with his impression of Freyja, and Loki, sitting before Þrymr and appearing as a "very shrewd maid", makes the excuse that "Freyja's" behaviour is due to her having not consumed anything for eight entire days before arriving due to her eagerness to arrive. Þrymr then lifts "Freyja's" veil and wants to kiss "her" until catching the terrifying eyes staring back at him, seemingly burning with fire. Loki states that this is because "Freyja" had not slept for eight nights in her eagerness.^[22]



Loki's flight to Jötunheim (1908) by W. G. Collingwood



Ah, what a lovely maid it is! (1902) by Elmer Boyd Smith.

The "wretched sister" of the jötnar appears, asks for a bridal gift from "Freyja", and the jötnar bring out Mjöllnir to "sanctify the bride", to lay it on her lap, and marry the two by "the hand" of the goddess Vár. Thor laughs internally when he sees the hammer, takes hold of it, strikes Þrymr, beats all of the jötnar, and kills the "older sister" of the jötnar.^[23]

Reginmál

Loki appears in both prose and the first six stanzas of the poem *Reginmál*. The prose introduction to *Reginmál* details that, while the hero Sigurd was being fostered by Regin, son of Hreidmar, Regin tells him that once the gods Odin, Hœnir, and Loki went to Andvara-falls, which contained many fish. Regin, a dwarf, had two brothers; Andvari, who gained food by spending time in the Andvara-falls in the form of a pike, and Ótr, who would often go to the Andvara-falls in the form of an otter.^[24]

While the three gods are at the falls, Ótr (in the form of an otter) catches a salmon and eats it on a river bank, his eyes shut, when Loki hits and kills him with a stone. The gods think that this is great, and flay the skin from the otter to make a bag. That night, the three gods stay with Hreidmar (the father of Regin, Andvari, and the now-dead Ótr) and show him their catches, including the skin of the otter. Upon seeing the skin, Regin and Hreidmar "seized them and made them ransom their lives" in exchange for filling the otterskin bag the gods had made with gold and covering the exterior of the bag with red gold.^[24]

Loki is sent to retrieve the gold, and Loki goes to the goddess Rán, borrows her net, and then goes back to the Andvara-falls. At the falls, Loki spreads his net before Andvari (who is in the form of a pike), which Andvari jumps into. The stanzas of the poem then begin: Loki mocks Andvari, and tells him that he can save his head by telling Loki where his gold is. Andvari gives some background information about himself, including that he was cursed by a "norn of misfortune" in his "early days". Loki responds by asking Andvari "what requital" does mankind get if "they wound each other with words". Andvari responds that lying men receive a "terrible requital": having to wade in the river Vadgelmir, and that their suffering will be long.^[24]

Loki looks over the gold that Andvari possesses, and after Andvari hands over all of his gold, Andvari holds on to but a single ring; the ring Andvarinaut, which Loki also takes. Andvari, now in the form of a dwarf, goes into a rock, and tells Loki that the gold will result in the death of two brothers, will cause strife between eight princes, and will be useless to everyone.^[25]

Loki returns, and the three gods give Hreidmar the money from the gold hoard and flatten out the otter skin, stretch out its legs, and heap gold atop it, covering it. Hreidmar looks it over, and notices a single hair that has not been covered. Hreidmar demands that it be covered as well. Odin puts forth the ring Andvarinaut, covering the single hair.^[25]

Loki states that they have now handed over the gold, and that gold is cursed as Andvari is, and that it will be the death of Hreidmar and Regin both. Hreidmar responds that if he had known this before, he would have taken their lives, yet that he believes those are not yet born whom the curse is intended for, and that he doesn't believe him. Further, with the hoard, he will have red gold for the rest of his life. Hreidmar tells them to leave, and the poem continues without further mention of Loki.^[25]

Baldrs draumar

In *Baldr draumar*, Odin has awoken a deceased völvu in Hel, and questions her repeatedly about his son Baldr's bad dreams. Loki is mentioned in stanza 14, the final stanza of the poem, where the völvu tells Odin to ride home, to be proud of himself, and that no one else will come visit until "Loki is loose, escaped from his bonds" and the onset of Ragnarök.^[26]

Hyndluljóð

Loki is referenced in two stanzas in *Völuspá hin skamma*, found within the poem *Hyndluljóð*. The first stanza notes that Loki produced "the wolf" with the jötunn Angrboða, that Loki himself gave birth to the horse Sleipnir by the stallion Svaðilfari, and that Loki (referred to as the "brother of Býleistr") thirdly gave birth to "the worst of all marvels". This stanza is followed by:

Loki ate some of the heart, the thought-stone of a woman,
roasted on a linden-wood fire, he found it half-cooked;
Lopt was impregnated by a wicked woman,
from whom every ogress on earth is descended.^[27]

In the second of the two stanzas, Loki is referred to as *Lopt*. Loki's consumption of a woman's heart is otherwise unattested.^[28]

Fjölsvinnsmál

In the poem *Fjölsvinnsmál*, a stanza mentions Loki (as *Lopt*) in association with runes. In the poem, Fjölsviðr describes to the hero Svipdagr that Sinmara keeps the weapon *Lævateinn* within a chest, locked with nine strong locks (due to significant translation differences, two translations of the stanza are provided here):

Fjölsvith spake:
"Lævatein is there, that Lopt with runes
Once made by the doors of death;
In Lægjarn's chest by Sinmora lies it,
And nine locks fasten it firm."^[29]

Fiolsvith.
Hævatein the twig is named, and Lopt plucked it,
down by the gate of Death.
In an iron chest it lies with Sinmora,
and is with nine strong locks secured.^[30]

Prose Edda

Gylfaginning

The *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning* tells various myths featuring Loki, including Loki's role in the birth of the horse Sleipnir and Loki's contest with Logi, fire personified.

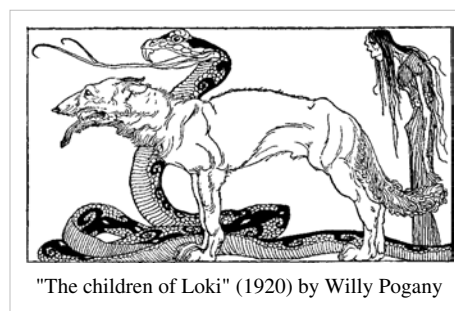
High's introduction

Loki first appears in the *Prose Edda* in chapter 20 of the book *Gylfaginning*, where he is referred to as the "ás called Loki" while the enthroned figure of Third explains to "Gangleri" (King Gylfi in disguise) the goddess Frigg's prophetic abilities while citing a stanza of *Lokasenna*.^[31]



Loki consumes a roasted heart in a painting (1911) by John Bauer

Loki is more formally introduced by High in chapter 34, where he is "reckoned among the Æsir", and High states that Loki is called by some "the Æsir's calumniator", "originator of deceits", and "the disgrace of all gods and men". High says that Loki's alternative name is *Lopt*, that he is the son of the male jötunn Farbauti, his mother is "Laufey or Nál", and his brothers are Helblindi and Býleistr. High describes Loki as "pleasing and handsome" in appearance, malicious in character, "very capricious in behaviour", and as possessing "to a greater degree than others" learned cunning, and "tricks for every purpose", often getting the Æsir into trouble, and then getting them out of it with his trickery. Loki's wife is named Sigyn, and they have a son named "Nari or Narfi". Otherwise, Loki had three children with the female jötunn Angrboða from Jötunheimr; the wolf Fenrir, the serpent Jörmungandr, and the female being Hel. The gods realized that these three children were being raised in Jötunheimr, and expected trouble from them partially due to the nature of Angrboða, but worse yet Loki.^[32] In chapter 35, Gangleri comments that Loki produced a "pretty terrible"—yet important—family.^[33]

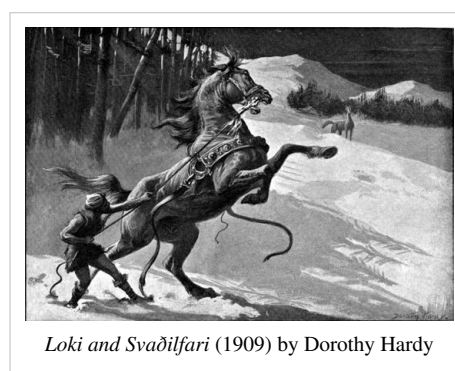


"The children of Loki" (1920) by Willy Pogany

Loki, Svaðilfari, and Sleipnir

In chapter 42, High tells a story set "right at the beginning of the gods' settlement, when the gods at established Midgard and built Val-Hall." The story is about an unnamed builder who has offered to build a fortification for the gods that will keep out invaders in exchange for the goddess Freyja, the sun, and the moon. After some debate, the gods agree to these conditions, but place a number of restrictions on the builder, including that he must complete the work within three seasons without the help of any man. The builder makes a single request; that he may have help from his stallion Svaðilfari, and due to Loki's influence, this is allowed. The stallion Svaðilfari performs twice the deeds of strength as the builder, and hauls enormous rocks—to the surprise of the gods. The builder, with Svaðilfari, makes fast progress on the wall, and three days before the deadline of summer, the builder is nearly at the entrance to the fortification. The gods convene, and figure out who is responsible, resulting in a unanimous agreement that, along with most trouble, Loki is to blame (here referred to as *Loki Laufeyjarson*—his surname derived from his mother's name, *Laufey*).^[34]

The gods declare that Loki deserves a horrible death if he cannot find a scheme that will cause the builder to forfeit his payment, and threaten to attack him. Loki, afraid, swears oaths that he will devise a scheme to cause the builder to forfeit the payment, whatever it may cost himself. That night, the builder drives out to fetch stone with his stallion Svaðilfari, and out from a wood runs a mare. The mare neighs at Svaðilfari, and "realizing what kind of horse it was," Svaðilfari becomes frantic, neighs, tears apart his tackle, and runs towards the mare. The mare runs to the wood, Svaðilfari follows, and the builder chases after. The two horses run around all night, causing the building to be halted and the builder is then unable to regain the previous momentum of his work.^[35]



Loki and Svaðilfari (1909) by Dorothy Hardy

The builder goes into a rage, and when the Æsir realize that the builder is a hrimthurs, they disregard their previous oaths with the builder, and call for Thor. Thor arrives, and subsequently kills the builder by smashing the builder's skull into shards with the hammer Mjöllnir. However, Loki "had such dealings" with Svaðilfari that "somewhat later" Loki gives birth to a gray foal with eight legs; the horse Sleipnir—"the best horse among gods and men."^[35]

Loki, Útgarða-Loki, and Logi

In chapter 44, Third reluctantly relates a tale where Thor and Loki are riding in Thor's chariot, which is pulled by his two goats. Loki and Thor stop at the house of a peasant farmer, and there they are given lodging for a night. Thor

slaughters his goats, prepares them, puts them in a pot, and Loki and Thor sit down for their evening meal. Thor invites the peasant family who own the farm to share with him the meal he has prepared. Afterward, the peasant child Þjálfi sucks the bone marrow from one of the goat bones, and when Thor goes to resurrect the goats, he finds one of the goats to be lame. In their terror, the family atones to Thor by giving Thor their son Þjálfi and their daughter Röskva.^[36]

Minus the goats, Thor, Loki, and the two children continue east until they arrive at a vast forest in Jötunheimr. They continue through the woods until dark. The four seek shelter for the night. They encounter an immense building. Finding shelter in a side room, they experience earthquakes through the night. The earthquakes cause all four but Thor, who grips his hammer in preparation of defense, to be fearful. The building turns out to be the huge glove of Skrymir, who has been snoring throughout the night, causing what seemed to be earthquakes. All four sleep beneath an oak tree near Skrymir in fear.^[37]

Thor wakes up in the middle of the night, and a series of events occur where Thor twice attempts to kill the sleeping Skrymir with his hammer. Skrymir awakes after each attempt, only to say that he detected an acorn falling on his head or that he wonders if bits of tree from the branches above have fallen on top of him. The second attempt awakes Skrymir. Skrymir gives them advice; if they are going to be cocky at the keep of Útgarðr it would be better for them to turn back now, for Útgarða-Loki's men there won't put up with it. Skrymir throws his knapsack onto his back and abruptly goes into the forest. High comments that "there is no report that the Æsir expressed hope for a happy reunion".^[38]



I am the giant Skrymir by Elmer Boyd Smith

The four travelers continue their journey until midday. They find themselves facing a massive castle in an open area. The castle is so tall that they must bend their heads back to their spines to see above it. At the entrance to the castle is a shut gate, and Thor finds that he cannot open it. Struggling, all four squeeze through the bars of the gate, and continue to a large hall. Inside the great hall are two benches, where many generally large people sit on two benches. The four see Útgarða-Loki, the king of the castle, sitting.^[38]

Útgarða-Loki says that no visitors are allowed to stay unless they can perform a feat. Loki, standing in the rear of the party, is the first to speak, claiming that he can eat faster than anyone. Útgarða-Loki comments that this would be a feat indeed, and calls for a being by the name of Logi to come from the benches. A trencher is fetched, placed on the floor of the hall, and filled with meat. Loki and Logi sit down on opposing sides. The two eat as quickly as they can and meet at the midpoint of the trencher. Loki consumed all of the meat off of the bones on his side, yet Logi had not only consumed his meat, but also the bones and the trencher itself. It was evident to all that Loki had lost. In turn, Þjálfi races against a figure by the name of Hugi three times and thrice loses.^[39]

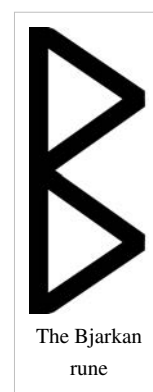
Thor agrees to compete in a drinking contest but after three immense gulps fails. Thor agrees to lift a large, gray cat in the hall but finds that it arches his back no matter what he does, and that he can only raise a single paw. Thor demands to fight someone in the hall, but the inhabitants say doing so would be demeaning, considering Thor's weakness. Útgarða-Loki then calls for his nurse Elli, an old woman. The two wrestle but the harder Thor struggles the more difficult the battle becomes. Thor is finally brought down to a single knee. Útgarða-Loki says to Thor that fighting anyone else would be pointless. Now late at night, Útgarða-Loki shows the group to their rooms and they are treated with hospitality.^[40]

The next morning the group gets dressed and prepares to leave the keep. Útgarða-Loki appears, has his servants prepare a table, and they all merrily eat and drink. As they leave, Útgarða-Loki asks Thor how he thought he fared in the contests. Thor says that he is unable to say he did well, noting that he is particularly annoyed that Útgarða-Loki will now speak negatively about him. Útgarða-Loki points out that the group has left his keep and says that he hopes that they never return to it, for if he had an inkling of what he was dealing with he would never have allowed the group to enter in the first place. Útgarða-Loki reveals that all was not what it seemed to the group. Útgarða-Loki was in fact the immense Skrímir, and that if the three blows Thor attempted to land had hit their mark, the first would have killed Skrímir. In reality, Thor's blows were so powerful that they had resulted in three square valleys.^[41]

The contests, too, were an illusion. Útgarða-Loki reveals that Loki had actually competed against wildfire itself (*Logi*, Old Norse "flame"), Þjálfi had raced against thought (*Hugi*, Old Norse "thought"), Thor's drinking horn had actually reached to the ocean and with his drinks he lowered the ocean level (resulting in tides). The cat that Thor attempted to lift was in actuality the world serpent, Jörmungandr, and everyone was terrified when Thor was able to lift the paw of this "cat", for Thor had actually held the great serpent up to the sky. The old woman Thor wrestled was in fact old age (*Elli*, Old Norse "old age"), and there is no one that old age cannot bring down. Útgarða-Loki tells Thor that it would be better for "both sides" if they did not meet again. Upon hearing this, Thor takes hold of his hammer and swings it at Útgarða-Loki but he is gone and so is his castle. Only a wide landscape remains.^[42]

Norwegian rune poem

Loki is mentioned in stanza 13 of the Norwegian rune poem in connection with the Younger Futhark Bjarkan rune:



Old Norse:

Bjarkan er laufgrønster líma;
Loki bar flærða tíma.^[43]

Modern English:

Birch has the greenest leaves of any shrub;
Loki was fortunate in his deceit.^[44]

According to Bruce Dickins, the reference to 'Loki's deceit' in the poem "is doubtless to Loki's responsibility for Balder's death."^[44]

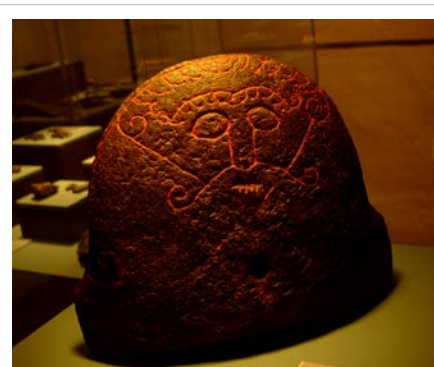
Archaeological record

Snaptun Stone

On a spring day in 1950, a semi-circular flat stone featuring a depiction of a mustachioed face was discovered on a beach near Snaptun, Denmark. Made of soapstone that originated in Norway or Sweden, the depiction was carved around the year 1000 CE and features a face with a curled mustache and scarred lips. The figure is identified as Loki due to the lips, considered a reference to a tale recorded in *Skáldskaparmál* where sons of Ivaldi stitch up Loki's lips.^[45]

The stone is identified as a hearth stone; the nozzle of the bellows would be inserted into the hole in the front of the stone, and the air produced by the bellows pushed flame through the top hole, all the while the bellows were protected from the heat and flame. The stone may point to a connection between Loki and smithing and flames.

According to Hans Jørgen Madsen, the Snaptun Stone is "the most beautifully made hearth-stone that is known." The stone is housed and on display at the Moesgård Museum near Aarhus, Denmark.^[45]



The Snaptun Stone may feature a depiction of Loki

Kirkby Stephen Stone and Gosforth Cross

A fragmentary late 10th century cross located in Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, England features a bound figure with horns and a beard. This figure is sometimes theorized as depicting the bound Loki.^[46] Discovered in 1870, the stone consists of yellowish-white sandstone, and now sits at the front of the Kirkby Stephen church. A depiction of a similarly horned and round-shouldered figure was discovered in Gainford, County Durham and is now housed in the Durham Cathedral Library.^[47]

The mid-11th century Gosforth Cross has been interpreted as featuring various figures from Norse mythology and, like the Kirkby Stephen Stone, is also located in Cumbria. The bottom portion of the west side of the cross features a depiction of a long-haired female, kneeling figure holding an object above another prostrate, bound figure. Above and to their left is a knotted serpent. This has been interpreted as Sigyn soothing the bound Loki.^[48]



Loki Bound (motive from the Gosforth Cross) (1908) by W. G. Collingwood



The bound figure on the Kirkby Stephen Stone



Detail from the Gosforth Cross

Folklore

The notion of Loki survived into the modern period in the folklore of Scandinavia. In Denmark, Loki appeared as *Lokke*. In Jutland, the phrases "Lokke slår sin havre" ('Lokke is reaping his oats') and "Lokkemand driver sine geder" ('Lokkemand drives his goats') are thereby recorded in the beginning of the 20th century, the latter with the variation of simply "Lokke". In Zealand the name "Lokke lejemand" ('Lokke the Playing Man') was used. In his study of Loki's appearance in Scandinavian folklore in the modern period, Danish folklorist Axel Olrik cites numerous examples of natural phenomena explained by way of Lokke in popular folk tradition, including rising heat. An example from 1841 reads as follows:

"The expressions: "Lokke (Lokki) sår havre i dag" (Lokke (Lokki) sows oats today), or: "Lokke driver i dag med sine geder" (Lokke herds his goats today), are used in several regions of Jutland, for example in Medelsom shire, the diocese of Viborg etc. . . and stand for the sight in the springtime, when the sunshine generates vapour from the ground, which can be seen as fluttering or shimmering air in the horizon of the flat landscape, similar to the hot steam over a kettle or a burning fire"

And in Thy, from the same source; "... when you look at the horizon in clear weather and sunshine, and the air seems to move in shimmering waves, or like a sheet of water which seems to rise and sink in waves". Olrik further cites several different types of plants named after Loki. Olrik detects three major themes in folklore attestations; Lokke appeared as an "air phenomenon", connected with the "home fire", and as a "teasing creature of the night".^[49]

Loka Táttur or *Lokka Táttur* (Faroese "tale—or *páttur*—of Loki") is a Faroese ballad dating to the late Middle Ages that features the gods Loki, Odin, and Hœnir helping a farmer and a boy escape the wraith of a bet-winning jötunn. The tale notably features Loki as a benevolent god in this story, although his slyness is in evidence as usual.^[50]

Theories

Loki's origins and role in Norse mythology have been much debated by scholars. In 1835, Jacob Grimm was first to produce a major theory about Loki, in which he advanced the notion of Loki as a "god of fire". In 1889, Sophus Bugge theorized Loki to be variant of Lucifer of Christian mythology, an element of Bugge's larger effort to find a basis of Christianity in Norse mythology. After World War II, four scholarly theories dominated. The first of the four theories is that of Folke Ström, who in 1956 concluded that Loki is a hypostasis of the god Odin. In 1959, Jan de Vries theorized that Loki is a typical example of a trickster figure. In 1961, by way of excluding all non-Scandinavian mythological parallels in her analysis, Anna Birgitta Rooth concluded that Loki was originally a spider. Anne Holtsmark, writing in 1962, concluded that no conclusion could be made about Loki.^[51]

Regarding scholarship on Loki, scholar Gabriel Turville-Petre comments (1964) that "more ink has been spilled on Loki than on any other figure in Norse myth. This, in itself, is enough to show how little scholars agree, and how far we are from understanding him."^[52]

In her review of scholarly discourse involving Loki, scholar Stefanie von Schnurbein (2000) comments that "Loki, the outsider in the Northern Germanic pantheon, confounds not only his fellow deities and chronicler Snorri Sturluson [referring to the *Prose Edda*] but has occasioned as much quarrel among his interpreters. Hardly a monography, article, or encyclopedic entry does not begin with the reference to Loki as a staggeringly complex, confusing, and ambivalent figure who has been the catalyst of countless unresolved scholarly controversies and has elicited more problems than solutions".^[53]

Popular culture

Loki's allure has given him an enduring presence in modern popular culture.

The most famous incarnation is Marvel Comics' supervillain Loki. He appeared in the pages of *Journey into Mystery* #85 (October 1962) [54] trying to get his revenge on his stepbrother, the superhero Thor. Loki goes to become Thor's archenemy, often trying to steal Mjolnir from him^[55] and his elaborate plan of revenge on Thor leads to the formation of the Avengers superhero team in both the main continuity (*Avengers* #1, 1963) and in the Ultimates continuity.^{[56][57]} This version of Loki is played by Tom Hiddleston in the movies *Thor* (2011), *The Avengers* (2012) and the upcoming *Thor: The Dark World*. He appeared in an earlier Marvel Comics publication, Venus Comics #6, in which he is inaccurately shown as an exiled Olympian in the Underworld, who seems based on the traditional image of the Devil.

Loki is also a central character in Neil Gaiman's acclaimed novel *American Gods*, where he and Odin play a cruel con and he eventually becomes the leader of the New Gods.^[58] Gaiman also used Loki as an important character in a few arcs of his popular comic *The Sandman*^[59]

Loki also appeared in cult TV series *Supernatural* as the Trickster, first as an enemy of the Winchester brothers (season 2 episode "Tall Tales" and season 3 episode "Mystery Spot") but in the season 5 episode "Changing Channels" he was revealed to be the archangel Gabriel in disguise and joined the Winchester's side before being killed by his brother Lucifer in the episode "Hammer of the Gods". He was played by Richard Speight Jr..

The 1994 movie *The Mask* depicts a fictional "Mask of Loki" that transforms characters into mischievous beings with godlike powers. Also, the 1999 movie *Dogma*, has a character named Loki.^[60]

The anime *Hakagure No Tomokashi: Dragon Knights of the Eternal Fist Emperor* features a character named Loki who dual wields katanas. The katana he carries on the left carries the power of unleashing Shaman Spirit Bombs when Loki focuses his chi through the ornate blade, given to him by the pirate captain Elfen Jack. The katana he carries on the right is possessed by a fox demon. These katanas were both originally forged in the Fire Citadel by the elusive trickster-wizard Oreiganakai.

Loki is also central character in Polish sci-fi tetralogy "Kłamca" (ang. *The Liar*) written by Jakub Ćwiek.

In Richard Wagner's Opera Cycle Ring of the Nibelung, Loki is merged with Logi and called Loge. In the first opera *Das Rheingold* he hopes to turn into fire and destroys Valhalla, and in the final opera *Gotterdammerung* Valhalla is set alight, destroying the Gods.

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:195).
- [2] Simek (2007:197).
- [3] Simek (2007:166).
- [4] Larrington (1998:8).
- [5] Larrington (1998:10).
- [6] Larrington (1998:11).
- [7] Larrington (1998:84–85).
- [8] Larrington (1998:85).
- [9] Larrington (1998:86).
- [10] Larrington (1998:87).
- [11] Larrington (1998:87–88).
- [12] Larrington (1998:88–89).
- [13] Larrington (1998:89).
- [14] Larrington (1998:90–91).
- [15] Larrington (1998:91).
- [16] Larrington (1998:94).
- [17] Larrington (1998:94–95).
- [18] Larrington (1998:95).
- [19] Larrington (1998:97).
- [20] Larrington (1998:98).
- [21] Larrington (1998:99).
- [22] Larrington (1998:100).
- [23] Larrington (1998:101).
- [24] Larrington (1999:151).
- [25] Larrington (1999:152).
- [26] Larrington (1998:245).
- [27] Larrington (1998:258).
- [28] Larrington (1998:296).
- [29] Bellows (2004:245).
- [30] Thorpe (1907:96–97).
- [31] Faulkes (1995:21).
- [32] Faulkes (1995:26–27).
- [33] Faulkes (1995:29).
- [34] Faulkes (1995:35).
- [35] Faulkes (1995:36).
- [36] Faulkes (1995:37–38).
- [37] Faulkes (1995:38–40).
- [38] Faulkes (1995:40).
- [39] Faulkes (1995:41–42).
- [40] Faulkes (1995:42–44).
- [41] Faulkes (1995:44–45).
- [42] Faulkes (1995:45–46).
- [43] Dickins (1915:26).
- [44] Dickins (1915:27).
- [45] Madsen (1990:180).
- [46] Orchard (1997:105).
- [47] Calverley (1899:218).
- [48] Orchard (1997:13).
- [49] Olrik (1909).
- [50] Hirschfeld (1889:30–31).
- [51] Von Schnurbein (2000:112–113).
- [52] Turville-Petre (1964:324).

[53] Von Schnurbein (2000:109).

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Meili

In Norse mythology, **Meili** (Old Norse "the lovely one"^[1]) is a god, son of the god Odin and brother of the god Thor. Meili is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Other than Meili's relation to Odin and Thor, no additional information is provided about the deity in either source.

Attestations

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Hárbarðsljóð*, Meili receives a single mention; the god Thor declares that, even if he were an outlaw, he would reveal his name and his homeland, for he is the son of Odin, the brother of Meili, and the father of Magni.^[2]

Meili receives four mentions in the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*. In chapter 17, verses from the poem *Haustlög* (attributed to the 10th century skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir) are provided, where Thor is referred to as "Meili's brother."^[3] In chapter 22, additional quotes from *Haustlög* are provided where a kenning is employed for the god Hœnir that refers to Meili ("step-Meili").^[4] In chapter 23, a quote by a work from the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir is provided that refers to Thor as "Meili's brother".^[5] In chapter 75, Meili is listed among names of the Æsir and as a son of Odin (between the god Baldr and the god Víðarr).^[6]

Theories

Some 19th-century scholars theorized that Meili's mother is Jörð, a goddess and the personified Earth.^[7] Also during the 19th century, Viktor Rydberg theorized that Baldr and Meili are one and the same.^[8]

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:210).
- [2] Larrington (1999:70).
- [3] Faulkes (1995:80).
- [4] Faulkes (1995:87).
- [5] Faulkes (1999:89).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:156).
- [7] Examples include Pierer (1844:204), Barth (1846:396), and Uhland (1868:18).
- [8] Rydberg (2003:191).

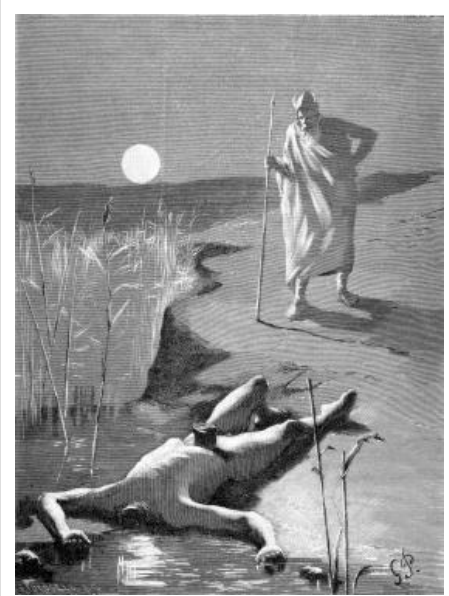
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Mímir

Mímir (Old Norse "The rememberer, the wise one")^[1] or **Mím** is a figure in Norse mythology renowned for his knowledge and wisdom who is beheaded during the Æsir-Vanir War. Afterward, the god Odin carries around Mímir's head and it recites secret knowledge and counsel to him.

Mímir is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson of Iceland, and in euhemerized form as one of the Æsir in *Heimskringla*, also written by Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century. Mímir's name appears in the names of the well Mímisbrunnr, the tree Mímameiðr, and the wood Hoddmímis holt.



A 19th century depiction of Odin finding Mímir's beheaded body.

Attestations

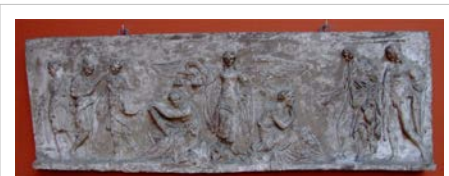
Poetic Edda

Mímir is mentioned in the *Poetic Edda* poems *Völuspá* and *Sigrdrífumál*. In *Völuspá*, Mímir is mentioned in two stanzas. Stanza 28 references Odin's sacrifice of his eye to Mímir's Well, and states that Mímir drinks mead every morning "from the Father of the Slain's [Odin] wager."^[2] Stanza 46 describes that, in reference to Ragnarök, the "sons" of Mím are at play while "fate burns" (though no further information about these "sons" has survived),^[3] that the god Heimdallr blows the Gjallarhorn, and that Mímir's decapitated head gives counsel to Odin. The single mention in stanza 14 of *Sigrdrífumál* is also a reference to Mímir's speaking, decollated head. Stanzas 20 and 24 of the poem *Fjölsvinnsmál* refer to Yggdrasil as *Mímameiðr*.

Prose Edda

In chapter 15 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, as owner of his namesake well, Mímir himself drinks from it and gains great knowledge. To drink from the well, he uses skin from a dragon foot, a drinking horn which shares its name with the sounding horn used by Heimdallr intended to announce the onset of Ragnarök. The section further relates that the well is located beneath one of the three roots of Yggdrasil, in the realm of the frost jötunn.

Chapter 51 relates that, with the onset of Ragnarök, "Heimdall stands up and blows the Gjallarhorn with all his strength. He wakens all the gods who then hold an assembly. Odin now rides to Mímir's Well, seeking council for both himself and his followers. The ash Yggdrasil shakes, and nothing, whether in heaven or on earth, is without fear."^[4]



"Mímir and Balder Consulting the Norns" (1821-1822) by H. E. Freund

In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Mímir's name appears in various kennings. These kennings include "Mím's friend" (for "Odin") in three places, "mischief-Mímir" (a kenning for "jötunn"),^[5] and among a list of names for jötunn.^[6]

Heimskringla

Mímir is mentioned in chapters 4 and 7 of the saga *Ynglinga Saga*, as collected in *Heimskringla*. In chapter 4, Snorri presents a euhemerized account of the Æsir-Vanir War. Snorri states that the two sides eventually tired of the war and both agree to meet to establish a truce. The two sides meet and exchanged hostages. Vanaheimr are described as having sent to Asgard their best men: Njörðr—described as wealthy—and his son Freyr in exchange for Asaland's Hœnir—described here as large, handsome, and thought of by the people of Vanaheimr well suited to be a chieftain. Additionally, the Æsir send Mímir—described as a man of great understanding—in exchange for Kvasir, who Snorri describes as the wisest man of Vanaheimr.^[7]

Snorri continues that, upon arrival in Vanaheimr, Hœnir was immediately made chief and Mímir often gave him good counsel. However, when Hœnir was at meetings and at the Thing without Mímir by his side, he would always answer the same way: "Let others decide."^[7] Subsequently, the Vanir suspected they had been cheated in the exchange by the Æsir, so they seized Mimir and beheaded him and sent the head to Asgard. Odin took the head of Mímir, embalmed it with herbs so that it would not rot, and spoke charms over it, which gave it the power to speak to him and reveal to him secrets.^[7] The head of Mímir is again mentioned in chapter 7 in connection with Odin, where Odin is described as keeping Mímir's head with him and that it divulged information from other worlds.^[8]

Theories

On the basis of *Hávamál* 140 - where Odin learns nine magic songs from the unnamed brother of his mother Bestla - some scholars have theorized that Bestla's brother may in fact be Mímir, who is then Odin's maternal uncle. This also means that Mimir's father would be Bölþorn.^[9]

In the theories of Viktor Rydberg, Mímir's wife is Sinmara, named in the poem *Fjölsvinnsmal*. According to Rydberg, the byname *Sinmara* ("sinew-maimir") refers to "Mímir-Niðhad"'s "queen ordering Völund's hamstrings to be cut".^[10]

Notes

[1] Simek (2007:216).

[2] Larrington (1999:7).

[3] Larrington (1999:265).

[4] Byock (2006:72).

[5] Faulkes (1995:84).

[6] Faulkes (1995:155).

[7] Hollander (2007:8).

[8] Hollander (2007:11).

[9] Examples include Rydberg (1886:176), Bellows (1923:92) and Puhvel (1989:212).

[10] Rydberg (2003:196).

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Móði and Magni

In Norse mythology, **Móði** (anglicized Módi or Mothi) and **Magni** are the sons of Thor. Their names mean "Angry" and "Strong," respectively. Rudolf Simek states that, along with Thor's daughter Þrúðr ("Strength"), they embody their father's features.^[1]

Móði and Magni's descent from Thor is attested by the kennings "Móði's father" (*faðir Móða*, in *Hymiskviða*, 34) and "Magni's father" (*faðir Magna*, in *Þórsdrápa* and *Hárbarðsljóð*, 53). Snorri Sturluson confirms it (*Gylfaginning*, 53, *Skáldskaparmál*, 4). According to *Skáldskaparmál* (17) Magni is the son of Thor and the Jötunn Járnsaxa. There is no mention of Móði's mother.

Poetic Edda

The two brothers are mentioned among the survivors of Ragnarök in the *Poetic Edda Vafþrúðnismál*:

Móði ok Magni

skulu Mjöllni hafa

Vingnis at vígþroti.

—*Vafþrúðnismál* (51), Guðni Jónsson's edition^[2]

Modi and Magni

shall Mjollnir have

When Vingnir falls in fight.

—*Vafþrúðnismol* (51), Bellows' translation^[3]

Prose Edda

Apart from his role after Ragnarök, there is nothing we know about Móði but, in the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Magni plays a role in the myth of Thor's battle with the giant Hrungrnir:

But the hammer Mjöllnir struck Hrungrnir in the middle of the head, and smashed his skull into small crumbs, and he fell forward upon Thor, so that his foot lay over Thor's neck. Thjálfi struck at Mökkurkálfi, and he fell with little glory. Thereupon Thjálfi went over to Thor and would have lifted Hrungrnir's foot off him, but could not find sufficient strength. Straightway all the Æsir came up, when they, learned that Thor was fallen, and would have lifted the foot from off him, and could do nothing. Then Magni came up, son of Thor and Járnsaxa: he was then three nights old; he cast the foot of Hrungrnir off Thor, and spake: 'See how ill it is, father, that I came so late: I had struck this giant dead with my fist, methinks, if I had met with him.' Thor arose and welcomed his son, saying that he should surely become great; 'And I will give thee, he said, the horse Gold-Mane, which Hrungrnir possessed.' Then Odin spake and said that Thor did wrong to give the good horse to the son of a giantess, and not to his father.

—*Skáldskaparmál* (17), Brodeur's translation^[4]

John Lindow draws a parallel between Magni and Odin's son Váli for they both have a giantess mother (Rindr for Váli) and achieve a feat at a very young age (Váli is only one day old when he kills Höðr, thus avenging Baldr's

death).^[5]

In popular culture

Móði and Magni are characters in Joanne Harris' Runemarks series. Modi is the son of Thor and Hela in Marvel Comics's Ultimate Marvel imprint.

Notes

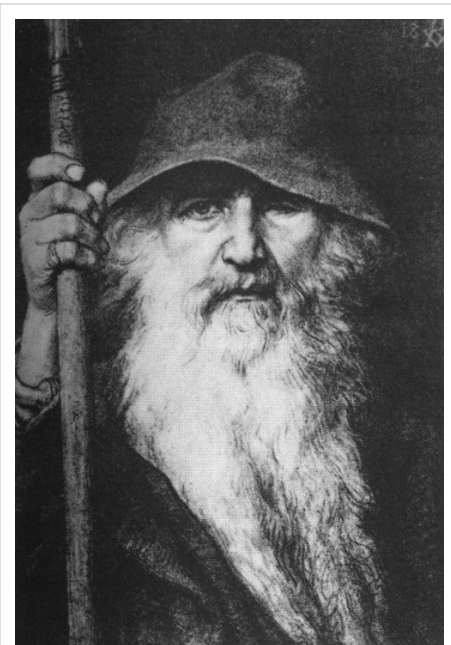
- [1] Simek 1987.
- [2] <http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/vafthrudnesmal.php>
- [3] <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe05.htm>
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Odin

Odin (/ˈoʊdɪn/; from Old Norse *Óðinn*) is a major god in Norse mythology and the ruler of Asgard.^[1] Homologous with the Old English "Wōden", the Old Saxon "Wōdan" and the Old High German "Wōtan",^[2] the name is descended from Proto-Germanic "***Wodanaz**" or "***Wōdanaz**". "Odin" is generally accepted as the modern English form of the name, although, in some cases, older forms may be used or preferred. His name is related to *ōðr*, meaning "fury, excitement," besides "mind," or "poetry." His role, like that of many of the Norse gods, is complex. Odin is a principal member of the Æsir (the major group of the Norse pantheon) and is associated with war, battle, victory and death, but also wisdom, Shamanism, magic, poetry, prophecy, and the hunt. Odin has many sons, the most famous of whom is Thor.



Odin the Wanderer (1896) by Georg von Rosen

Origins

Worship of Odin may date to Proto-Germanic paganism. The Roman historian Tacitus may refer to Odin when he talks of Mercury. The reason is that, like Mercury, Odin was regarded as a Psychopomp, "guide of souls."

As Odin is closely connected with a horse called Sleipnir, a spear called Gungnir, and transformation/shape shifting into animal shapes, an alternative theory of origin contends that Odin, or at least some of his key characteristics, may have arisen just prior to the 6th century as a nightmarish horse god (Echwaz), later signified by the eight-legged Sleipnir. Some support for Odin as a latecomer to the Scandinavian Norse pantheon can be found in the Sagas where, for example, at one time he is thrown out of Asgard by the other gods — a seemingly unlikely tale for a well-established "all father". However, it could also mean Odin represented an older cult of proto-Germanic hunter-gatherers, his association with being a wanderer and having shamanic qualities, and this story might on the contrary mean the Odin-cult was taken over by newer sedentary cults. Scholars who have linked Odin with the "Death God" template include E. A. Ebbinghaus, Jan de Vries and Thor Templin. The later two also link Loki and Odin as being one-and-the-same until the early Norse Period.

Scandinavian *Óðinn* emerged from Proto-Norse **Wōdin* during the Migration period, artwork of this time (on gold bracteates) depicting the earliest scenes that can be aligned with the High Medieval Norse mythological texts. The context of the new elites emerging in this period aligns with Snorri's tale of the indigenous Vanir who were eventually replaced by the *Æsir*, intruders from the Continent.^[3]

Parallels between Odin and Celtic Lugus have often been pointed out: both are intellectual gods, commanding magic and poetry. Both have ravens and a spear as their attributes. Julius Caesar (*de bello Gallico*, 6.17.1) mentions Mercury as the chief god of Celtic religion. A likely context of the diffusion of elements of Celtic ritual into Germanic culture is that of the Chatti, who lived at the Celtic-Germanic boundary in Hesse during the final centuries before the Common Era. (It should be remembered that many Indo-Europeanists hypothesize that Odin in his Proto-Germanic form was not the chief god, but that he only gradually replaced Týr during the Migration period.)



A depiction of Odin entering Valhalla riding on Sleipnir from the Tjängvide image stone.



The 7th century Tängelgarda stone shows Odin leading a troop of warriors all bearing rings. Valknut symbols are drawn beneath his horse, which is depicted with four legs.

Adam of Bremen

Written around 1080, one of the oldest written sources on pre-Christian Scandinavian religious practices is Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. Adam claimed to have access to first-hand accounts on pagan practices in Sweden. His description of the Temple at Uppsala gives some details on the god.



A detail from runestone G 181 in the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm. The three men are interpreted as Odin, Thor and Freyr.

In hoc templo, quod totum ex auro paratum est, statuas trium deorum veneratur populus, ita ut potentissimus eorum Thor in medio solium habeat triclinio; hinc et inde locum possident Wodan et Fricco. Quorum significationes eiusmodi sunt: 'Thor', inquiunt, 'praesidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat. Alter Wodan, id est furor, bella gerit, hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos. Tertius est Fricco, pacem voluptatemque largiens mortalibus'. Cuius etiam simulacrum fingunt cum ingenti priapo.

Gesta Hammaburgensis 26, Waitz' edition ^[4]

In this temple, entirely decked out in gold, the people worship the statues of three gods in such ways 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 and 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.

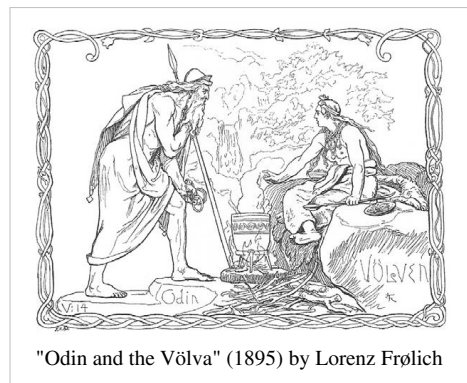
Gesta Hammaburgensis 26, Tschan's translation

Poetic Edda

Völuspá

In the poem *Völuspá*, a völva tells Odin of numerous events reaching far into the past and future, including his own doom. The Völva describes creation, recounts the birth of Odin by his father Borr and his mother Bestla and how Odin and his brothers formed Midgard from the sea. She further describes the creation of the first human beings - Ask and Embla - by Hœnir, Lóðurr and Odin.

Amongst various other events, the Völva mentions Odin's involvement in the Æsir-Vanir War, the oedipism of Odin's eye at Mímir's Well, the death of his son Baldr. She describes how Odin is slain by the wolf Fenrir at Ragnarök, the subsequent avenging of Odin and death of Fenrir by his son Víðarr, how the world disappears into flames and, yet, how the earth again rises from the sea. She then relates how the surviving Æsir remember the deeds of Odin.



"Odin and the Völva" (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Lokasenna

In the poem *Lokasenna*, the conversation of Odin and Loki started with Odin trying to defend Gefjun and ended with his wife, Frigga, defending him. In *Lokasenna*, Loki derides Odin for practicing *seid* (witchcraft), implying it was women's work. Another example of this may be found in the *Ynglinga saga* where Snorri opines that men who used *seid* were *ergi* or *unmanly*.



"Odin Rides to Hel" (1908) by W. G. Collingwood

Hávamál

In *Rúnatal*, a section of the *Hávamál*, Odin is attributed with discovering the runes. In a sacrifice to himself, the highest of the gods, he was hanged from the world tree Yggdrasil for nine days and nights, pierced by his own spear, in order to learn the wisdom that would give him power in the nine worlds. Nine is a significant number in Norse magical practice (there were, for example, nine realms of existence), thereby learning nine (later eighteen) magical songs and eighteen magical runes.

One of Odin's names is *Ygg*, and the Norse name for the World Ash—Yggdrasil—therefore could mean "Ygg's (Odin's) horse." Another of Odin's names is *Hangatýr*, the god of the hanged.

Hárbarðsljóð

In *Hárbarðsljóð*, Odin, disguised as the ferryman Hárbarðr, engages his son Thor, unaware of the disguise, in a long argument. Thor is attempting to get around a large lake and Hárbarðr refuses to ferry him.



The sacrifice of Odin (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Prose Edda

Odin had three residences in Asgard. First was Gladsheim, a vast hall where he presided over the twelve Diar or Judges, whom he had appointed to regulate the affairs of Asgard. Second, Valaskjálf, built of solid silver, in which there was an elevated place, Hlidskjalf, from his throne on which he could perceive all that passed throughout the whole earth. Third was Valhalla (the hall of the fallen), where Odin received the souls of the warriors killed in battle, called the Einherjar. The souls of women warriors, and those strong and beautiful women whom Odin favored, became Valkyries, who gather the souls of warriors fallen in battle (the Einherjar), as these would be needed to fight for him in the battle of Ragnarök. They took the souls of the warriors to Valhalla. Valhalla has five hundred and forty gates, and a vast hall of gold, hung around with golden shields, and spears and coats of mail.

Odin has a number of magical artifacts associated with him: the spear Gungnir, which never misses its target; a magical gold ring (Draupnir), from which every ninth night eight new rings appear; and two ravens Huginn and Muninn (Thought and Memory), who fly around Earth daily and report the happenings of the world to Odin in Valhalla at night. He also owned Sleipnir, an octopedal horse, who was given to Odin by Loki, and the severed head of Mímir, which foretold the future. He also commands a pair of wolves named Geri and Freki, to whom he gives his food in Valhalla since he consumes nothing but mead or wine. From his throne, Hlidskjalf (located in Valaskjálf), Odin could see everything that occurred in the universe. The Valknut (slain warrior's knot) is a symbol associated with Odin. It consists of three interlaced triangles.

Odin is an ambivalent deity. Old Norse (Viking Age) connotations of Odin lie with "poetry, inspiration" as well as with "fury, madness and the wanderer." Odin sacrificed his eye (which eye he sacrificed is unclear) at Mímir's spring in order to gain the Wisdom of Ages. Odin gives to worthy poets the mead of inspiration, made by the dwarfs, from the vessel *Óð-rerir*.^[5]

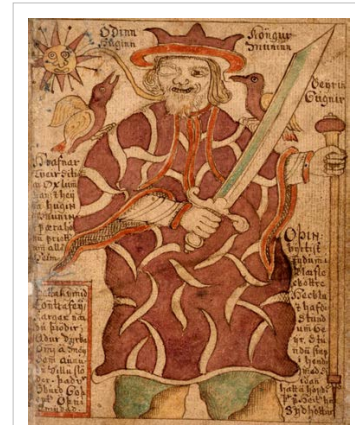
Odin is associated with the concept of the Wild Hunt, a noisy, bellowing movement across the sky, leading a host of slain warriors.

Consistent with this, Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda depicts Odin as welcoming the great, dead warriors who have died in battle into his hall, Valhalla, which, when literally interpreted, signifies the hall of the slain. The fallen, the *einherjar*, are assembled and entertained by Odin in order that they in return might fight for, and support, the gods in the final battle of the end of Earth, Ragnarök. Snorri also wrote that Freyja receives half of the fallen in her hall Folkvang.

He is also a god of war, appearing throughout Norse myth as the bringer of victory. In the Norse sagas, Odin sometimes acts as the instigator of wars, and is said to have been able to start wars by simply throwing down his spear Gungnir, and/or sending his valkyries, to influence the battle toward the end that he desires. The Valkyries are Odin's beautiful battle maidens that went out to the fields of war to select and collect the worthy men who died in battle to come and sit at *Odin's table* in Valhalla, feasting and battling until they had to fight in the final battle, Ragnarök. Odin would also appear on the battle-field, sitting upon his eight-legged horse Sleipnir, with his two ravens, one on each shoulder, Hugin (Thought) and Munin (Memory), and two wolves (Geri and Freki) on each side of him.



A depiction of Odin riding Sleipnir from an 18th-century Icelandic manuscript.



Odin with his ravens and weapons (MS SÁM 66, 18th century)

Odin is also associated with trickery, cunning, and deception. Most sagas have tales of Odin using his cunning to overcome adversaries and achieve his goals, such as swindling the blood of Kvasir from the dwarves.

On September 2, 2009 an amateur archaeologist found a small silver figurine at Lejre in Denmark. It has been dated to around 900. The figurine is only 2 centimeters tall and shows a person sitting on a throne adorned with two beast heads and flanked by two birds on the arm-rests. The excavator interpreted the piece as a representation of Odin, Hugin and Munin.^[6] Scholars specialising in Viking Period dress and gender representations, however, pointed out that the person is dressed entirely in female attire, making it more probably a goddess such as Freya or Frigga.

Prologue

Snorri Sturluson feels compelled to give a rational account of the Æsir in the prologue of his Prose Edda. In this scenario, Snorri speculates that Odin and his peers were originally refugees from the Anatolian city of Troy, folk etymologizing Æsir as derived from the word Asia. In any case, Snorri's writing (particularly in *Heimskringla*) tries to maintain an essentially scholastic neutrality. That Snorri was correct was one of the last of Thor Heyerdahl's archeoanthropological theories, forming the basis for his *Jakten på Odin*.

Gylfaginning

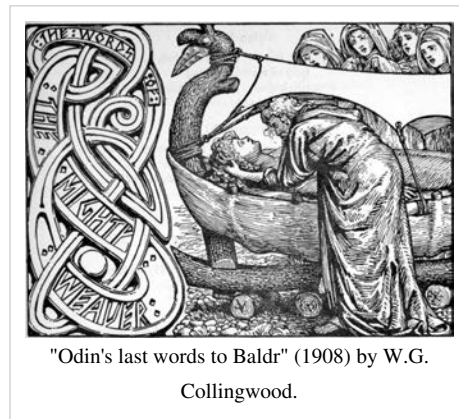
According to the Prose Edda, Odin, the first and most powerful of the Æsir, was a son of Bestla and Borr and brother of Vili and Vé. With these brothers, he cast down the frost giant Ymir and made Earth from Ymir's body. The three brothers are often mentioned together. "Vili" is the German word for "will" (English), "Vé" is the German word (Gothic *wai*) for woe but is more likely related to the archaic German "Wei" meaning 'sacred.'

Odin has fathered numerous children. With his wife, Frigg, he fathered his doomed son Baldr and the blind god Höðr. By the personification of earth, Fjörgyn or Jörð, Odin was the father of his most famous son, Thor. By the giantess Gríðr, Odin was the father of Víðar, and by Rinda he was father of Váli. Also, many royal families claimed descent from Odin through other sons.

Odin and his brothers, Vili and Ve, are attributed with slaying Ymir, the Ancient Giant, to form Midgard. From Ymir's flesh, the brothers made the earth, and from his shattered bones and teeth they made the rocks and stones. From Ymir's blood, they made the rivers and lakes. Ymir's skull was made into the sky, secured at four points by four dwarfs named East, West, North, and South. From Ymir's brains, the three Gods shaped the clouds, whereas Ymir's eyebrows became a barrier between Jotunheim (giant's home) and Midgard, the place where men now dwell. Odin and his brothers are also attributed with making humans.

After having made earth from Ymir's flesh, the three brothers came across two logs (or an ash and an elm tree). Odin gave them breath and life; Vili gave them brains and feelings; and Ve gave them hearing and sight. The first man was Ask and the first woman was Embla.

Odin was said to have learned the mysteries of seid from the Vanic goddess and völva Freyja, despite the unwarriorly connotations of using magic.



"Odin's last words to Baldr" (1908) by W.G. Collingwood.

Skáldskaparmál

In section 2 of *Skáldskaparmál*, Odin's quest for wisdom can also be seen in his work as a farmhand for a summer, for Baugi, and his seduction of Gunnlod in order to obtain the Mead of Poetry.

In section 5 of *Skáldskaparmál*, the origins of some of Odin's possessions are described.

Sagas of Icelanders

Ynglinga saga

According to the *Ynglinga saga*:

Odin had two brothers, the one called Ve, the other Vili, and they governed the kingdom when he was absent. It happened once when Odin had gone to a great distance, and had been so long away that the people of Asa doubted if he would ever return home, that his two brothers took it upon themselves to divide his estate; but both of them took his wife Frigg to themselves. Odin soon after returned home, and took his wife back.

In *Ynglinga saga*, Odin is considered the 2nd Mythological king of Sweden, succeeding Gylfi and was succeeded by Njörðr.

Further, in *Ynglinga saga*, Odin is described as venturing to Mímir's Well, near Jötunheimr, the land of the giants; not as Odin, but as Vegtam the Wanderer, clothed in a dark blue cloak and carrying a traveler's staff. To drink from the Well of Wisdom, Odin had to sacrifice his eye (which eye he sacrificed is unclear), symbolizing his willingness to gain the knowledge of the past, present and future. As he drank, he saw all the sorrows and troubles that would fall upon men and the gods. He also saw why the sorrow and troubles had to come to men.

Mímir accepted Odin's eye and it sits today at the bottom of the Well of Wisdom as a sign that the father of the gods had paid the price for wisdom.

Other sagas

According to *Njáls saga*: Hjalti Skeggiason, an Icelander newly converted to Christianity, wished to express his contempt for the native gods, so he sang:

"Ever will I Gods blaspheme

Freyja methinks a dog does seem,

Freyja a dog? Aye! Let them be

Both dogs together Odin and she!"^[7]

Hjalti was found guilty of blasphemy for his infamous verse and he ran to Norway with his father-in-law, Gizur the White. Later, with Olaf Tryggvason's support, Gizur and Hjalti came back to Iceland to invite those assembled at the Althing to convert to Christianity (which happened in 999).^[18]

The *Saga of King Olaf Tryggvason*, composed around 1300, describes that following King Olaf Tryggvason's orders, to prove their piety, people must insult and ridicule major heathen deities when they are newly converted into Christianity. Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, who was reluctantly converted from paganism to Christianity by Olaf, also had to make a poem to forsake pagan deities. Below is an example:



"Odin with Gunnlöd" (1901) by Johannes Gehrts.



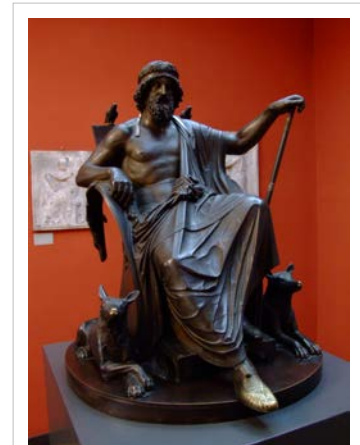
"Odhin" (1901) by Johannes Gehrts.

The whole race of men to win
 Odin's grace has wrought poems
 (I recall the exquisite
 works of my forebears);
 but with sorrow, for well did
 Viðrir's [Odin's] power please the poet,
 do I conceive hate for the first husband of
 Frigg [Odin], now I serve Christ. (Lausavísur 10, Whaley's translation)

Flateyjarbók

Sörla þáttur is a short narrative from a later and extended version of the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*^[9] found in the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript, which was written and compiled by two Christian priests, Jon Thordson and Magnus Thorhalson, from the late 14th^[10] to the 15th century.^[11]

"Freyja was a human in Asia and was the favorite concubine of Odin, King of Asialand. When this woman wanted to buy a golden necklace (no name given) forged by four dwarves (named Dvalinn, Alfrik, Berling, and Grer), she offered them gold and silver but they replied that they would only sell it to her if she would lie a night by each of them. She came home afterward with the necklace and kept silent as if nothing happened. But a man called Loki somehow knew it, and came to tell Odin. King Odin commanded Loki to steal the necklace, so Loki turned into a fly to sneak into Freyja's bower and stole it. When Freyja found her necklace missing, she came to ask king Odin. In exchange for it, Odin ordered her to make two kings, each served by twenty kings, fight forever unless some christened men so brave would dare to enter the battle and slay them. She said yes, and got that necklace back. Under the spell, king Högni and king Heðinn battled for one hundred and forty-three years, as soon as they fell down they had to stand up again and fight on. But in the end, the great Christian lord Olaf Tryggvason arrived with his brave christened men, and whoever slain by a Christian would stay dead. Thus the pagan curse was finally dissolved by the arrival of Christianity. After that, the noble man, king Olaf, went back to his realm."^[12]



Odin (1825–1827) by H. E. Freund.

Gesta Danorum

In the 13th century, Saxo Grammaticus, in the service of Archbishop Absalon in Denmark, presented in his Latin language work *Gesta Danorum* euhemerized accounts of Thor and Odin as cunning sorcerers that, Saxo states, had fooled the people of Norway, Sweden and Denmark into their recognition as gods:

"There were of old certain men versed in sorcery, Thor, namely, and Odin, and many others, who were cunning in contriving marvellous sleights; and they, winning the minds of the simple, began to claim the rank of gods. For, in particular, they ensnared Norway, Sweden and Denmark in the vainest credulity, and by prompting these lands to worship them, infected them with their imposture. The effects of their deceit spread so far, that all other men adored a sort of divine power in them, and, thinking them either gods or in league with gods, offered up solemn prayers to these inventors of sorceries, and gave to blasphemous error the honour due to religion. Some say that the gods, whom our countrymen worshipped, shared only the title with those honoured by Greece or Latium, but that, being in a manner nearly equal to them in dignity, they borrowed from them the worship as well as the name. This must be sufficient discourse upon the deities of Danish antiquity. I have expounded this briefly for the general profit, that my readers may know clearly to what worship in its heathen superstition our country has bowed the knee." (Gesta Danorum, Book I)¹

Saxo also wrote a story about how Odin's wife, Frigg, slept with a servant to obtain a device to steal Odin's gold.

"At this time there was one Odin, who was credited over all Europe with the honour, which was false, of godhead, but used more continually to sojourn at Upsala; and in this spot, either from the sloth of the inhabitants or from its own pleasantness, he vouchsafed to dwell with somewhat especial constancy.

The kings of the North, desiring more zealously to worship his deity, embounded his likeness in a golden image; and this statue, which betokened their homage, they transmitted with much show of worship to Byzantium, fettering even the effigied arms with a serried mass of bracelets. Odin was overjoyed at such notoriety, and greeted warmly the devotion of the senders. But his queen Frigg, desiring to go forth more beautified, called smiths, and had the gold stripped from the statue.

Odin hanged them, and mounted the statue upon a pedestal, which by the marvellous skill of his art he made to speak when a mortal touched it. But still Frigg preferred the splendour of her own apparel to the divine honours of her husband, and submitted herself to the embraces of one of her servants; and it was by this man's device she broke down the image, and turned to the service of her private wantonness that gold which had been devoted to public idolatry. Little thought she of practicing unchastity, that she might the easier satisfy her greed, this woman so unworthy to be the consort of a god; but what should I here add, save that such a godhead was worthy of such a wife? So great was the error that of old befooled the minds of men.

Thus Odin, wounded by the double trespass of his wife, resented the outrage to his image as keenly as that to his bed; and, ruffled by these two stinging dishonours, took to an exile overflowing with noble shame, imagining so to wipe off the slur of his ignominy. At home, Frigg went with a certain Mith-Othin



Lee Lawrie, *Odin* (1939). Library of Congress John Adams Building, Washington, D.C.

and took over Odin's properties, until Odin came back and drove them away. Frigg's death later cleared Odin's name and he regained his reputation." (Gesta Danorum, Book I)^[1]

There is also an account about how Odin was exiled by the Latin gods at Byzantium:

But the gods, whose chief seat was then at Byzantium, (Asgard), seeing that Odin had tarnished the fair name of godhead by divers injuries to its majesty, thought that he ought to be removed from their society. And they had him not only ousted from the headship, but outlawed and stripped of all worship and honour at home...^[13]

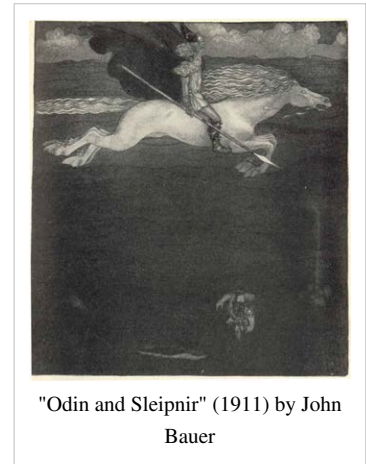
Blót

It is attested in primary sources that sacrifices were made to Odin during blóts. Adam of Bremen relates that every ninth year, people assembled from all over Sweden to sacrifice at the Temple at Uppsala. Male slaves and males of each species were sacrificed and hung from the branches of the trees.

As the Swedes had the right not only to elect their king but also to depose him, the sagas relate that both King Domalde and King Olof Trätälja were sacrificed to Odin after years of famine. It has been argued that the killing of a combatant in battle was to give a sacrificial offering to Odin. The fickleness of Odin in war was well documented; in *Lokasenna*, Loki taunts Odin for his inconsistency.

Sometimes sacrifices were made to Odin to bring about changes in circumstance. A notable example is the sacrifice of King Víkar that is detailed in Gautrek's Saga and in Saxo Grammaticus' account of the same event. Sailors in a fleet being blown off course drew lots to sacrifice to Odin that he might abate the winds. The king himself drew the lot and was hanged.

Sacrifices were probably also made to Odin at the beginning of summer (mid April, actually—summer being reckoned essentially the same as did the Celt, at Beltene, Calan Mai [Welsh], which is Mayday—hence as summer's "herald"), since Ynglinga saga states one of the great festivals of the calendar is *at sumri, þat var sigrblót* "in summer, for victory;" Odin is consistently referred to throughout the Norse mythos as the bringer of victory. The Ynglinga saga also details the sacrifices made by the Swedish king Aun, to whom it was revealed that he would lengthen his life by sacrificing one of his sons every ten years; nine of his ten sons died this way. When he was about to sacrifice his last son Egil, the Swedes stopped him.



"Odin and Sleipnir" (1911) by John Bauer

Persisting beliefs and folklore

The Christianization of Scandinavia was slow, and it worked its way downwards from the nobility. Among commoners, beliefs in Odin lingered and legends would be told until modern times.

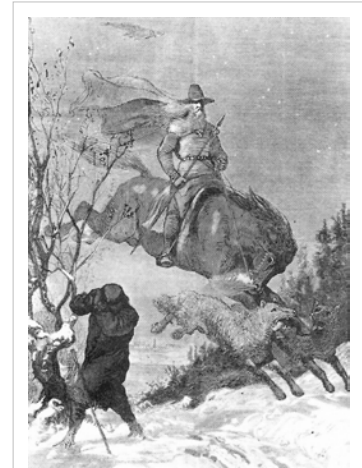
The last battle where Scandinavians attributed a victory to Odin was the Battle of Lena in 1208.^[14] The former Swedish king Sverker had arrived with a large Danish army, and the Swedes led by their new king Eric were outnumbered. It is said that Odin then appeared riding on Sleipnir and he positioned himself in front of the Swedish battle formation. He led the Swedish charge and gave them victory.

The *Bagler sagas*, written in the 13th century concerning events in the first two decades of the 13th century, tells a story of a one-eyed rider with a broad-brimmed hat and a blue coat who asks a smith to shoe his horse. The suspicious smith asks where the stranger stayed during the previous night. The stranger mentions places so distant that the smith does not believe him. The stranger says that he has stayed for a long time in the north and taken part in many battles, but now he is going to Sweden. When the horse is shod, the rider mounts his horse and says "I am Odin" to the stunned smith, and rides away. The next day, the battle of Lena took place. The context of this tale in the saga is that a peace-treaty has been signed in Norway, and Odin, a god of war, no longer has a place there.

Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar, written in the 1260s, describes how, at some point in the 1230s, Skule Baardsson has the skald Snorri Sturluson compose a poem comparing one of Skule's enemies to Odin, describing them both as bringers of strife and disagreement. These episodes do not necessarily imply a continued belief in Odin as a god, but show clearly that his name was still widely known at this time.

Scandinavian folklore also maintained a belief in Odin as the leader of the Wild Hunt. His main objective seems to have been to track down and kill a lady who could be the forest dweller *huldran* or *skogsrået*. In these accounts, Odin was typically a lone hunter, save for his two dogs.^{[15][16]}

In late 19th century Danish folklore, an account of Odin as having hid in a cliff of Møen (modern Møn, Denmark) where his residence there is "still pointed out." At this time, he was referred to as the "*Jætte* (giant) from Uppsala" but "is now called Jön Upsal" and from this latter name comes the expression "*Men jøtten dog!*" as opposed to the expression "*Men Jøs dog!*" ("By Jesus!"). Outside his doorway a green spot is described on the otherwise white cliff; this is where he "goes out on behalf of nature". A man who "now lives in Copenhagen" is described as having once sailed along the cliff, having seen Jön toss out his "dirt" - a big cloud of dust was to be seen outside of his door. Several "still living people" have lost their way in Klinteskoven ("The Cliff Forest") and ended up in Jön Upsal's garden, that is said to be so big and wonderful that it is beyond any description. The garden is also in full bloom in midwinter. If one sets out to find this garden, it is impossible to find.^[17]



Odin continued to hunt in Swedish folklore. Illustration by August Malmström.

Names

Odin was referred to by more than 200 names which hint at his various roles. Among others, he was known as Yggr (terror), Sigfodr (father of Victory) and Alfodr (All Father)^[18] in the skaldic and Eddic traditions of heiti and kennings, a poetic method of indirect reference, as in a riddle.

Some epithets establish Odin as a father god: Alföðr "all-father," "father of all;" Aldaföðr "father of men (or of the age);" Herjaföðr "father of hosts;" Sigföðr "father of victory;" Valföðr "father of the slain."

Eponymy

Many toponyms in Northern Europe where Germanic Tribes existed contain the name of *Wodanaz (Norse Odin, West Germanic Woden).

Wednesday is named after Woden, the English form of Odin (Old English *Wēdnes dæg*, "Woden's day"). It is an early Germanic translation of the Latin *dies Mercurii* ("Mercury's day") based on the Roman practice of understanding foreign gods by comparing them to Roman deities.^[19]

Odin came to be used as a Norwegian male given name from the 19th century, originally in the context of the Romanticist Viking revival.

Modern influence

Germanic neopaganism

Odin, along with the other Germanic Gods and Goddesses, is recognized by Germanic neopagans. His Norse form is particularly acknowledged in Ásatrú, the "faith in the Æsir", an officially recognized religion in Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Spain.^[20]

Popular Culture

- In a letter of 1946 J.R.R. Tolkien stated that he thought of Gandalf as an "Odinic wanderer."^[21] Other commentators have also compared Gandalf to Odin in his "Wanderer" guise – an old man with one eye, a long white beard, a wide brimmed hat, and a staff.^[22]
- Odin appears in the 1939 novel *The Ship That Flew* by Hilda Lewis.
- In the historical novel *Votan* by John James, a Greek merchant named Photinus is depicted as inadvertently inspiring the Odin mythology over the course of his travels through Northern Europe.
- Odin is the main God character in the 2001 novel *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman; the character of Odin is primarily called Mr. Wednesday and the All-Father in the novel.
- Odin appears in *The Dresden Files* by Jim Butcher living under the name Vadderung and is a "retired god" turned security specialist.
- Metal band Manowar often mentions Odin and Norse mythology in their songs, such as in "Sons of Odin" and "The Crown and the Ring". Odinism is a theme in a form of black metal called viking metal.



"Odin disguised as a Traveller" from 1914.




"Wotan takes leave of Brunhild" (1892) by Konrad Dietz.

- The 2011 TV series *The Almighty Johnsons* features Norse gods in modern New Zealand, the main character being Axl Johnson, who discovers on his 21st birthday he is the incarnation of Odin.
- Odin is a character in the Marvel Comics universe, in which he is the god-king of the Asgardians and father to the popular superhero Thor and the adoptive father of Thor's nemesis Loki. He was adapted from Norse mythology by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. He was introduced in *Journey into Mystery* #86 in 1962 and appeared in the 2011 Marvel Studios film *Thor* in which he is portrayed by Anthony Hopkins.
- Wotan is a character in Jack Kirby's *Fourth World* universe, the king of the Old Gods whose death was the beginning of the world of the New Gods.
- In their August 1990 Release TYR. Metal Band, Black Sabbath Tracks 5, 6, and 7 run into each other, and tell a Battle Story mentioning "Odin's Court" The Songs are as follows... 5. The Battle of Tyr. 6. Odin's Court, and 7. Valhalla.
- In 2006, the melodic death metal band Amon Amarth released their sixth studio album, *With Oden on Our Side*. The lyrical theme of the album is essentially Norse mythology and features Odin riding on his octopedal horse, Sleipnir, as the album cover art. The inspiration of the cover art is of a depiction of Odin on the Tjängvide image stone.

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- [5] *Skaldskaparmal*, in *Edda*. Anthony Faulkes, Trans., Ed. (London: Everyman, 1996).
- [6] Jyllands-Posten, "Sensationelt fund af Odin-figur", November 14 2009 (<http://jp.dk/nyviden/article1885655.ece>) (in Danish).
- [7] Njál's Saga or The Story of Burnt Njal (<http://books.google.com/books?id=U1sAAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Story+of+Burnt+Njal#v=onepage&q=&f=false>), George W. DaSant transl. (1861).
- [8] T. Kendrick, "History of the Vikings" (1930), p.349, 350.
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- [17] Kristensen, Evald Tang. (1980) *Danske Sagn: Som De Har Lyd I Folkemunde*, page 103. Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, Copenhagen. ISBN 87-17-02791-8
- [18] Harrison, D. & Svensson, K. (2007). *Vikingaliv* Fält & Hässler, Värnamo. ISBN 978-91-27-35725-9 p. 63
- [20] Confesiones Minoritarias (http://dgraj.mju.es/EntidadesReligiosas/resultadoNNCC.asp?codAutonomia=CM&tipo=CA&p_estado=3&p_provincia=2&p_municipio=NAVAS DE JORQUERA&p_inscripcion=1161-SG/A) - MINISTERIO DE JUSTICIA
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Preceded by Gylfi	Mythological king of Sweden	Succeeded by Njörðr
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Óðr

In Norse mythology, **Óðr** (Old Norse for "Divine Madness, frantic, furious, vehement, eager", as a noun "mind, feeling" and also "song, poetry"; Orchard (1997) gives "the frenzied one"^[1]) or **Óð**, sometimes anglicized as **Odr** or **Od**, is a figure associated with the major goddess Freyja. The *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, both describe Óðr as Freyja's husband and father of her daughter Hnoss. *Heimskringla* adds that the couple produced another daughter, Gersemi. A number of theories have been proposed about Óðr, generally that he is somehow a hypostasis of the deity Odin due to their similarities.



Óðr again leaves the grieving Freyja in *Odur verläßt abermals die trauernde Gattin* (1882), artist unknown.

Etymology

The Old Norse noun *óðr* may be the origin of the theonym *Óðinn* (Anglicized as Odin), and it means "mind", "soul" or "spirit" (so used in stanza 18.1 of the Poetic Edda poem *Völuspá*). In addition, *óðr* can also mean "song", "poetry" and "inspiration", and it has connotations of "possession". It is derived from a Proto-Germanic **wōð-* or **wōþ-* and it is related to Gothic *wōds* ("raging", "possessed"), Old High German *wuot* ("fury" "rage, to be insane") and the Anglo-Saxon words *wód* ("fury", "rabies") and *wóð* ("song", "cry", "voice", "poetry", "eloquence"). Old Norse derivations include *æði* "strong excitation, possession".^[2]

Ultimately these Germanic words are derived from the Proto-Indo-European word **wāt-*, which meant "to blow (on), to fan (flames)", fig. "to inspire". The same root also appears in Latin *vātēs* ("seer", "singer"), which is considered to be a Celtic loanword, compare to Irish *fáith* ("poet", but originally "excited", "inspired").^[2] The root has also been said to appear in Sanskrit *vāt-* "to fan".^[3]

Attestations

Óðr is attested in the following sources:

Poetic Edda

Óðr is mentioned in stanza 25 of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*. The name appears in a kenning for the major goddess Freyja; "Óð's girl" (Old Norse *Óðs mey gefna*), pointing to a relation with the goddess.^[4]

Stanza 47 of the poem *Hyndluljóð* contains mention of a figure by the name of *Ædi*. There, Hyndla taunts Freyja, stating that Freyja had run to Ædi, "always full of desire". Scholar Carolyne Larrington says that the identity of Ædi is uncertain; it has been theorized that this may simply be Óðr, or that the figure may be another lover of Freyja's.^[5] Scholar John Lindow describes this reference as "puzzling" as no other information is provided regarding the situation referred to by Hyndla.^[6] Scholar Britt-Mari Näsström says that this reference likely does not refer to Óðr, rather being the product of the amendments of Sophus Bugge, and that the line simply points to Freyja's lust. Näsström comments that "perhaps the philologists of the nineteenth century were misled by their romantic

intentions".^[7]

Prose Edda

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High says that the goddess Freyja "was married to someone named" Óðr. High details that the two produced a daughter, Hnoss, and that this daughter was so fair that the term *hnossir* (meaning "treasures") derives from her name and is applied to whatever is "beautiful and precious." High adds that Óðr would go off traveling for extended periods, all the while Freyja would stay behind weeping tears of red gold. However, Freyja would travel "among strange peoples" while looking for Óðr, and so had many names.^[8] In chapter 36 of *Gylfaginning*, the stanza of *Völuspá* mentioning Óðr is quoted.^[9]

In chapter 20 of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, poetic names for the goddess Freyja are listed, including "wife of Óðr".^[10] In chapter 36, a prose narrative points out than an excerpt of a work by the skald Einarr Skúlason refers to Freyja as the wife of Óðr ("Óðr's bedfellow").^[11] The same excerpt appears in chapter 49.^[12] In chapter 75, Óðr is mentioned a final time in the *Prose Edda*, where Freyja is cited as having "wept gold" for Óðr.^[13]

Heimskringla

In chapter 1 of the *Heimskringla* book *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson refers to the two in an euhemerized account, stating that Freyja had a husband named Óðr, two daughters named Hnoss and Gersemi, and that they were so beautiful that their names were used for "our most precious possessions" (both of their names literally mean "jewel").^[14]

Theories

Óðr is often theorized as somehow connected to Odin (Old Norse: *Óðinn*), the head of the *Æsir* in Norse mythology, by way of etymological similarities between the two (Lindow states that the linguistic relationship is identical to that of *Ullr* and *Ullin*—often considered as variant names of a single god), and the fact that both are described as going on long journeys, though Lindow points out that Snorri is careful to keep them apart.^[6]

Scholar Viktor Rydberg proposed that Freyja's husband Óðr is identical with the hero Svipdag from the poems *Grougaldr* and *Fjolsvinsmal*. Jacob Grimm and others have long identified Menglad, "the neck-lace lover", Svipdag's love interest in that poem, with Freyja.^[15]

Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson proposes that a cult of the Vanir may have influenced a cult of the *Æsir* in the waning days of Norse paganism during the Christianization of Scandinavia, potentially resulting in the figure of Óðr in Norse mythology, which she refers to as a "strange double of Odin".^[16]

Scholar Rudolf Simek says that since Óðr appears in a kenning employed by the 11th century skald Einarr Skúlason (in *Skáldskaparmál*) and in the *Poetic Edda* poems *Völuspá* and *Hyndlujóð*, Óðr is not a late invention. Simek says that "the most obvious explanation is to identify Óðr with Odin," noting the similarity between their names (and agreeing with the Ullr/Ullin parallel), the long absences (comparing them to Odin's exile in *Gesta Danorum*), and Óðr's marriage with Freyja.^[17]

Simek adds that although these similarities exist, there are things that speak against it, such as that "Freyja's tears for Odin and her search are unmotivated," and that "the reference to Hnoss as their only child is surprising - why, for example, should Baldr not be mentioned?" Simek notes that these issues have resulted in sometimes very different explanations; Sophus Bugge and Hjalmar Falk saw a reflection of the Greek god Adonis in Óðr, Rudolf Much saw a reflection in the god Attis, and Lee Hollander theorizes a reflection of the folktale of Amor and Psyche in Snorri's *Prose Edda* account of Óðr and Freyja.^[17]

Simek concurs that, if the two gods were identical, Snorri would not have kept them so apart; yet that the names Odin and Óðr are so close that a lack of connection between the two gods isn't possible. Some scholars have examined the relationship between the two in an attempt to find "older" and "younger" layers in the figures of Óðr

and Odin, but Simek says that this approach has yet to yield any results that are convincing due to the sparsity of sources that mention Óðr.^[17]

Scholar Stephan Grundy comments that while it is conceivable that Óðr may have been invented as a separate figure from Odin after Christianization, the notion is implausible because a separate, independent figure by the name of Wod survives in folklore involving the Wild Hunt in areas as far south from Scandinavia as Switzerland. Grundy notes that Óðr appears to date to at least before the Viking Age. Grundy opines that "as pointed out by Jan de Vries and others, there is little doubt" that Óðr and Odin were once the same figure. Grundy says that *Óðinn* is an adjectival form of *Óðr*, and that *Óðr* may be the elder form of the two.^[18]

Grundy theorizes that the goddesses Frigg and Freyja did not stem from a single goddess. If they did not, Grundy says, the question of explaining the relationship between Freyja and Óðr becomes central, which has been one of the strongest points made in favor of the descent of Frigg and Freyja from a common goddess. Grundy notes that it is rarely mentioned that the Germanic peoples sometimes practiced polygamy, and cites chapter 18 of Tacitus' 1st century AD work *Germania*, where Tacitus records that while monogamy has very few exceptions in Germanic society, there are those who actively seek a polygamous marriage "for the sake of high birth." Grundy contrasts this with accounts of polygynous marriages among the Merovingians and Carolingians, points out that the only Germanic law-code that expressly forbids such relationships is that of the Visigoths, and notes that while polygynous marriages are rarely attested in Scandinavian sources, Harald I of Norway was married to seven wives simultaneously. Grundy concludes that, as "gods tend to reflect the social norms of their worshippers," it very possible that Odin/Óðr originally "could have rejoiced in Frigg and Freyja simultaneously". Grundy posits that, over time polygynous marriages dwindled during the Viking Age and into the Christianization of the North Germanic territories and, as a result, such a relationship was less easily reflected in the deities of the people.^[19]

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:121).

[2] Jacob Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1961), s.v. "Wut", "Wutesheer". Julius Pokorny, *IEW* (1959), s.v. "wat".

[3] With the *api-*, the verb takes the meaning of "to excite, awaken", in RV 1.128.2 said of Agni, the sacrificial fire, where the literal meaning of "to fan" coincides with the figurative meaning "to excite". See Monier-Williams (1899), s.v. "vāt", "apivat".

[4] Larrington (1996:7).

[5] Larrington (1999:297).

[6] Lindow (2001:246—247).

[7] Näsström (1998:69).

[8] Faulkes (1995:29—30).

[9] Faulkes (1995:36).

[10] Faulkes (1995:86).

[11] Faulkes (1995:98).

[12] Faulkes (1995:119).

[13] Faulkes (1995:157).

[14] Hollander (1964:14).

[15] Rydberg, *Undersökningar i Germanisk Mytologi*, v. 1, 1886.

[16] Davidson (1965:154).

[17] Simek (2007:250).

[18] Grundy (1998:56 and 58-59).

[19] Grundy (1998:66).

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Thor

In Norse mythology, **Thor** (from Old Norse *Þórr*) is a hammer-wielding god associated with thunder, lightning, storms, oak trees, strength, the protection of mankind, and also hallowing, healing and fertility. The cognate deity in wider Germanic mythology and paganism was known in Old English as *Punor* and in Old High German as *Donar* (runic *þonar* 𐀓𐀆𐀗𐀚), stemming from a Common Germanic **Punraz* (meaning "thunder").

Thor is a prominently mentioned god throughout the recorded history of the Germanic peoples, from the Roman occupation of regions of Germania, to the tribal expansions of the Migration Period, to his high popularity during the Viking Age, when, in the face of the process of the Christianization of Scandinavia, emblems of his hammer, Mjöllnir, were worn in defiance and Norse pagan personal names containing the name of the god bear witness to his popularity. Into the modern period, Thor continued to be acknowledged in rural folklore throughout Germanic regions. Thor is frequently referred to in place names, the day of the week Thursday ("Thor's day") bears his name, and names stemming from the pagan period containing his own continue to be used today.

In Norse mythology, largely recorded in Iceland from traditional material stemming from Scandinavia, numerous tales and information about Thor are provided. In these sources, Thor bears at least fourteen names, is the husband of the golden-haired goddess Sif, is the lover of the jötunn Járnsaxa, and is generally described as fierce-eyed,



Thor's Battle Against the Jötnar (1872) by Mårten Eskil Winge

red-haired and red-bearded.^[1] With Sif, Thor fathered the goddess (and possible valkyrie) Þrúðr; with Járnsaxa, he fathered Magni; with a mother whose name is not recorded, he fathered Móði, and he is the stepfather of the god Ullr. The same sources list Thor as the son of the god Odin and the personified earth, Fjörgyn, and by way of Odin, Thor has numerous brothers. Thor has two servants, Þjálfi and Röskva, rides in a cart or chariot pulled by two goats, Tanngrisnir and Tanngrjóstr (that he eats and resurrects), and is ascribed three dwellings (Bilskirnir, Þrúðheimr, and Þrúðvangr). Thor wields the mountain-crushing hammer, Mjöllnir, wears the belt Megingjörð and the iron gloves Járngreipr, and owns the staff Gríðarvölr. Thor's exploits, including his relentless slaughter of his foes and fierce battles with the monstrous serpent Jörmungandr—and their foretold mutual deaths during the events of Ragnarök—are recorded throughout sources for Norse mythology.

Name

Old Norse *Þórr*, Old English *ðunor*, Old High German *Donar*, Old Saxon *thunar*, and Old Frisian *thuner* are cognates within the Germanic language branch, descending from the Proto-Germanic masculine noun **þunraz* 'thunder'.^[2]

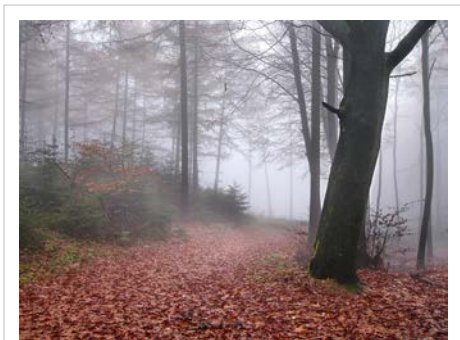
The name of the god is the origin of the weekday name *Thursday*. By employing a practice known as *interpretatio germanica* during the Roman Empire period, the Germanic peoples adopted the Roman weekly calendar, and replaced the names of Roman gods with their own. Latin *dies Iovis* ("day of Jupiter") was converted into Proto-Germanic **Þonares dagaz* ("Thor's day"), from which stems modern English "Thursday" and all other Germanic weekday cognates.^[3]

Beginning in the Viking Age, personal names containing the theonym *Thōrr* are recorded with great frequency. Prior to the Viking Age, no known examples are recorded. *Thórr*-based names may have flourished during the Viking Age as a defiant response to attempts at Christianization, similar to the widescale Viking Age practice of wearing Thor's hammer pendants.^[4]

Attestations

Roman era

The earliest records of the Germanic peoples were recorded by the Romans, and in these works Thor is frequently referred to—via a process known as *interpretatio romana* (where characteristics perceived to be similar by Romans result in identification of a non-Roman god as a Roman deity)—as either the Roman god Jupiter (also known as *Jove*) or the Greco-Roman god Hercules. The first clear example of this occurs in the Roman historian Tacitus's late first century work *Germania*, where, writing about the religion of the Suebi (a confederation of Germanic peoples), he comments that "among the gods Mercury is the one they principally worship. They regard it as a religious duty to offer to him, on fixed days, human as well as other sacrificial victims. Hercules and Mars they appease by animal offerings of the permitted kind" and adds that a portion of the Suebi also venerate "Isis".^[5] In this instance, Tacitus refers to the god Odin as "Mercury", Thor as "Hercules", and the god Týr as "Mars", and the identity of the "Isis" of the Suebi has been debated. In Thor's case, the identification with the god Hercules is likely at least in part due to similarities between Thor's hammer and Hercules' club.^[6] In his *Annals*, Tacitus again refers to the veneration of "Hercules" by the Germanic peoples; he records a wood beyond the river Weser (in what is now northwestern Germany) as dedicated to him.^[7]



The Teutoburg Forest in northwestern Germany

In Germanic areas occupied by the Roman Empire, coins and votive objects dating from the 2nd and 3rd century AD have been found with Latin inscriptions referring to "Hercules", and so in reality, with varying levels of likelihood, refer to Thor by way of *interpretatio romana*.^[8]

Post-Roman Era

The first recorded instance of the name of the god appears in the Migration Period, where a piece of jewelry (a fibula), the Nordendorf fibula, dating from the 7th century AD and found in Bavaria, bears an Elder Futhark inscription that contains the name "Þonar", i.e. "Donar", the southern Germanic form of the god's name.^[9]

According to a near-contemporary account, the Christian missionary Saint Boniface felled an oak tree dedicated to "Jove" in the 8th century, the Donar Oak in the region of Hesse, Germany.^[10]



Boniface bears his crucifix after felling Thor's Oak in *Bonifacius* (1905) by Emil Doepler

Around the second half of the 8th century, Old English tales of a figure named *Thunor* (*Punor*) are recorded, a figure who likely refers to an Old English version of the god. In relation, *Thunor* is sometimes used in Old English texts to gloss *Jupiter*, the god may be referenced in the poem *Solomon and Saturn*, where the thunder strikes the devil with a "fiery axe", and the Old English expression *þunnorad* ("thunder ride") may refer to the god's thunderous, goat-led chariot.^{[11][12]}

A 9th-century AD codex from Mainz, Germany, known as the *Old Saxon Baptismal Vow* records the name of three Old Saxon gods, UUôden (Old Saxon "Wodan"), Saxnôte, and Thunaer, by way of their renunciation as demons in a formula to be repeated by Germanic pagans formally converting to Christianity.^[13]

The Kentish royal legend, probably 11th-century, contains the story of a villainous reeve of Egberht of Kent called Thunor, who is swallowed up by the earth at a place from then on known as *þunores hlæwe* (Old English 'Thunor's mound'). Gabriel Turville-Petre saw this as an invented origin for the placename demonstrating loss of memory that Thunor had been a god's name.^[14]

Viking Age

In the 11th century, chronicler Adam of Bremen records in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* that a statue of Thor, who Adam describes as "mightiest", sits in the Temple at Uppsala in the center of a triple throne (flanked by Woden and "Fricco") located in Gamla Uppsala, Sweden. Adam details that "Thor, they reckon, rules the sky; he governs thunder and lightning, winds and storms, fine weather and fertility" and that "Thor, with his mace, looks like Jupiter". Adam details that the people of Uppsala had appointed priests to each of the gods, and that the priests were to offer up sacrifices. In Thor's case, he continues, these sacrifices were done when plague or famine threatened.^[15] Earlier in the same work, Adam relays that in 1030 an English preacher, Wulfred, was lynched by assembled Germanic pagans for "profaning" a representation of Thor.^[16]



A 16th-century depiction of Norse gods by Olaus Magnus; from left to right, Frigg, Thor, and Odin

Two objects with runic inscriptions invoking Thor date from the 11th century, one from England and one from Sweden. The first, the Canterbury Charm from Canterbury, England, calls upon Thor to heal a wound by banishing a thurs.^[17] The second, the Kvinneby amulet, invokes protection by both Thor and his hammer.^[18]

Post-Viking Age

In the 12th century, more than a century after Norway was "officially" Christianized, Thor was still being invoked by the population, as evidenced by a stick bearing a runic message found among the Bryggen inscriptions in Bergen, Norway. On the stick, both Thor and Odin are called upon for help; Thor is asked to "receive" the reader, and Odin to "own" them.^[19] Also around the 12th century, iconography of the Christianizing 11th-century king Olaf II of Norway absorbed elements of the native Thor; Olaf II had become a familiarly red-bearded, hammer-wielding figure.^[20]

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from traditional source material reaching into the pagan period, Thor appears (or is mentioned) in the poems *Völuspá*, *Grímnismál*, *Skírnismál*, *Hárbarðsljóð*, *Hymiskviða*, *Lokasenna*, *Þrymskviða*, *Alvíssmál*, and *Hyndluljóð*.^[21]

In the poem *Völuspá*, a dead völva recounts the history of the universe and foretells the future to the disguised god Odin, including the death of Thor. Thor, she foretells, will do battle with the great serpent during the immense mythical war waged at Ragnarök, and there he will slay the monstrous snake, yet after he will only be able to take nine steps before succumbing to the venom of the beast:



The foretold death of Thor as depicted (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Then comes the mighty son of Hlōdyn:
(Odin's son goes with the monster to fight);
Midgârd's Veor in his rage will slay the worm.
Nine feet will go Fiörgyn's son,
bowed by the serpent, who feared no foe.
All men will their homes forsake.^[22]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Hither there comes the son of Hlothyn,
The bright snake gapes to heaven above;
.....
Against the serpent goes Othin's son.
In anger smites the warder of earth,—
Forth from their homes must all men flee;—
Nine paces fares the son of Fjorgyn,
And, slain by the serpent, fearless he sinks.^[23]

Afterwards, says the völva, the sky will turn black before fire engulfs the world, the stars will disappear, flames will dance before the sky, steam will rise, the world will be covered in water, and then it will be raised again; green and fertile (see *Prose Edda* section below for the survival of the sons of Thor, who return after these events with Thor's hammer).^[24]

In the poem *Grímnismál*, the god Odin, in disguise as *Grímnir*, and tortured, starved and thirsty, imparts in the young Agnar cosmological lore, including that Thor resides in *Þrúðheimr*, and that, every day, Thor wades through the rivers *Körmt* and *Örmt*, and the two *Kerlaugar*. There, *Grímnir* says, Thor sits as judge at the immense cosmological world tree, *Yggdrasil*.^[25]

In *Skírnismál*, the god Freyr's messenger, *Skírnir*, threatens the fair *Gerðr*, who Freyr is smitten with, with numerous threats and curses, including that Thor, Freyr, and Odin will be angry with her, and that she risks their "potent wrath".^[26]

Thor is the main character of *Hárbarðsljóð*, where, after traveling "from the east", he comes to an inlet where he encounters a ferryman who gives his name as *Hárbarðr* (Odin, again in disguise), and attempts to hail a ride from him. The ferryman, shouting from the inlet, is immediately rude and obnoxious to Thor and refuses to ferry him. At first, Thor holds his tongue, but *Hárbarðr* only becomes more aggressive, and the poem soon becomes a flying match between Thor and *Hárbarðr*, all the while revealing lore about the two, including Thor's killing of several *jötnar* in "the east" and berzerk women on *Hlesey* (now the Danish island of *Læsø*). In the end, Thor ends up walking instead.^[27]

Thor is again the main character in the poem *Hymiskviða*, where, after the gods have been hunting and have eaten their prey, they have an urge to drink. They "sh[ake] the twigs" and interpret what they say. The gods decide that they would find suitable cauldrons at *Ægir's* home. Thor arrives at *Ægir's* home and finds him to be cheerful, looks into his eyes, and tells him that he must prepare feasts for the gods. Annoyed, *Ægir* tells Thor that the gods must first bring to him a suitable cauldron to brew ale in. The gods search but find no such cauldron anywhere. However, *Týr* tells Thor that he may have a solution; east of *Élivágar* lives *Hymir*, and he owns such a deep kettle.^[28]

So, after Thor secures his goats at *Egil's* home, Thor and *Týr* go to *Hymir's* hall in search of a cauldron large enough to brew ale for them all. They arrive, and *Týr* sees his nine-hundred-headed grandmother and his gold-clad mother, the latter of which welcomes them with a horn. After *Hymir*—who is not happy to see Thor—comes in from the cold outdoors, *Týr's* mother helps them find a properly strong cauldron. Thor eats a big meal of two oxen (all the rest eat but one), and then goes to sleep. In the morning, he awakes and informs *Hymir* that he wants to go fishing the following evening, and that he will catch plenty of food, but that he needs bait. *Hymir* tells him to go get some bait from his pasture, which he expects should not be a problem for Thor. Thor goes out, finds *Hymir's* best ox, and rips its head off.^[29]

After a lacuna in the manuscript of the poem, *Hymiskviða* abruptly picks up again with Thor and *Hymir* in a boat, out at sea. *Hymir* catches a few whales at once, and Thor baits his line with the head of the ox. Thor casts his line and the monstrous serpent *Jörmungandr* bites. Thor pulls the serpent on board, and violently slams him in the head with his hammer. *Jörmungandr* shrieks, and a noisy commotion is heard from underwater before another lacuna appears in the manuscript.^[30]

After the second lacuna, *Hymir* is sitting in the boat, unhappy and totally silent, as they row back to shore. On shore, *Hymir* suggests that Thor should help him carry a whale back to his farm. Thor picks both the boat and the whales up, and carries it all back to *Hymir's* farm. After Thor successfully smashes a crystal goblet by throwing it at *Hymir's*



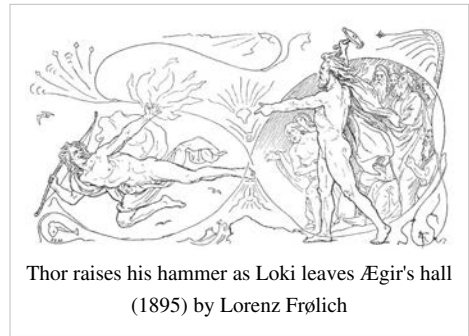
Thor wades through a river while the *Æsir* ride across the bridge *Bifröst* (1895) by Lorenz Frølich



Týr looks on as Thor discovers that one of his goats is lame in the leg (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

head on Týr's mother's suggestion, Thor and Týr are given the cauldron. Týr cannot lift it, but Thor manages to roll it, and so with it they leave. Some distance from Hymir's home, an army of many-headed beings led by Hymir attacks the two, but are killed by the hammer of Thor. Although one of his goats is lame in the leg, the two manage to bring the cauldron back, have plenty of ale, and so, from then on, return to Ægir's for more every winter.^[31]

In the poem *Lokasenna*, the half-god Loki angrily flyts with the gods in the sea entity Ægir's hall. Thor does not attend the event, however, as he is away in the east for unspecified purposes. Towards the end of the poem, the flyting turns to Sif, Thor's wife, whom Loki then claims to have slept with. The god Freyr's servant Beyla interjects, and says that, since all of the mountains are shaking, she thinks that Thor is on his way home. Beyla adds that Thor will bring peace to the quarrel, to which Loki responds with insults.^[32]



Thor raises his hammer as Loki leaves Ægir's hall (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Thor arrives and tells Loki to be silent, and threatens to rip Loki's head from his body with his hammer. Loki asks Thor why he is so angry, and comments that Thor will not be so daring to fight "the wolf" (Fenrir) when it eats Odin (a reference to the foretold events of Ragnarök). Thor again tells him to be silent, and threatens to throw him into the sky, where he will never be seen again. Loki says that Thor should not brag of his time in the east, as he once crouched in fear in the thumb of a glove (a story involving deception by the magic of Útgarda-Loki, recounted in the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*)—which, he comments, "was hardly like Thor". Thor again tells him to be silent, threatening to break every bone in Loki's body. Loki responds that he intends to live a while yet, and again insults Thor with references to his encounter with Útgarda-Loki. Thor responds with a fourth call to be silent, and threatens to send Loki to Hel. At Thor's final threat, Loki gives in, commenting that only for Thor will he leave the hall, for "I know alone that you do strike", and the poem continues.^[33]

In the comedic poem *Þrymskviða*, Thor again plays a central role. In the poem, Thor wakes and finds that his powerful hammer, Mjöllnir, is missing. Thor turns to Loki, and tells him that nobody knows that the hammer has been stolen. The two go to the dwelling of the goddess Freyja, and so that he may attempt to find Mjöllnir, Thor asks her if he may borrow her feather cloak. Freyja agrees, and says she would lend it to Thor even if it were made of silver or gold, and Loki flies off, the feather cloak whistling.^[34]



Thor is unhappily dressed by the goddess Freyja and her attendants as herself in *Ah, what a lovely maid it is!* (1902) by Elmer Boyd Smith

In Jötunheimr, the jötnunn Þrymr sits on a barrow, plaiting golden collars for his female dogs, and trimming the manes of his horses. Þrymr sees Loki, and asks what could be amiss among the Æsir and the elves; why is Loki alone in Jötunheimr? Loki responds that he has bad news for both the elves and the Æsir—that Thor's hammer, Mjöllnir, is gone. Þrymr says that he has hidden Mjöllnir eight leagues beneath the earth, from which it will be retrieved, but only if Freyja is brought to him as his wife. Loki flies off, the feather cloak whistling, away from Jötunheimr and back to the court of the gods.^[34]

Thor asks Loki if his efforts were successful, and that Loki should tell him while he is still in the air as "tales often escape a sitting man, and the man lying down often barks out lies." Loki states that it was indeed an effort, and also a success, for he has discovered that Þrymr has the

hammer, but that it cannot be retrieved unless Freyja is brought to Þrymr as his wife. The two return to Freyja and tell her to put on a bridal head dress, as they will drive her to Jötunheimr. Freyja, indignant and angry, goes into a

rage, causing all of the halls of the Æsir to tremble in her anger, and her necklace, the famed Brísingamen, falls from her. Freyja pointedly refuses.^[35]

As a result, the gods and goddesses meet and hold a thing to discuss and debate the matter. At the thing, the god Heimdallr puts forth the suggestion that, in place of Freyja, Thor should be dressed as the bride, complete with jewels, women's clothing down to his knees, a bridal head-dress, and the necklace Brísingamen. Thor rejects the idea, yet Loki interjects that this will be the only way to get back Mjöllnir. Loki points out that, without Mjöllnir, the jötnar will be able to invade and settle in Asgard. The gods dress Thor as a bride, and Loki states that he will go with Thor as his maid, and that the two shall drive to Jötunheimr together.^[36]

After riding together in Thor's goat-driven chariot, the two, disguised, arrive in Jötunheimr. Þrymr commands the jötnar in his hall to spread straw on the benches, for Freyja has arrived to be his wife. Þrymr recounts his treasured animals and objects, stating that Freyja was all that he was missing in his wealth.^[37]

Early in the evening, the disguised Loki and Thor meet with Þrymr and the assembled jötnar. Thor eats and drinks ferociously, consuming entire animals and three casks of mead. Þrymr finds the behaviour at odds with his impression of Freyja, and Loki, sitting before Þrymr and appearing as a "very shrewd maid", makes the excuse that "Freyja's" behaviour is due to her having not consumed anything for eight entire days before arriving due to her eagerness to arrive. Þrymr then lifts "Freyja's" veil and wants to kiss "her". Terrifying eyes stare back at him, seemingly burning with fire. Loki says that this is because "Freyja" has not slept for eight nights in her eagerness.^[37]

The "wretched sister" of the jötnar appears, asks for a bridal gift from "Freyja", and the jötnar bring out Mjöllnir to "sanctify the bride", to lay it on her lap, and marry the two by "the hand" of the goddess Vár. Thor laughs internally when he sees the hammer, takes hold of it, strikes Þrymr, beats all of the jötnar, kills their "older sister", and so gets his hammer back.^[38]

In the poem *Alvíssmál*, Thor tricks a dwarf, Alvíss, to his doom upon finding that he seeks to wed his daughter (unnamed, possibly Þrúðr). As the poem starts, Thor meets a dwarf who talks about getting married. Thor finds the dwarf repulsive and, apparently, realizes that the bride is his daughter. Thor comments that the wedding agreement was made among the gods while Thor was gone, and that the dwarf must seek his consent. To do so, Thor says, Alvíss must tell him what he wants to know about all of the worlds that the dwarf has visited. In a long question and answer session, Alvíss does exactly that; he describes natural features as they are known in the languages of various races of beings in the world, and gives an amount of cosmological lore.^[39]

However, the question and answer session turns out to be a ploy by Thor, as, although Thor comments that he has truly never seen anyone with more wisdom in their breast, Thor has managed to delay the dwarf enough for the Sun to turn him to stone; "day dawns on you now, dwarf, now sun shines on the hall".^[40]

In the poem *Hyndluljóð*, Freyja offers to the jötnunn woman Hyndla to blót (sacrifice) to Thor so that she may be protected, and comments that Thor does not care much for jötnunn women.^[41]



In *Sun Shines in the Hall* (1908) by W.G. Collingwood, Thor clasps the hand of his daughter and chuckles at the "all-wise" dwarf, whom he has outwitted

Prose Edda, Heimskringla, and sagas

In the prologue to his *Prose Edda*, Snorri Sturluson euhemerises Thor as a prince of Troy, and the son of king Memnon by Troana, a daughter of Priam. Thor, also known as *Tror*, is said to have married the prophetic Sibyl (identified with Sif). Thor is further said here to have been raised in Thrace by a chieftain named Lorikus, whom he later slew to assume the title of "King of Thrace", to have had hair "fairer than gold", and to have been strong enough to lift ten bearskins.

The name of the *aesir* is explained as "men from Asia," *Asgard* being the "Asian city" (i.e., Troy). Alternatively, Troy is in *Tyrkland* (Turkey, i.e., Asia Minor), and *Asialand* is Scythia, where Thor founded a new city named *Asgard*. Odin is a remote descendant of Thor, removed by twelve generations, who led an expedition across Germany, Denmark and Sweden to Norway.

In the *Prose Edda*, Thor is mentioned in all four books; *Prologue*, *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál*, and *Háttatal*.

In *Heimskringla*, composed in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, Thor or statues of Thor are mentioned in *Ynglinga saga*, *Hákonar saga Góða*, *Ólafs saga Tryggvason*, and *Ólafs saga helga*[42]. In *Ynglinga saga* chapter 5, a heavily Euhemerized account of the gods is provided, where Thor is described as having been a gothi—a pagan priest—who was given by Odin (who himself is explained away as having been an exceedingly powerful magic-wielding chieftain from the east) a dwelling in the mythical location of *Þrúðvangr*, in what is now Sweden. The saga narrative adds that numerous names—at the time of the narrative, popularly in use—were derived from *Thor*.^[43]

Modern folklore

Tales about Thor, or influenced by native traditions regarding Thor, continued into the modern period, particularly in Scandinavia. Writing in the 19th century, scholar Jacob Grimm records various phrases surviving into Germanic languages that refer to the god, such as the Norwegian *Thorsvarme* ("Thor's warmth") for lightning and the Swedish *godgubben åfar* ("The good old (fellow) is taking a ride") when it thunders. Grimm comments that, at times, Scandinavians often "no longer liked to utter the god's real name, or they wished to extol his fatherly goodness [...]".^[44]

Thor remained pictured as a red-bearded figure, as evidenced by the Danish rhyme that yet referred to him as *Thor med sit lange skæg* ("Thor with the long beard") and the Frisian curse *diis ruadhiiret donner regiir!* ("let red-haired thunder see to that!").^[44]

A Scandinavian folk belief that lightning frightens away trolls and jötnar appears in numerous Scandinavian folktales, and may be a late reflection of Thor's role in fighting such beings. In connection, the lack of trolls and ettins in modern Scandinavia is explained as a result of the "accuracy and efficiency of the lightning strokes".^[45]

Archaeological record

Runestone invocations and image stones

On four (or possibly five) runestones, an invocation to Thor appears that reads "May Thor hallow (these runes/this monument)!" The invocation appears thrice in Denmark (DR 110, DR 209, and DR 220), and a single time in Västergötland (Vg 150), Sweden. A fifth appearance may possibly occur on a runestone found in Södermanland, Sweden (Sö 140), but the reading is contested. Pictorial representations of Thor's hammer also appear on a total of five runestones found in Denmark and in the Swedish counties of Västergötland and Södermanland.^[46]

Three stones depict Thor fishing for the serpent Jörmungandr; the Hørdum stone in Thy, Denmark, the Altuna Runestone in Altuna, Sweden, one of the Ardre image stones (stone VII) from Gotland, Sweden, and the Gosforth Cross in Gosforth, England.



The Sönder Kirkeby Runestone (DR 220), a runestone from Denmark bearing the "May Thor hallow these runes!" inscription



The Altuna stone from Sweden, one of four stones depicting Thor's fishing trip



The Gosforth depiction, one of four stones depicting Thor's fishing trip



Runes \times þur : uiki \times on the Velande Runestone, Sweden, meaning "may Þórr hallow."

Hammer pendants and Eyrarland Statue

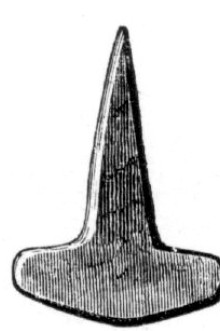
Pendants in a distinctive shape representing the hammer of Thor (known in Norse sources as Mjöllnir) have frequently been unearthed in Viking Age Scandinavian burials. The hammers were worn as a symbol of Norse pagan faith and as a symbol of opposition to Christianization; a response to crosses worn by Christians. Casting moulds have been found for the production of both Thor's hammers and Christian crucifixes, and at least one example of a combined crucifix and hammer has been discovered.^[47] The Eyrarland Statue, a copper alloy figure found near Akureyri, Iceland dating from around the 11th century, may depict Thor seated and gripping his hammer.^[48]



Drawing of a silver-gilt Thor's hammer found in Scania, Sweden



Drawing of a 4.6 cm gold-plated silver Mjöllnir pendant found at Bredsättra on Öland, Sweden



Drawing of a silver Thor's hammer amulet found in Fitjar, Hordaland, Norway



Drawing of Thor's hammer amulet from Mandemark, Møn, Denmark

Swastikas

The swastika symbol has been identified as representing the hammer or lightning of Thor.^[49] Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson (1965) comments on the usage of the swastika as a symbol of Thor:

The protective sign of the hammer was worn by women, as we know from the fact that it has been found in women's graves. It seems to have been used by the warrior also, in the form of the swastika. [...] Primarily it appears to have had connections with light and fire, and to have been linked with the sun-wheel. It may have been on account of Thor's association with lightning that this sign was used as an alternative to the hammer, for it is found on memorial stones in Scandinavia besides inscriptions to Thor. When we find it on the pommel of a warrior's sword and on his sword-belt, the assumption is that the warrior was placing himself under the Thunder God's protection.^[50]



Detail of swastika on the 9th century Snoldelev Stone

Swastikas appear on various Germanic objects stretching from the Migration Period to the Viking Age, such as the 3rd century Værlose Fibula (DR EM85;123) from Zealand, Denmark; the Gothic spearhead from Brest-Litovsk, Belarus; numerous Migration Period bracteates; cremation urns from early Anglo-Saxon England; the 8th century Sæbø sword from Sogn, Norway; and the 9th century Snoldelev Stone (DR 248) from Ramsø, Denmark.

Eponymy and toponymy

Numerous place names in Scandinavia contain the Old Norse name *Þórr*. The identification of these place names as pointing to religious significance is complicated by the aforementioned common usage of *Þórr* as a personal name element. Cultic significance may only be assured in place names containing the elements *-vé* (signifying the location of a vé, a type of pagan Germanic shrine), *-hof* (a structure used for religious purposes, see heathen hofs), and *-lundr* (a holy grove). The place name *Þórslundr* is recorded with particular frequency in Denmark (and has direct cognates in Norse settlements in Ireland, such as *Coill Tomair*), whereas *Þórshof* appears particularly often in southern Norway.^[4]

In English placenames, Old English *Thunor* (in contrast with the Old Norse form of the name, later introduced to the Danelaw) left comparatively few traces. Examples include Thundersley, from **Thunores hlæw* and *Thurstable* (Old English "Thunor's pillar").^[4] F. M. Stenton noted that such placenames were apparently restricted to Saxon and Jutish territory and not found in Anglian areas.^{[11][51]}

In what is now Germany, locations named after Thor are sparsely recorded, but an amount of locations called *Donnersberg* (German "Donner's mountain") may derive their name from the deity *Donner*, the southern Germanic form of the god's name.^[4]

In as late as the 19th century in Iceland, a specific breed of fox was known as *holtþórr* ("Thor of the holt"), likely due to the red coat of the breed.^[52] In Sweden, 19th century folk belief is recorded as having held that smooth, wedge-shaped stones found in the earth (Thunderstones) are called *Thorwiggar* ("Thor's wedges"), and whose origins were explained as having been once hurled at a troll by the god Thor. Similarly, meteorites may be



A city limit sign marking Thorsager ("Thor's Acre"), Denmark

considered memorials to Thor in folk tradition due to their sheer weight. On the Swedish island of Gotland, a species of beetle (*scarabæus stercorarius*), was named after the god; the *Thorbagge*. When the beetle is found turned upside down and one flips it over, Thor's favor may be gained. In other regions of Sweden the name of the beetle appears to have been demonized with Christianization, where the insect came to be known as *Thordedjefvul* or *Thordyfvel* (both meaning "Thor-devil").^[53]

Origin, theories, and interpretations

Scholars have theorized on Thor's role in Germanic religion and the origins thereof. Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson summarizes that:

The cult of Thor was linked up with men's habitation and possessions, and with well-being of the family and community. This included the fruitfulness of the fields, and Thor, although pictured primarily as a storm god in the myths, was also concerned with the fertility and preservation of the seasonal round. In our own times, little stone axes from the distance past have been used as fertility symbols and placed by the farmer in the holes made by the drill to receive the first seed of spring. Thor's marriage with Sif of the golden hair, about which we hear little in the myths, seems to be a memory of the ancient symbol of divine marriage between sky god and earth goddess, when he comes to earth in the thunderstorm and the storm brings the rain which makes the fields fertile. In this way Thor, as well as Odin, may be seen to continue the cult of the sky god which was known in the Bronze Age.^[54]

Modern influence

In modern times, Thor continues to be referenced in popular culture. Starting with F. J. Klopstock's 1776 ode to Thor, *Wir und Sie*, Thor has been the subject of various poems, including Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger's 1807 epic poem *Thors reise til Jotunheim* and, by the same author, three more poems (*Hammeren hentes*, *Thors fiskeri*, and *Thor besøger Hymir*) collected in his 1819 *Nordens Guder*; *Thors Trunk* (1859) by Wilhelm Hertz; the 1820 satirical poem *Mythologierne eller Gudatvisten* by J. M. Stiernstolpe; *Nordens Mythologie eller Sinnbilled-Sprog* (1832) by N.F.S. Grundtvig; the poem *Harmen* by Thor Thorild; *Der Mythus von Thor* (1836) by Ludwig Uhland; *Der Hammer Thors* (1915) by W. Schulte v. Brühl; Hans Friedrich Blunck's *Herr Dunningar und die Bauern* (published in *Märchen und Sagen*, 1937); and *Die Heimholung des Hammers* (1977) by H. C. Artmann.^[55] He also features in two works by Rudyard Kipling: *Letters of Travel: 1892-1913* and "Cold Iron" in *Rewards and Fairies*.



An early 20th century Danish bicycle head badge depicting Thor

Artists have depicted Thor in painting and sculpture, including Henry Fuseli's 1780 painting *Thor in Hymirs Boot bekämpft die Midgardschlange*; H. E. Freund's 1821–1822 statue *Thor*; B. E. Fogelberg's 1844 marble statue *Thor*; M. E. Winge's 1880 charcoal drawing *Thors Kampf mit den Riesen*; K. Ehrenberg's 1883 drawing *Odin, Thor und Magni*; several illustrations by E. Doepler published in Wilhelm Ranisch's 1901 *Walhall (Thor; Thor und die Midgardschlange; Thor den Hrungnir bekämpfend; Thor bei dem Riesen Prym als Braut verkleidet; Thor bei Hymir; Thor bei Skrymir; Thor den Fluß Wimur durchwatend)*; J. C. Dollman's 1909 drawings *Thor and the Mountain* and *Sif and Thor*; G. Poppe's painting *Thor*; E. Pottner's 1914 drawing *Thors Schatten*; H. Natter's marble statue *Thor*; and U. Brember's 1977 illustrations to *Die Heimholung des Hammers* by H. C. Artmann.^[55]

Swedish chemist Jöns Jacob Berzelius (1779–1848) discovered a chemical element that he named after Thor; thorium.^[56] In 1962, American comic book writer Stan Lee and his brother Larry Lieber, together with Jack Kirby,

created the Marvel Comics superhero Thor, which they based on the god of the same name.^[57] This character stars in the 2011 Marvel Studios film *Thor* and the upcoming *Thor: The Dark World* and also appears in the 2012 film *The Avengers* and its associated animated series.

Notes

- [1] On the red beard and the use of "Redbeard" as an epithet for Thor, see H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, 1964, repr. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990, ISBN 0-14-013627-4, p. 85 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=8RYSAQAIAAJ&q=Thorhall+boasted+to+his+Christian+companions+:+Redbeard+has+got+the+better+of+your+Christ+!""&dq=Thorhall+boasted+to+his+Christian+companions+:+Redbeard+has+got+the+better+of+your+Christ+!""&hl=en&ei=ppm5TYL3F5P0swOWm_XlBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&sqi=2&ved=0CCKQ6AEwAA](http://books.google.com/books?id=8RYSAQAIAAJ&q=Thorhall+boasted+to+his+Christian+companions+:+Redbeard+has+got+the+better+of+your+Christ+!)), citing the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* in *Flateyjarbók*, *Saga of Erik the Red*, and *Flóamanna saga*. The Prologue to the *Prose Edda* says ambiguously that "His hair is more beautiful than gold."
- [2] Orel (2003:429).
- [3] Simek (2007:333).
- [4] Simek (2007:321).
- [6] Birley (1999:107).
- [7] Birley (1999:42 and 106—107).
- [8] Simek (2007:140—142).
- [9] Simek (2007:235—236).
- [10] Simek (2007:238) and Robinson (1916:63).
- [11] Turville-Petre (1964:99)
- [12] See North (1998:238—241) for *þunnorad* and tales regarding Thunor, see Encyclopædia Britannica (1910:608) regarding usage of *Thunor* as an Old English gloss for *Jupiter* and *Tiw* employed as a gloss for *Mars*.
- [13] Simek (2007:276).
- [14] Turville-Petre (1964:99—100); variant texts in mss. Stowe 944, Cotton Caligula A. xiv, London, Lambeth Palace 427.
- [15] Orchard (1997:168—169).
- [16] North (1998:236).
- [17] McLeod, Mees (2006:120).
- [18] McLeod, Mees (2006:28).
- [19] McLeod, Mees (2006:30).
- [20] Dumézil (1973:125).
- [21] Larrington (1999:320).
- [22] Thorpe (1907:7).
- [23] Bellows (1923:23).
- [24] Larrington (1999:11—12).
- [25] Larrington (1999:57).
- [26] Larrington (1999:66).
- [27] Larrington (1999:69-75).
- [28] Larrington (1999:78—79).
- [29] Larrington (1999:79—80).
- [30] Larrington (1999:81).
- [31] Larrington (1999:82—83).
- [32] Larrington (1999:84 and 94).
- [33] Larrington (1999:94—95).
- [34] Larrington (1999:97).
- [35] Larrington (1999:98).
- [36] Larrington (1999:99).
- [37] Larrington (1999:100).
- [38] Larrington (1999:101).
- [39] Larrington (1999:109—113). For Þrúðr hypothesis, see Orchard (1997:164—165).
- [40] Larrington (1999:113).
- [41] Larrington (1999:254).
- [42] http://toolserver.org/%7EEdispenser/cgi-bin/dab_solver.py?page=Thor&editintro=Template:Disambiguation_needed/editintro&client=Template:Dn
- [43] Hollander (2007:10—11).
- [44] Grimm (1882:166—177).

- [45] See Lindow (1978:89), but noted as early as Thorpe (1851:154) who states "The dread entertained by Trolls for thunder dates from the time of paganism, Thor [. . .] being the deadly foe of their race".
- [46] Sawyer (2003:128).
- [47] Simek (2007:219) and Orchard (1997:114).
- [48] Orchard (1997:161).
- [49] The symbol was identified as such since 19th century scholarship; examples include Worsaae (1882:169) and Greg (1884:6).
- [50] Davidson (1965:12—13).
- [51] Stenton, Frank (1941). "The Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies: Anglo-Saxon Heathenism". *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, XXIII, 1–24, pp. 17– ; (1971). *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford History of England 2, 1943, 3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, ISBN 9780198217169, pp. 99–100.
- [52] Grimm (1882:177).
- [53] Thorpe (1851:51—54).
- [54] Davidson (1975:72).
- [55] Simek (2007:323).
- [56] Morris (1992:2212).
- [57] Reynolds (1994:54).

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Týr

Týr (/ˈtɛər/^[1] Old Norse: *Týr* [tyːr]) is a god associated with law and heroic glory in Norse mythology, portrayed as one-handed. Corresponding names in other Germanic languages are Gothic *Teiws*, Old English *Tīw* and Old High German *Ziu* and *Cyo*, all from Proto-Germanic **Tīwaz* (**Tē₂waz*). The Latinised name is *Tius* or *Tio*.^[2]

In the late Icelandic Eddas, Tyr is portrayed, alternately, as the son of Odin (Prose Edda) or of Hymir (Poetic Edda), while the origins of his name and his possible relationship to Tuisto (see Tacitus' *Germania*) suggest he was once considered the father of the gods and head of the pantheon, since his name is ultimately cognate to that of **Dyeus* (cf. *Dyaus*), the reconstructed chief deity in Indo-European religion. It is assumed that *Tīwaz* was overtaken in popularity and in authority by both Odin and Thor at some point during the Migration Age, as Odin shares his role as God of war.

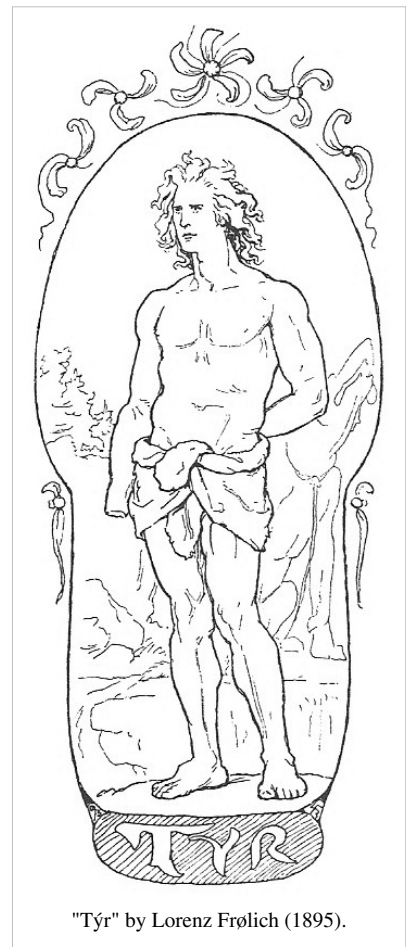
Tiw was equated with Mars in the *interpretatio germanica*. Tuesday is in fact "Tīw's Day" (also in Alemannic *Zischtig* from *zīes tag*), translating *dies Martis*.

Name

Old Norse *Týr*, literally "god", plural *tívar* "gods", comes from Proto-Germanic **Tē₂waz* (cf. Old English *Tīw*, Old High German *Zīo*), which continues Proto-Indo-European **deiwós* "celestial being, god" (cf. Welsh *duw*, Latin *deus*, Lithuanian *diēvas*, Sanskrit *dēvá*, Avestan *daēvō* "demon"). And **deiwós* is based in **dei-*, **deyā-*, **dīdyā-*, meaning 'to shine'.^[3]

The earliest attestation for Týr's continental counterpart occurs in Gothic *tyz* "the *t*-rune" (𐌹) in the 9th-century *Codex Vindobonensis* 795.^[4] The name is later attested in Old High German as *Cyo* in the A Wessobrunn prayer ms. of 814. The Negau helmet inscription (2nd century b.c.) may actually record the earliest form, *teiva*, but this interpretation is tentative.

Týr in origin was a generic noun meaning "god", e.g. *Hangatyr*, literally, the "god of the hanged", as one of Odin's names, which was probably inherited from Tyr in his role as god of justice. The name continues on as Norwegian *Ty*, Swedish *Tyr*, Danish *Tyr*, while it remains *Týr* in Modern Icelandic and Faroese.



"Týr" by Lorenz Frølich (1895).

West Germanic Ziu/Tiw/Tiwaz

A gloss to the Wessobrunn prayer names the Alamanni *Cyowari* (worshippers of *Cyo*) and their capital Augsburg *Ciesburc*.^[5]

The *Excerptum ex Gallica Historia* of Ursberg (ca. 1135) records a *dea Ciza* as the patron goddess of Augsburg. According to this account, *Cisaria* was founded by Swabian tribes as a defence against Roman incursions. This *Zisa* would be the female consort of *Ziu*, as *Dione* was of *Zeus*.

The name of Mars Thingsus (*Thincsus*) is found in an inscription on an 3rd century altar from the Roman fort and settlement of Vercovicium at Housesteads in Northumberland, thought to have been erected by Frisian mercenaries stationed at Hadrian's Wall. It is interpreted as "Mars of the Thing".^[6] Here is also worth noting what Tacitus stated in his work *Germania* about capital punishment amongst the Germanic folk; that none could be flogged, imprisoned or executed, not even on order of the warlord, without the consent of the priest; who was himself required to render his judgement in accordance with the will of *the god they believe accompanies them to the field of battle*. In the same source this god is stated being the chief deity.

Tacitus also named the German "Mars" as the primary deity, along with the German "Mercury", associated with the Germanic custom of the disposal of the spoils of war; as practiced from the 4th century BC to the 6th century AD.

In the Old English Rune Poem, the rune that is otherwise named for Tiw in the other rune poems (*Abecedarium Nordmanicum*, Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme, Old Icelandic Rune Poem), is called *tir*, meaning "glory". This rune was inscribed on more Anglo-Saxon cremation urns than any other symbol.

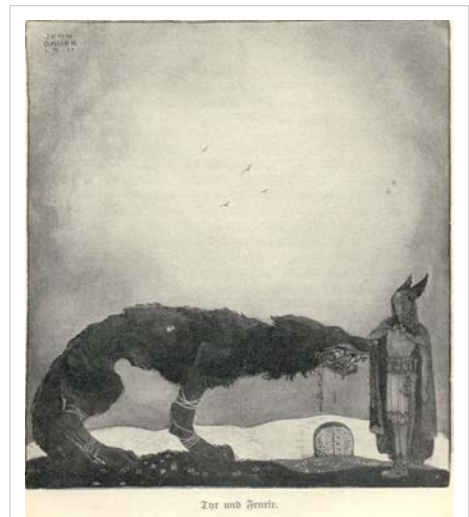
There is sketchy evidence of a consort, in German named *Zisa*: Tacitus mentions one Germanic tribe who worshipped "Isis", and Jacob Grimm pointed to *Cisa/Zisa*, the patroness of Augsburg, in this connection. The name *Zisa* could be derived from *Ziu* etymologically.

North Germanic Tyr

An early depiction of Tyr is found on the IK 190 bracteate found near Trollhättan, Sweden. The figure is shown with long hair, holding a sceptre in his left hand, and with a wolf biting his right.^[7]

According to the Poetic Edda and Prose Edda, at one stage the gods decided to shackle the Fenris wolf (Fenrir), but the beast broke every chain they put upon him. Eventually they had the dwarves make them a magical ribbon called *Gleipnir*. It appeared to be only a silken ribbon but was made of six wondrous ingredients: the sound of a cat's footfall, the beard of a woman, the roots of a mountain, bear's sinews (meaning nerves, sensibility), fish's breath and bird's spittle. The creation of *Gleipnir* is said to be the reason why none of the above exist.^[8] Fenrir sensed the gods' deceit and refused to be bound with it unless one of them put his hand in the wolf's mouth.

Tyr, known for his great wisdom and courage, agreed, and the other gods bound the wolf. After Fenrir had been bound by the gods, he struggled to try to break the rope. Fenrir could not break the ribbon and enraged, bit Tyr's right hand off. When the gods saw that Fenrir was bound they all rejoiced, except Tyr. Fenrir will remain bound until the day of Ragnarök. As a result of this deed, Tyr is called the "Leavings of the Wolf"; which is to be understood as a poetic kenning for glory. After a heartbreaking battle (of Ragnarök) Fenrir swallowed Odin the All-father, whole.



Tyr sacrifices his arm to Fenrir in a 1911 illustration by John Bauer.

According to the Prose version of Ragnarok, Tyr is destined to kill and be killed by Garm, the guard dog of Hel. However, in the two poetic versions of Ragnarok, he goes unmentioned; unless one believes that he is the "Mighty One".

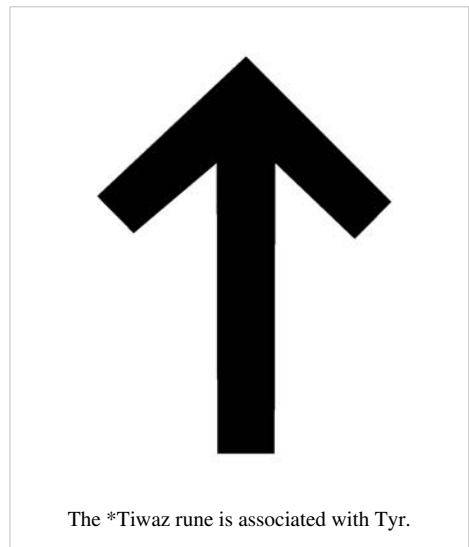
In *Lokasenna*, Tyr is taunted with cuckoldry by Loki, maybe another hint that he had a consort or wife at one time.

In the *Hymiskvidha*, Tyr's father is named as the etin Hymir – the term "Hymir's kin" was used a kenning for etinkind – while his mother goes unnamed, but is otherwise described in terms that befit a goddess. This myth also pairs Tyr with Thor, and draws a comparison between their strength via the lifting of Hymir's cauldron. Thor proves the stronger, but other than Thor's own son, Magni, Tyr is the only deity whose strength is ever questioned in comparison to the Thunderer's.

Tiwaz rune

The *t*-rune ᚛ is named after Tyr, and was identified with this god; the reconstructed Proto-Germanic name is **Tīwaz*. The rune is sometimes also referred to as **Teiwaz*, or spelling variants.

The rune was also compared with Mars as in the Icelandic rune poem:



*Týr er einhendr áss
ok ulfs leifar
ok hofa hilmir.
Mars tiggj.*

Tyr is a one-handed god,
and leavings of the wolf
and prince of temples.

Lexical traces

In the sphere of organized warfare, Tyr/Tiw had become relatively unimportant compared to Odin/Woden in both North and West Germanic by the close of the Migration Age. Traces of the god remain, however, in Tuesday (Old English *tíwesdæg* "Tiw's day"; Old Frisian *tīesdei*, Old High German *zīestag*, Alemannic and Swabian dialect in south west Germany (today) *Zieschdig/Zeischdig*, Old Norse *týsdagr*), named after Tyr in both the North and the West Germanic languages (corresponding to *Martis dies*, dedicated to the Roman god of war and the father-god of Rome, Mars) and also in the names of some plants: Old Norse *Týsfiola* (after the Latin *Viola Martis*), *Týrhialm* (*Aconitum*, one of the most poisonous plants in Europe whose helmet-like shape might suggest a warlike connection) and *Týviðr*, "Tý's wood", Tiveden may also be named after Tyr, or reflecting *Tyr* as a generic word for "god" (i.e., the forest of the gods). In Norway the parish and municipality of Tysnes are named after the god.

German Dienstag and Dutch dinsdag (Tuesday) might be derived from Mars Thingsus, as mentioned above.

Toponyms

- *Dewsbury*, England - possibly *Tiw's Burg*
- *Tuesley*, England - *Tiw's Clearing*
- *Tisvilde*, Sjælland, Denmark - *Tyr's Spring*.
- *Lake Tissø*, near Gørlev, Sjælland, Denmark - *Tyr's Lake*.
- *Thisted*, Jutland, Denmark - *Tyr's Stead*.
- *Tyrol / South Tyrol, Austria / Italy*. Probably through a combination of Tyr-Odal or Tyr-Ull^[9]
- *Tyrsted*, Jutland, Denmark - *Another form of Tyr's Stead*.
- *Tyrseng* ("Tyr's Meadow"), Viby, Jutland, Denmark. Once a stretch of meadow near a stream called *Dødeå* ("Stream of the Dead" or "Dead Stream"), where ballgame courts now exist. Viby contained another theonym; *Onsholt* ("Odin's Holt") and religious practices associated with Odin and Tyr may have occurred in these places. A spring dedicated to Holy Niels that was likely a Christianization of prior indigenous pagan practice also exists in Viby and the city itself may mean "the settlement by the sacred site". Traces of sacrifices going back 2,500 years have been found in Viby.^[10]
- *Tiveden*, Sweden - *Tyr's Woods*
- *Tysnes*, Norway - *Tyr's Headland*



Týr, depicted here with both hands intact, before the encounter with Fenrir is identified with Mars in this illustration from an 18th century Icelandic manuscript.

Personal names

A number of Icelandic male names are derived from *Týr*. Apart from *Týr* itself: *Angantýr*, *Bryntýr*, *Hjálmtýr*, *Hrafnkýr*, *Sigtýr*, *Valtýr* and *Vigtýr*. When *Týr* is used in this way, joined to another name, it takes on a more general meaning of "a god" instead of referring to the god *Týr*. For example, *Hrafnkýr* "raven-god" and *Valtýr* "god of the slain" are Old Norse names of Odin.

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- [2] Adapted from the work of Dr. W. Wägner. By M. W. MacDowall. *Asgard and the Gods. The Tales and Traditions of our Northern Ancestors* ([http://nsl-archiv.com/Buecher/Fremde-Sprachen/MacDowell, M.W. - Asgard and the Gods - The Tales and Traditions of our Northern Ancestors \(EN, 1884, 317 S., Text\).pdf](http://nsl-archiv.com/Buecher/Fremde-Sprachen/MacDowell,%20M.W.-%20Asgard%20and%20the%20Gods%20-%20The%20Tales%20and%20Traditions%20of%20our%20Northern%20Ancestors%20(EN,%201884,%20317%20S.,%20Text).pdf)).
- [3] Klein, E., "deity", *Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Elsevier Publishing, 1966), pp. 417—8.
- [4] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/grimmst/009_03.php)
- [5] Peter Buchholz, *Perspectives for Historical Research in Germanic Religion*, *History of Religions*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1968), 127.
- [6] Vercovicium, the Roman fort and settlement at Housesteads (<http://www.roman-britain.org/places/vercovicium.htm>)
- [7] Karl Hauck in: Heizmann and Axboe (eds.), *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Volkerwanderungszeit: Auswertung Und Neufunde*, Walter de Gruyter, 2011, p. 29. Karl Hauck in: Hoops and BeckK (eds.), *Kontinuität und Brüche in der Religionsgeschichte*, Walter de Gruyter, 2001, 284-288.
- [8] Snorri Sturluson. *The Prose Edda*

- [9] Horst Pirchl-Hussl, Elmar Stöttner, Ulrich Lamm, *Ist der Name Tirol ein Name aus der Völkerwanderungszeit?* <http://www.dorftirol.com/tirol.htm>
- [10] Damm, Annette. Editor. (2005) *Viking Aros*, pages 42-45. Moesgård Museum ISBN 87-87334-63-1



External links

- Runeberg Projekt – Swedish etymologic Dictionary (<http://runeberg.org/svetym/1129.html>)

Ullr

In early Germanic paganism, **Wulþuz* ("glory"; Old Norse *Ullr*) appears to have been a major god, or an epithet of an important god, in prehistoric times. The term *wolþu-* "glory", possibly in reference to the god, is attested on the 3rd century Thorsberg chape (as *owlþu-*), but medieval Icelandic sources have only sparse material on Old Norse *Ullr*.

The Old English cognate *wuldor* means "glory" but is not used as a proper name, although it figures frequently in kennings for the Christian God such as *wuldres cyning* "king of glory", *wuldorfæder* "glory-father" or *wuldor alwealda* "glorious all-ruler".

The medieval Norse word was Latinized as **Ollerus**. The Modern Icelandic form is *Ullur*. In the mainland Scandinavian languages the modern form is *Ull*.



The Böksta Runestone shows a figure on skis and with a bow, possibly Ullr.

Archaeological record

Thorsberg chape

The Thorsberg chape (a metal piece belonging to a scabbard found in the Thorsberg moor) bears an Elder Futhark inscription, one of the earliest known altogether, dating to roughly AD 200.

owlþuþewaz / niwajmariz

The first element *owlþu*, for *wolþu-*, means "glory", "glorious one", Old Norse *Ullr*, Old English *wuldor*. The second element, *-þewaz*, means "slave, servant". The whole compound is a personal name or title, "servant of the glorious one", "servant/priest of Ullr". *Niwajmariz* means "well-honored".

Lilla Ullevi

In Lilla Ullevi ("little shrine of Ullr"^[1]) north of Stockholm archaeologists excavated during 2007 the site of a religious worshipping ground for Ullr (from 500 to 800 AD).^[1] ^[2] The well-preserved state of the shrine may be unique in Scandinavia: it was shaped like a platform with two "arms" of rocks having four erected poles in front of it where there was probably a wooden platform.^[1] Moreover, the archaeologists found 65 "amulet rings" in the area; rings are reported to have been used when people swore oaths.^[1] They may be the rings of Ullr^[2] that are referred to in the eddic poem *Atlakviða*.

Gesta Danorum

In Saxo Grammaticus' 12th century work *Gesta Danorum*, where gods appear euhemerized, *Ollerus* is described as a cunning wizard with magical means of transportation:



Ollerus traverses the sea on his magic bone. 16th century woodcut

Fama est, illum adeo praestigiarum usu calluisse, ut ad traicienda maria osse, quod diris carminibus obsignavisset, navigii loco uteretur nec eo segnius quam remigio praeiecta aquarum obstacula superaret. [3]

The story goes that he was such a cunning wizard that he used a certain bone, which he had marked with awful spells, wherewith to cross the seas, instead of a vessel; and that by this bone he passed over the waters that barred his way as quickly as by rowing.— Elton's translation

When Odin was exiled, Ollerus was chosen to take his place. Ollerus ruled under the name Odin for ten years until the true Odin was called back, whereupon Ollerus retired to Sweden where he was slain by Danes.

Poetic Edda

Ullr is mentioned in the poem *Grímnismál* where the homes of individual gods are recounted. The English versions shown here are by Thorpe.



This illustration from an 18th century Icelandic manuscript shows Ullr on his skis and with his bow.

Ýdalir heita	Ydalir it is called,
þar er Ullr hefir	where Ullr has
sér of görva sali.	himself a dwelling made.

The name *Ýdalir*, meaning "yew dales", is not otherwise attested. The yew was an important material in the making of bows, and the word *ýr*, "yew", is often used metonymically to refer to bows. It seems likely that the name *Ýdalir* is connected with the idea of Ullr as a bow-god.

Another strophe in *Grímnismál* also mentions Ullr.

Ullar hylli	Ullr's and all the gods'
hefr ok allra goða	favour shall have,
hverr er tekr fyrstr á funa,	whoever first shall look to the fire;
því at opnir heimar	for open will the dwelling be,
verða of ása sonum,	to the Æsir's sons,
þá er hefja af hvera.	when the kettles are lifted off.

The strophe is obscure but may refer to some sort of religious ceremony. It seems to indicate Ullr as an important god.

The last reference to Ullr in the *Poetic Edda* is found in *Atlakviða*:

Svá gangi þér, Atli,	So be it with thee, Atli!
sem þú við Gunnar áttir	as toward Gunnar thou hast held
eiða oft of svarða	the oft-sworn oaths,
ok ár of nefnda,	formerly taken -
at sól inni suðrhöllu	by the southward verging sun,
ok at Sigtýs bergi,	and by Sigtý's hill,
hölkvi hvílbeðjar	the secluded bed of rest,
ok at hringi Ullar.	and by Ullr's ring.

Both *Atlakviða* and *Grímnismál* are often considered to be among the oldest extant Eddic poems. It may not be a coincidence that they are the only ones to refer to Ullr. Again we seem to find Ullr associated with some sort of ceremony, this time that of swearing an oath by a ring, a practice associated with Thor in later sources. During an excavation in 2007, of a Vendel era shrine for Ullr north of Stockholm, many symbolic rings were discovered, which are considered to represent Ullr's ring (see the archaeology section below).^[2]

Prose Edda

In chapter 31 of *Gylfaginning* in the Prose Edda, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, Ullr is referred to as a son of Sif (with a father unrecorded in surviving sources) and as a stepson of Sif's husband; the major Germanic god Thor:

Ullr heitir einn, sonr Sifjar, stjúpsonr Þórs. Hann er bogmaðr svá góðr ok skíðfærr svá at engi má við hann keppask. Hann er ok fagr álitum ok hefir hermanns atgervi. Á hann er ok gott at heita í einvígi. [4]

Ullr, Sif's son and Thór's stepson, is one [too]. He is such a good archer and ski-runner that no one can rival him. He is beautiful to look at as well and he has all the characteristics of a warrior. It is also good to call on him in duels.— *Young's translation*

In *Skáldskaparmál*, the second part of the Prose Edda, Snorri mentions Ullr again in a discussion of kennings. Snorri informs his readers that Ullr can be called ski-god, bow-god, hunting-god and shield-god. In turn a shield can be called Ullr's ship. Despite these tantalising tidbits Snorri relates no myths about Ullr. It seems likely that he didn't know any, the god having faded from memory.

Skaldic poetry

Snorri's note that a shield can be called Ullr's ship is borne out by surviving skaldic poetry with kennings such as *askr Ullar*, *far Ullar* and *kjóll Ullar* all meaning Ullr's ship and referring to shields. While the origin of this kenning is unknown it could be connected with the identity of Ullr as a ski-god. Early skis, or perhaps sleds, might have been reminiscent of shields. A late Icelandic composition, *Laufás-Edda*, offers the prosaic explanation that Ullr's ship was called *Skjöldr*, "Shield".

The name of Ullr is also common in warrior kennings, where it is used as other god names are.

Ullr brands – Ullr of sword – warrior

rand-Ullr – shield-Ullr – warrior

Ullr almsíma – Ullr of bowstring – warrior [5]

Three skaldic poems, *Pórsdrápa*, *Haustlög* and a fragment by Eysteinn Valdason, refer to Thor as Ullr's stepfather, confirming Snorri's information.

Etymology

The name *Ullr* is probably descended from the same word as Old English *wuldor* and the Gothic *wulþus*, meaning "glory". The reconstructed Proto-Germanic form is **Wulþuz*.

Ullr's name appears in several important Norwegian and Swedish place names (but not in Denmark or in Iceland). This indicate that Ullr had at some point a religious importance in Scandinavia that is greater than what is immediately apparent from the scant surviving textual references.

Toponymy

Norway

- *Ullarhváll* ("Ullr's hill") - name of an old farm in Oslo.
- *Ullarnes* ("Ullr's headland") - name of an old farm in Rennesøy.
- *Ullarvin* ("Ullr's meadow") - name of four old farms in Hole Oslo, Ullensaker and Øvre Eiker.
- *Ullarøy* ("Ullr's island") - name of four old farms in Skjeberg, Spind, Sør-Odal and Vestre Moland.
- *Ullinsakr* ("Ullin's field") - name of two old farms in Hemsedal and Torpa (old church site).
- *Ullinshof* ("Ullin's temple") - name of three old farms in Nes, Hedmark (old church site), Nes, Akershus and Ullensaker (old church site).
- *Ullinsvangr* ("Ullr's field") - name of an old farm in Ullensvang (old church site).
- *Ullinsvin* ("Ullin's meadow") - name of an old farm in Vågå (old church site).
- *Ullsfjorden* ("Ullr's Fjord") - fjord in Troms county. Commonly believed to be named after Ullr, although there is some uncertainty.

(For a possible nickname **Ringir* for *Ullr* see under the name Ringsaker.)

Sweden

- *Ulleråker* ("Ullr's field") Uppland
- *Ultuna* ("Ullr's town") Uppland
- *Ullared* ("Ull's clearing?") Halland
- *Ullevi* ("Ullr's sanctuary") Västergötland
- *Ullvi* ("Ullr's sanctuary") Västmanland



The coat of arms of Ullensaker displays Ullr as a charge.

- *Ullene* ("Ullr's meadow") Västergötland
- *Ullånger* ("Ullr's bay") Ångermanland
- *Ullan* Värmland, Hagfors springsource lake
- *Värmullen* Värmland, Hagfors
- *Ullsberg* ("Ull's mountain") Värmland, Hagfors

Rydberg's theories

In Viktor Rydberg's idiosyncratic *Teutonic Mythology* Ullr is the son of Sif and Egill-Örvandill, half-brother of Svipdagr-Óðr, nephew of Völundr and a cousin of Skaði. His father, Egill, was the greatest archer in the mythology, and Ullr follows in his father's footsteps. Ullr helped Svipdagr-Eiríkr rescue Freyja from the giants. He also ruled over the Vanir when they held Ásgarðr during the war between the Vanir and the Æsir.

While most of Rydberg's theories are dismissed as fanciful by modern scholars his idea that Ullr is connected with the elves of *Völundarkviða* is not absurd. Both seem associated with skiing and hunting and since Ullr's father is not identified as one of the Æsir he may have been of another race.

Popular reception

Within the winter skiing community of Europe the Old Norse god "Ullr" is considered the Guardian Patron Saint of Skiers (German *Schutzpatron der Skifahrer*). An Ullr medallion or Ullr ski medal, depicting the Scandinavian god Ullr on skis holding a bow and arrow, is widely worn as a talisman by both recreational and professional skiers as well as ski patrols in Europe and elsewhere.

The town of Breckenridge, Colorado hosts a week-long festival called "Ullr Fest" each year in January, featuring numerous events designed to win his favor in an effort to bring snow to the historic ski town. Breck Ullr Fest was first held in 1962.

Ullr is one of the incarnated gods in the New Zealand comedy/drama *The Almighty Johnsons*. The part of Mike Johnson/Ullr is played by Tim Balme.

Notes

- [2] A presentation on Swedish state television, channel 1. (<http://svt.se/svt/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=33538&a=974290>)
- [3] <http://www.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/3/4/index.htm>
- [4] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/gg/gg4par23.html>
- [5] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/ugm/kennings/tvoca.html>

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Váli

In Norse mythology, **Váli** is a son of the god Odin and the giantess Rindr. He was birthed for the sole purpose of killing Höðr as revenge for Höðr's accidental murder of his twin brother, Baldr. He grew to full adulthood within one day of his birth, and slew Höðr. Váli is fated to survive Ragnarök.

Myths

The Váli myth is referred to in Baldrs draumar:

Rindr will bear Váli
 in western halls;
 that son of Óðinn
 will kill when one night old—
 he will not wash hand,
 nor comb head,
 before he bears to the pyre
 Baldr's adversary. - Ursula Dronke's translation

And in Völuspá:

There formed from that stem,
 which was slender-seeming,
 a shaft of anguish, perilous:
 Höðr started shooting.
 A brother of Baldr
 was born quickly:
 he started—Óðinn's son—
 slaying, at one night old.

The *Prose Edda* also mentions him. *Gylfaginning* contains this passage:

"One is called Ali or Váli, son of Odin and Rindr: he is daring in fights, and a most fortunate marksman."

The same text also states that he will survive Ragnarök, along with his brother Víðarr and the sons of Thor, Móði and Magni.

There is another Váli, a son of Loki by Sigyn, who was transformed by the gods into a slaving wolf who tore out the throat of his brother Narfi to punish Loki for his crimes. See Váli (son of Loki).

The two figures named Váli may originally have been conceived of as the same being.

In *Gesta Danorum* the figure **Bous** corresponds to Váli.

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Víðarr

In Norse mythology, **Víðarr** (Old Norse, possibly "wide ruler",^[1] sometimes anglicized as **Vidar**, **Vithar**, **Vidarr**, and **Vitharr**) is a god among the Æsir associated with vengeance. Víðarr is described as the son of Odin and the jötunn Gríðr, and is foretold to avenge his father's death by killing the wolf Fenrir at Ragnarök, a conflict which he is described as surviving. Víðarr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and is interpreted as depicted with Fenrir on the Gosforth Cross. A number of theories surround the figure, including theories around potential ritual silence and a Proto-Indo-European basis.



A depiction of Víðarr stabbing Fenrir while holding his jaws apart (1908) by W. G. Collingwood, inspired by the Gosforth Cross.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, Víðarr is mentioned in the poems *Völuspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál*, and *Lokasenna*. In stanzas 54 and 55 of the poem *Völuspá*, a völva tells Odin that his son Víðarr will avenge Odin's death at Ragnarök by stabbing Fenrir in the heart.^[2] In stanzas 51 and 53 of *Vafþrúðnismál*, Vafþrúðnir states that Víðarr and his brother Váli will both live in the "temples of the gods" after Surtr's fire has ceded and that Víðarr will avenge the death of his father Odin by sundering the cold jaws of Fenrir in battle.^[3]

In stanza 17 of *Grímnismál*, during Odin's visions of various dwelling places of the gods, he describes Víðarr's (here anglicized as "Vidar") residence:

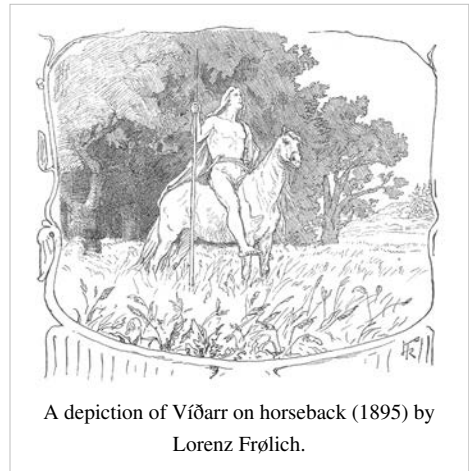
Brushwood grows and high grass
widely in Vidar's land
and there the son proclaims on his horse's back
that he's keen to avenge his father.^[4]

According to *Lokasenna*, Loki rebukes the gods at the start of the poem for not properly welcoming him to the feast at Ægir's hall. In stanza 10, Odin finally relents to the rules of hospitality, urging Víðarr to stand and pour a drink for the quarrelsome guest. Víðarr does so, and then Loki toasts the Æsir before beginning his flyting.^[5]

Prose Edda

Víðarr is referenced in the *Prose Edda* books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*:

Gylfaginning



A depiction of Víðarr on horseback (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.



CONSTANTIN HANSEN.

Víðarr straps his shoe on: woodcut by Hans Christian Henneberg (1826-93) based on a work by Constantin Hansen (1804-1880)

Víðarr is referenced in the book *Gylfaginning* in chapters 29, 51, and 53. In chapter 29, Víðarr is introduced by the enthroned figure of High as "the silent god" with a thick shoe, that he is nearly as strong as the god Thor, and that the gods rely on him in times of immense difficulties.^[6]

In chapter 51, High foretells that, during Ragnarök, the wolf Fenrir will devour Odin, Víðarr will avenge him by stepping down with one foot on the lower jaw of the monster, grabbing his upper jaw in one hand and tearing his mouth apart, killing him. Víðarr's "thick shoe" is described as consisting of all the extra leather pieces that people have cut from their own shoes at the toe and heel, collected by the god throughout all time. Therefore, anyone who is concerned enough to give assistance to the gods should throw these pieces away.^[7]

In chapter 54, following Ragnarök and the rebirth of the world, Víðarr along with his brother Váli will have survived both the swelling of the sea and the fiery conflagration unleashed by Surtr, completely unharmed, and shall thereafter dwell on the field Iðavöllr, "where the city of Asgard had previously been".^[8]

Skáldskaparmál

According to *Skáldskaparmál*, Víðarr was one of the twelve presiding male gods seated in their thrones at a banquet for the visiting Ægir.^[9] At a point in dialogue between the skaldic god Bragi and Ægir, Snorri himself begins speaking of the myths in euhemeristic terms and states that the historical equivalent of Víðarr was the Trojan hero Aeneas who survived the Trojan War and went on to achieve "great deeds".^[10]

Later in the book, various kennings are given for Víðarr, including again the "silent As", "possessor of the iron shoe", "enemy and slayer of Fenrisulf", "the gods' avenging As", "father's homestead-inhabiting As", "son of Odin", and "brother of the Æsir".^[11] In the tale of the god Thor's visit to the hall of the jötunn Geirröd, Gríðr is stated as the mother of "Víðarr the Silent" who assists Thor in his journey.^[12] In chapter 33, after returning from Asgard and feasting with the gods, Ægir invites the gods to come to his hall in three months. Fourteen gods make the trip to attend the feast, including Víðarr.^[13] In chapter 75, Víðarr's name appears twice in a list of Æsir.^[14]

Archaeological record

The mid-11th century Gosforth Cross, located in Cumbria, England, has been described as depicting a combination of scenes from the Christian Judgement Day and the pagan Ragnarök.^[15] The cross features various figures depicted in Borre style, including a man with a spear facing a monstrous head, one of whose feet is thrust into the beast's forked tongue and on its lower jaw, while a hand is placed against its upper jaw, a scene interpreted as Víðarr fighting Fenrir.^[15] The depiction has also been theorized as a metaphor for Jesus's defeat of Satan.^[16]



Detail from the Gosforth Cross.

Theories

Theories have been proposed that Víðarr's silence may derive from a ritual silence or other abstentions which often accompany acts of vengeance, as for example in *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar* when Váli, conceived for the sole purpose of avenging Baldr's death, abstains from washing his hands and combing his hair "until he brought Baldr's adversary to the funeral pyre".^[17] Parallels have been drawn between chapter 31 of Tacitus' 1st century CE work *Germania* where Tacitus describes that members of the Chatti, a Germanic tribe, may not shave or groom before having first slain an enemy.^[18]

Georges Dumézil theorized that Víðarr represents a cosmic figure from an archetype derived from the Proto-Indo-Europeans.^[19] Dumézil stated that he was aligned with both vertical space, due to his placement of his foot on the wolf's lower jaw and his hand on the wolf's upper jaw, and horizontal space, due to his wide step and strong shoe, and that, by killing the wolf, Víðarr keeps the wolf from destroying the cosmos, and the cosmos can thereafter be restored after the destruction resulting from Ragnarök.^[19] Thus Dumézil conceives of Víðarr as a spatial god (per the hypothesized Víð-/wide root - O.E. *wid*, from P.Gmc. **widas* (cf. O.S., O.Fris. *wid*, O.N. *viðr*, Du. *wijd*, O.H.G. *wit*, Ger. *weit*).^[20] Dumézil substantiates this claim with the text of the *Lokasenna*, in which Víðarr, trying to mediate the dispute with Loki, urges the other Aesir to "grant Loki his **space**" at the feasting table. Dumézil argues that this play on Víðarr's spatiality would have been understood by an audience familiar with the God, an interpretation further warranted by his reading of the *Lokasenna* as being in significant part a book of puns and word plays about the different Aesir. Dumézil also suggests that Víðarr's spatiality is seen in the Vishnu of the Vedic traditions, both etymologically (the *Vi-* root) and mythologically, citing the story of Bali and Vishnu. In this legend, Vishnu (in the form of Vamana) tricks the malevolent king Bali, who has secured dominion over the whole Earth, by making Bali promise to grant Vamana all the land he can cover in three paces. Vamana turns himself into a giant and strides across all of heaven and Earth, taking Bali's head and granting him immortality in lieu of taking the last pace. Dumézil theorizes that these myths of Fenrir/Víðarr and Bali/Vishnu may have a common origin in an Indo-European God of spatiality, similar but distinct from the hypothetical framing or entry/exit God that spawned Janus and Heimdall.^[19]



A depiction of Víðarr defeating Fenrir (1895) by Lorenz Frølich



A depiction of Víðarr and Váli (1892) by Axel Kulle

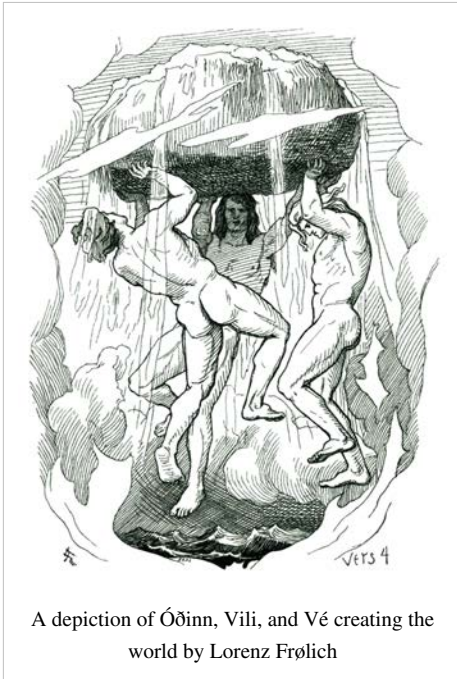
Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:174–175).
- [2] Larrington (1999:11).
- [3] Larrington (1999:48).
- [4] Larrington (1999:54).
- [5] Larrington (1999:86).
- [6] Byock (2006:37).
- [7] Byock (2006:73).
- [8] Byock (2006:77).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:59).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:66).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:76).
- [12] Faulkes (1995:82).
- [13] Faulkes (1995:95).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:156–157).
- [15] Pluskowski (2004:158).
- [16] Schapiro (1980:264, note 66).
- [17] Lindow (2001:312–313).
- [18] Lindow (2001:311).
- [19] Lindow (2001:314) referencing Dumézil, Georges (1965). "Le dieu scandinave Víðarr" collected in *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 168, pages 1–13.

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Vili and Vé



A depiction of Óðinn, Vili, and Vé creating the world by Lorenz Frølich

Vili	
Will	
Name in Old Norse	Vili
World	Asgard
Consort	Frigg
Parents	Borr and Bestla
Siblings	Vé, Odin

Vé	
Numen	
Name in Old Norse	Vé
World	Asgard
Consort	Frigg
Parents	Borr and Bestla
Siblings	Vili, Odin

In Norse mythology, **Vili** and **Vé** are the brothers of Óðinn (often Anglicized *Odin*), sons of Bestla, daughter of Bölþorn; and Borr, son of Búri:

Hann [Borr] fekk þeirrar konu er Bestla hét, dóttir Bölþorns jötuns, ok fengu þau þrjá sonu. Hét einn Óðinn, annarr Vili, þriði Vé.

Old Norse *Vili* means "will". Old Norse *Vé* refers to a type of Germanic shrine; a vé.

Creation

Vili and Vé, together with Óðinn, are the three brothers who slay Ymir — ending the primeval rule of the race of giants — and are the first of the Æsir. They are comparable to the three brothers Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, of Greek mythology, who defeat the Titans. Of the three, Óðin is the eldest, Vili the middle, and Ve the youngest. To the first human couple, Ask and Embla, Óðinn gave soul and life; Vili gave wit (intelligence) and sense of touch; and Vé gave countenance (appearance, facial expression), speech, hearing, and sight.

Their names are given in the *Völuspá* as *Hæmir* and *Lóðurr*.

Triad

In Proto-Norse, the three brothers' names were alliterating, **Wóðin, Wili, Wé* (Proto-Germanic **Wōðinaz, Wiljon, Wāhaz*), so that they can be taken as forming a triad of **wódz, wiljon, wāhaz*, approximately "inspiration (transcendent, mantic or prophetic knowledge), cognition (will, desire, internal thought that leads to action) and numen (spiritual power residing in the external world, in sacred objects)".

Compare to this the alliteration in a verse found in the Exeter Book, *Wōden worhte weos* "Woden wrought the sanctuaries" — where compared to the "triad" above, just the middle *will* etymon has been replaced by the *work* etymon. The name of such sanctuaries to Woden *Wōdenes weohas* (Saxon *Wōdanes wih*, Norse *Óðins vé*) survives in toponymy as *Odinsvi*, *Wodeneswegs*.

While Vili and Vé are of little prominence in Norse mythology as attested, their brother Óðinn has a more celebrated role as the chief of the Norse pantheon. Óðinn remains at the head of a triad of the mightiest gods: Óðinn, Thórr, and Freyr. Óðinn is also styled *Thriði* "the third", in which case he appears by the side of *Hárr* and *Jafnhárr* (the "high" and the "even-high" or co-equal), as the "Third High". At other times, he is *Tveggi* "the second". In relation to the Óðinn-Vili-Vé triad, Grimm compares Old High German *willa*, which not only expressed *voluntas*, but also *votum*, *impetus*, *spiritus*, and the personification of Will, to *Wela* in Old English sources.^[1] Keyser interprets the triad as "Spirit, Will and Holiness", postulating a kind of Germanic Trinity in Vili and Vé to be "blended together again in the all-embracing World-spirit — in Odin. [...] he alone is Al-father, from whom all the other superior, world-directing beings, the Æsir, are descended."^[2]

According to Loki, in *Lokasenna*, Vili and Vé had an affair with Óðinn's wife, Frigg. This is taken by Grimm as reflecting the fundamental identity of the three brothers, so that Frigg might be considered the wife of either. According to this story Óðinn was abroad for a long time, and in his absence his brothers acted for him. It is worthy of note that Saxo Grammaticus also makes Óðinn (Latin: *Othinus*) travel to foreign lands and Mitoðinn^[3] (Latin: *Mithothyn*) fill his place,^[4] and therefore Mitoðinn's position throws light on that of Vili and Vé. But Saxo represents Óðinn as once more an exile, and puts Ullr (Latin: *Ollerus*) in his place.^[5] The distant journeys of the god are implied in the Norse by-names *Gângrâðr*, *Gângleri*, *Vegtamr*, and *Viðförull*. It is not to be overlooked that even Paulus Diaconus (1, 9) knows of Wodan's residence in Greece while Saxo removes him to Byzantium, and Snorri to Tyrkland ^[6].

Notes

- [1] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (1835), ch. 7 (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/grimmst/007_11.php), ch. 19 (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/grimmst/019_01.php)
- [2] R. Keyser, *The Religion Of The Northmen (Nordmændenes Religionsforfatning I hedendommen)* (1847, trans. 1854), ch. 8 (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/northmen/008.php>)
- [3] Old Norse for *Mithotyn* (http://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Erl uterungen_zu_den_ersten_neun_B chern_der_D nischen_Geschichte_des_Saxo_Grammaticus_Teil_I_Anhang)
- [4] Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 1.7.2 (12th century), (<http://www2.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/1/7/index.htm>)
- [5] Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 3.4 (12th century), (<http://www2.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/3/4/index.htm>)
- [6] <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Tyrkland>

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- E. A. Philippson, *Die Genealogie der G tter in Germanischer Religion, Mythologie und Theologie*, Illinois studies in language and literature vol. 37, Urbana, Illinois (1953), 44-52.
- Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (1835), ch. 7 (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/grimmst/007_11.php), ch. 19 (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/grimmst/019_01.php).
- R. Keyser, *The Religion Of The Northmen (Nordmændenes Religionsforfatning I hedendommen)* (1847, trans. 1854), ch. 8 (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/northmen/008.php>)

Vanir

Njörðr

In Norse mythology, **Njörðr** is a god among the Vanir. Njörðr is father of the deities Freyr and Freyja by his unnamed Van sister, was in an ill-fated marriage with the goddess Skaði, lives in Nóatún and is associated with sea, seafaring, wind, fishing, wealth, and crop fertility.

Njörðr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, in euhemerized form as a beloved



Njörð's desire of the Sea (1908) by W. G. Collingwood

mythological early king of Sweden in *Heimskringla*, also written by Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century, as one of three gods invoked in the 14th century *Hauksbók* ring oath, and in numerous Scandinavian place names. Veneration of Njörðr survived into 18th or 19th century Norwegian folk practice, where the god is recorded as **Njor** and thanked for a bountiful catch of fish.

Njörðr has been the subject of an amount of scholarly discourse and theory, often connecting him with the figure of the much earlier attested Germanic goddess Nerthus, the hero Hadingus, and theorizing on his formerly more prominent place in Norse paganism due to the appearance of his name in numerous place names. *Njörðr* is sometimes modernly anglicized as **Njord**, **Njoerd**, or **Njorth**.

Name and eponyms

The name *Njörðr* corresponds to that of the older Germanic fertility goddess *Nerthus*, and both derive from the Proto-Germanic **Nerþuz*. The original meaning of the name is contested, but it may be related to the Irish word *ner* which means "force" and "power". It has been suggested that the change of sex from the female *Nerthus* to the male *Njörðr* is due to the fact that feminine nouns with u-stems disappeared early in Germanic language while the masculine nouns with u-stems prevailed. However, other scholars hold the change to be based not on grammatical gender but on the evolution of religious beliefs; that **Nerþuz* and *Njörðr* appear as different genders because they are to be considered separate beings.^[1] The name *Njörðr* may be related to the name of the Norse goddess Njörun.^[2]

Njörðr's name appears in various place names in Scandinavia, such as *Nærdhæwi* (now Nalavi), *Njærdhavi* (now Mjärdevi), *Nærdhælunda* (now Närlunda), *Nierdhatunum* (now Närtuna) in Sweden,^[1] Njarðvík in southwest Iceland, Njarðarlög and Njarðey (now Nærøy) in Norway.^[3] Njörðr's name appears in a word for sponge; *Njarðarvötr* (Old Norse "Njörðr's glove"). Additionally, in Old Icelandic translations of Classical mythology the Roman god Saturn's name is glossed as "Njörðr."^[3]

Attestations

Njörðr is attested in the following works:

Poetic Edda

Njörðr is described as a future survivor of Ragnarök in stanza 39 of the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*. In the poem, the god Odin, disguised as "Gagnráðr" faces off with the wise jötunn Vafþrúðnir in a battle of wits. While Odin states that Vafþrúðnir knows all the fates of the gods, Odin asks Vafþrúðnir "from where Njörðr came to the sons of the Æsir," that Njörðr rules over quite a lot of temples and hörgs (a type of Germanic altar), and further adds that Njörðr was not raised among the Æsir. In response, Vafþrúðnir says:

"In Vanaheim the wise Powers made him
and gave him as hostage to the gods;
at the doom of men he will come back

home among the wise Vanir."^[4]

In stanza 16 of the poem *Grímnismál*, Njörðr is described as having a hall in Nóatún made for himself. The stanza describes Njörðr as a "prince of men," that he is "lacking in malice," and that he "rules over the "high-timbered temple."^[5] In stanza 43, the creation of the god Freyr's ship Skíðblaðnir is recounted, and Freyr is cited as the son of Njörðr.^[6] In the prose introduction to the poem *Skírnismál*, Freyr is mentioned as the son of Njörðr, and stanza 2 cites the goddess Skaði as the mother of Freyr.^[7] Further in the poem, Njörðr is again mentioned as the father of Freyr in stanzas 38, 39, and 41.^[8]

In the late flyting poem *Lokasenna*, an exchange between Njörðr and Loki occurs in stanzas 33, 34, 35, and 36. After Loki has an exchange with the goddess Freyja, in stanza 33 Njörðr states:

"That's harmless, if, beside a husband, a woman has
a lover or someone else;
what is surprising is a pervert god coming in here,
who has borne children."^[9]

Loki responds in the stanza 34, stating that "from here you were sent east as hostage to the gods" (a reference to the Æsir-Vanir War) and that "the daughters of Hymir used you as a pisspot, and pissed in your mouth."^[9] In stanza 35, Njörðr responds that:

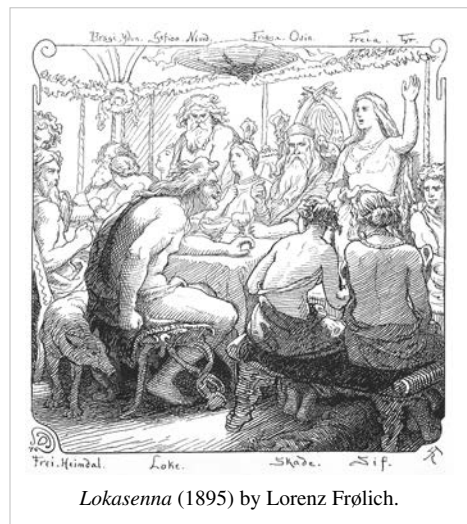
"That was my reward, when I, from far away,
was sent as a hostage to the gods,
that I fathered that son, whom no one hates
and is thought the prince of the Æsir."^[9]

Loki tells Njörðr to "stop" and "keep some moderation," and that he "won't keep it a secret any longer" that Njörðr's son Freyr was produced with his unnamed sister, "though you'd expect him to be worse than he is." The god Tyr then interjects and the flyting continues in turn.^[9]

Njörðr is referenced in stanza 22 of the poem *Brymskviða*, where he is referred to as the father of the goddess Freyja. In the poem, the jötunn Þrymr mistakenly thinks that he will be receiving the goddess Freyja as his bride, and while



Njörðr, Skaði, and Freyr as depicted in *The Lovesickness of Frey* (1908) by W. G. Collingwood



Lokasenna (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

telling his fellow jötunn to spread straw on the benches in preparation for the arrival of Freyja, he refers to her as the daughter of Njörðr of Nóatún.^[10] Towards the end of the poem *Sólarljóð*, Njörðr is cited as having nine daughters. Two of the names of these daughters are given; the eldest Ráðveig and the youngest Kreppvör.^[11]

Prose Edda

Njörðr is mentioned in the *Prose Edda* books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*.

Gylfaginning

In the *Prose Edda*, Njörðr is introduced in chapter 23 of the book *Gylfaginning*. In this chapter, Njörðr is described by the enthroned figure of High as living in the heavens at Nóatún, but also as ruling over the movement of the winds, having the ability to calm both sea and fire, and that he is to be invoked in seafaring and fishing. High continues that Njörðr is very wealthy and prosperous, and that he can also grant wealth in land and valuables to those who request his aid. Njörðr originates from Vanaheimr and is devoid of Æsir stock, and he is described as having been traded with Hœnir in hostage exchange with between the Æsir and Vanir.^[12]

High further states that Njörðr's wife is Skaði, that she is the daughter of the jötunn Þjazi, and recounts a tale involving the two. High recalls that Skaði wanted to live in the home once owned by her father called Þrymheimr ("Thunder Home"). However, Njörðr wanted to live nearer to the sea. Subsequently, the two made an agreement that they would spend nine nights in Þrymheimr and then next three nights in Nóatún (or nine winters in Þrymheimr and another nine in Nóatún according to the *Codex Regius* manuscript^[13]). However, when Njörðr returned from the mountains to Nóatún, he says:

"Hateful for me are the mountains,
I was not long there,
only nine nights.
The howling of the wolves
sounded ugly to me
after the song of the swans."^[14]

Skaði then responds:

"Sleep I could not
on the sea beds
for the screeching of the bird.
That gull wakes me
when from the wide sea
he comes each morning."^[14]

High states that afterward Skaði went back up to the mountains to Þrymheimr and recites a stanza where Skaði skis around, hunts animals with a bow, and lives in her fathers old house.^[13] Chapter 24 begins, which describes Njörðr as the father of two beautiful and powerful children: Freyr and Freyja.^[15] In chapter 37, after Freyr has spotted the



Njörðr and Skaði on the way to Nóatún (1882) by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine



"Skaði's longing for the Mountains" (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

beautiful jötunn Gerðr, he becomes overcome with sorrow, and refuses to sleep, drink, or talk. Njörðr then sends for Skírnir to find out who he seems to be so angry at, and, not looking forward to being treated roughly, Skírnir reluctantly goes to Freyr.^[16]

Skáldskaparmál

Njörðr is introduced in *Skáldskaparmál* within a list of 12 Æsir attending a banquet held for Ægir.^[17] Further in *Skáldskaparmál*, the skaldic god Bragi recounts the death of Skaði's father Þjazi by the Æsir. As one of the three acts of reparation performed by the Æsir for Þjazi's death, Skaði was allowed by the Æsir to choose a husband from amongst them, but given the stipulation that she may not see any part of them but their feet when making the selection. Expecting to choose the god Baldr by the beauty of the feet she selects, Skaði instead finds that she has picked Njörðr.^[18]

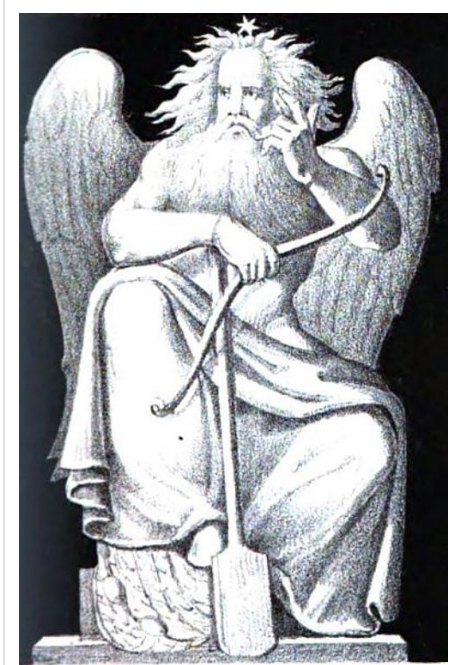
In chapter 6, a list of kennings is provided for Njörðr: "God of chariots," "Descendant of Vanir," "a Van," father of Freyr and Freyja, and "the giving god." This is followed by an excerpt from a composition by the 11th century skald Þórðr Sjáreksson, explained as containing a reference to Skaði leaving Njörðr:

Gundrun became her son's slayer; the wise god-bride [Skadi] could not love the Van; Kialar [Odin] trained horses pretty well; Hamdir is said not to have held back sword-play.^[19]

Chapter 7 follows and provides various kennings for Freyr, including referring to him as the son of Njörðr. This is followed by an excerpt from a work by the 10th century skald Egill Skallagrímsson that references Njörðr (here anglicized as "Niord"):

For Freyr and Niord have endowed Griotbiorn with a power of wealth.^[19]

In chapter 20, "daughter of Njörðr" is given as a kenning for Freyja.^[19] In chapter 33, Njörðr is cited among the gods attending a banquet held by Ægir.^[20] In chapter 37, Freyja is again referred to as Njörðr's daughter in a verse by the 12th century skald Einarr Skúlason.^[21] In chapter 75, Njörðr is included in a list of the Æsir.^[22] Additionally, *Njörðr* is used in kennings for "warrior" or "warriors" various times in *Skáldskaparmál*.^[23]



Njörðr (1832) from the philological book *Die Helden und Götter des Nordens, oder Das Buch der sagen*

Heimskringla

Njörðr appears in or is mentioned in three Kings' sagas collected in *Heimskringla*; *Ynglinga saga*, the *Saga of Hákon the Good* and the *Saga of Harald Graycloak*. In chapter 4 of *Ynglinga saga*, Njörðr is introduced in connection with the Æsir-Vanir War. When the two sides became tired of war, they came to a peace agreement and exchanged hostages. For their part, the Vanir send to the Æsir their most "outstanding men"; Njörðr, described as wealthy, and Freyr, described as his son, in exchange for the Æsir's Hœnir. Additionally, the Æsir send Mímir in exchange for the wise Kvasir.^[24]

Further into chapter 4, Odin appoints Njörðr and Freyr as priests of sacrificial offerings, and they became gods among the Æsir. Freyja is introduced as a daughter of Njörðr, and as the priestess at the sacrifices. In the saga, Njörðr is described as having once wed his unnamed sister while he was still among the Vanir, and the couple produced their children Freyr and Freyja from this union, though this custom was forbidden among the Æsir.^[24]

Chapter 5 relates that Odin gave all of his temple priests dwelling places and good estates, in Njörðr's case being Nóatún.^[25] Chapter 8 states that Njörðr married a woman named Skaði, though she would not have intercourse with him. Skaði then marries Odin, and the two had numerous sons.^[26]

In chapter 9, Odin dies and Njörðr takes over as ruler of the Swedes, and he continues the sacrifices. The Swedes recognize him as their king, and pay him tribute. Njörðr's rule is marked with peace and many great crops, so much so that the Swedes believed that Njörðr held power over the crops and over the prosperity of mankind. During his rule, most of the Æsir die, their bodies are burned, and sacrifices are made by men to them. Njörðr has himself "marked for" Odin and he dies in his bed. Njörðr's body is burnt by the Swedes, and they weep heavily at his tomb. After Njörðr's reign, his son Freyr replaces him, and he is greatly loved and "blessed by good seasons like his father."^[27]

In chapter 14 of *Saga of Hákon the Good* a description of the pagan Germanic custom of Yule is given. Part of the description includes a series of toasts. The toasts begin with Odin's toasts, described as for victory and power for the king, followed by Njörðr and Freyr's toast, intended for good harvests and peace. Following this, a beaker is drunk for the king, and then a toast is given for departed kin.^[28] Chapter 28 quotes verse where the kenning "Njörðr-of-roller-horses" is used for "sailor".^[29] In the *Saga of Harald Graycloak*, a stanza is given of a poem entitled *Vellekla* ("Lack of Gold") by the 10th century Icelandic skald Einarr skálaglamm that mentions Njörðr in a kenning for "warrior."^[30]



A depiction of Njörðr from a 17th century Icelandic manuscript

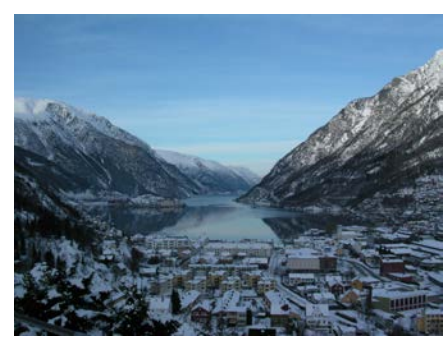
Egils saga

In chapter 80 of the 13th century Icelandic saga *Egils saga*, Egill Skallagrímsson composes a poem in praise of Arinbjörn (*Arinbjarnarkviða*). In stanza 17, Egill writes that all others watch in marvel how Arinbjörn gives out wealth, as he has been so endowed by the gods Freyr and Njörðr.^[31]

Modern folk practice

Veneration of Njörðr survived into 18th or 19th century Norwegian folk practice, as recorded in a tale collected by Halldar O. Opedal from an informant in Odda, Hordaland, Norway. The informant comments on a family tradition in which the god is thanked for a bountiful catch of fish:

The old folk [folk in the olden days?] were always rather lucky when they went fishing. One night old Gunnhild Reinsnos (born in 1746) and Johannes Reinsnos were fishing in the Sjosavatn. They had taken a torch and were fishing with live bait. The fish bit well, and it wasn't long before Gunnhild had a week's supply of fish for her pot. So she wound her line around her rod with the words: "Thanks be to him, to Njor, for this time."^[32]



Odda, Norway, in the winter of 2004

Scholar Georges Dumézil further cites various tales of *havmennsker* (Norwegian "sea people") who govern over sea weather, wealth, or, in some incidents, give magic boats are likely connected to Njörðr.^[33]

Theories

Nerthus

Njörðr is often identified with the goddess Nerthus, whose reverence by various Germanic tribes is described by Roman historian Tacitus in his 1st CE century work *Germania*. The connection between the two is due to the linguistic relationship between *Njörðr* and the reconstructed **Nerþuz*,^[34] "Nerthus" being the feminine, Latinized form of what *Njörðr* would have looked like around 1 CE.^[35] This has led to theories about the relation of the two, including that Njörðr may have once been a hermaphroditic god or, generally considered more likely, that the name may indicate an otherwise unattested divine brother and sister pair such as Freyr and Freyja.^[34] Consequently, Nerthus has been identified with Njörðr's unnamed sister with whom he had Freyja and Freyr, which is mentioned in *Lokasenna*.^[36]



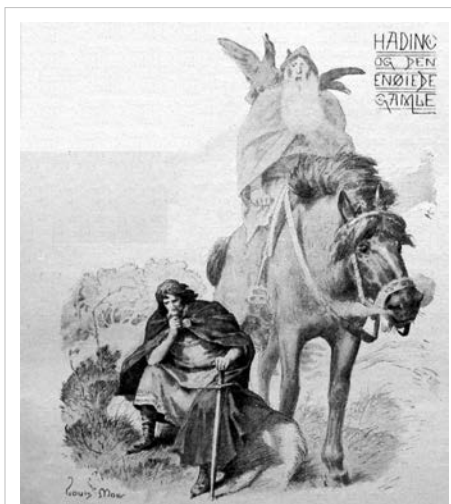
Nerthus (1905) by Emil Doepler.

Bieka-Galles

In Lapp mythology, Bieka-Galles (or Biega-, Biegga-Galles, depending on dialect; "The Old Man of the Winds") is a deity who rules over rain and wind, and is the subject of boat and wooden shovel (or, rather, oar) offerings. Due to similarities in between descriptions of Njörðr in *Gylfaginning* and descriptions of Bieka-Galles in 18th century missionary reports, Axel Olrik identified this deity as the result of influence from the seafaring North Germanic peoples on the landbound Lapps.^[37]

Hadingus

Parallels have been pointed out between Njörðr and the figure of Hadingus, attested in book I of Saxo Grammaticus' 13th century work *Gesta Danorum*.^[38] Some of these similarities include that, in parallel to Skaði and Njörðr in *Skáldskaparmál*, Hadingus is chosen by his wife Regnhild after selecting him from other men at a banquet by his lower legs, and, in parallel to Skaði and Njörðr in *Gylfaginning*, Hadingus complains in verse of his displeasure at his life away from the sea and how he is disturbed by the howls of wolves, while his wife Regnhild complains of life at the shore and states her annoyance at the screeching sea birds.^[38] Georges Dumézil theorized that in the tale Hadingus passes through all three functions of his trifunctional hypothesis, before ending as an Odinic hero, paralleling Njörðr's passing from the Vanir to the Æsir in the Æsir-Vanir War.^[39]



Hadingus meets the one-eyed old man,
illustration by Louis Moe

Svafrþorinn

In stanza 8 of the poem *Fjölsvinnsmál*, Svafrþorinn is stated as the father of Menglöð by an unnamed mother, who the hero Svipdagr seeks. Menglöð has often been theorized as the goddess Freyja, and according to this theory, Svafrþorinn would therefore be Njörðr. The theory is complicated by the etymology of the name *Svafrþorinn* (*þorinn* meaning "brave" and *svafr* means "gossip") (or possibly connects to *sofa* "sleep"), which Rudolf Simek says makes little sense when attempting to connect it to Njörðr.^[40]

Modern influence

Njörðr has been the subject of an amount of artistic depictions. Depictions include "Freyr und Gerda; Skade und Niurd" (drawing, 1883) by K. Ehrenberg, "Njörðr" (1893) by Carl Frederick von Saltza, "Skadi" (1901) by E. Doepler d. J., and "Njörd's desire of the Sea" (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

Notes

- [1] Hellquist (1922:519)
- [2] Jónsson (1913:110) and Magnússon (1989:671).
- [3] Vigfússon (1874:456).
- [4] Larrington (1999:46).
- [5] Larrington (1999:54).
- [6] Larrington (1999:58).
- [7] Larrington (1999:61).
- [8] Larrington (1999:67).
- [9] Larrington (1999:90).
- [10] Larrington (1999:100).
- [11] Thorpe (1907:120).
- [12] Byock (2006:33-34).
- [13] Byock (2006:141).
- [14] Byock (2006:33-34).
- [15] Byock (2006:35).
- [16] Byock (2006:45).
- [17] Faulkes (1995:59).
- [18] Faulkes (1995:61).
- [19] Faulkes (1995:75).
- [20] Faulkes (1995:86).
- [21] Faulkes (1995:98).

- [22] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [23] Faulkes (1995:248).
- [24] Hollander (2007:8).
- [25] Hollander (2007:10).
- [26] Hollander (2007:12).
- [27] Hollander (2007:13).
- [28] Hollander (2007:107).
- [29] Hollander (2007:119).
- [30] Hollander (2007:135).
- [31] Scudder (2001:163)
- [32] Dumézil (1973:220).
- [33] Dumézil (1973:217—226).
- [34] Simek (2007:234)
- [35] Lindow (2001:237-238)
- [36] Orchard (1997:117-118).
- [37] Dumézil (1973:25).
- [38] Lindow (2001:157-158).
- [39] Dumézil (1973).
- [40] Simek (2007:305).

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Preceded by Odin	Mythological king of Sweden	Succeeded by Yngvi-Freyr
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Freyr

Freyr (sometimes anglicized **Frey**, from **frawjaz* "lord"^[1]) is one of the most important gods of Norse paganism. Freyr was associated with sacral kingship, virility and prosperity, with sunshine and fair weather, and was pictured as a phallic fertility god, Freyr "bestows peace and pleasure on mortals". Freyr, sometimes referred to as **Yngvi-Freyr**, was especially associated with Sweden and seen as an ancestor of the Swedish royal house.

In the Icelandic books the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, Freyr is presented as one of the Vanir, the son of the sea god Njörðr, brother of the goddess Freyja. The gods gave him Álfheimr, the realm of the Elves, as a teething present. He rides the shining dwarf-made boar Gullinbursti and possesses the ship Skíðblaðnir which always has a favorable breeze and can be folded together and carried in a pouch when it is not being used. He has the servants Skírnir, Byggvir, and Beyla.

The most extensive surviving Freyr myth relates Freyr's falling in love with the female jötunn Gerðr. Eventually, she becomes his wife but first Freyr has to give away his magic sword which fights on its own "if wise be he who wields it". Although deprived of this weapon, Freyr defeats the jötunn Beli with an antler. However, lacking his sword, Freyr will be killed by the fire jötunn Surtr during the events of Ragnarök.



"Freyr" (1901) by Johannes Gehrts.

Adam of Bremen

Written around 1080, one of the oldest written sources on pre-Christian Scandinavian religious practices is Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. Adam claimed to have access to first-hand accounts on pagan practices in Sweden. He refers to Freyr with the Latinized name **Fricco** and mentions that an image of him at Skara was destroyed by a Christian missionary. His description of the Temple at Uppsala gives some details on the god.

In hoc templo, quod totum ex auro paratum est, statuas trium deorum veneratur populus, ita ut potentissimus eorum Thor in medio solium habeat triclinio; hinc et inde locum possident Wodan et Fricco. Quorum significationes eiusmodi sunt: 'Thor', inquiunt, 'praesidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat. Alter Wodan, id est furor, bella gerit, hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos. Tertius est Fricco, pacem voluptatemque largiens mortalibus'. Cuius etiam simulacrum fingunt cum ingenti priapo.

Gesta Hammaburgensis 26, Waitz' edition ^[4]

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; Woden and Fricco 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 and crops. The other, Woden—that is, the Furious—carries on war and imparts to man strength against his enemies. The third is Fricco, who bestows peace and pleasure on mortals. His likeness, too, they fashion with an immense phallus.

Gesta Hammaburgensis 26, Tschan's translation

Later in the account Adam states that when a marriage is performed a libation is made to the image of Fricco.

Historians are divided on the reliability of Adam's account.^[2] While he is close in time to the events he describes he has a clear agenda to emphasize the role of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen in the Christianization of Scandinavia. His timeframe for the Christianization of Sweden conflicts with other sources, such as runic inscriptions, and archaeological evidence does not confirm the presence of a large temple at Uppsala. On the other

hand, the existence of phallic idols was confirmed in 1904 with a find at Rällinge in Södermanland.^[3]

Prose Edda

When Snorri Sturluson was writing in 13th century Iceland the indigenous Germanic gods were still remembered though they had not been openly worshiped for more than two centuries.

Gylfaginning

In the *Gylfaginning* section of his *Prose Edda*, Snorri introduces Freyr as one of the major gods.

Njörðr í Nóatúnum gat síðan tvau börn, hét sonr Freyr en dóttir Freyja. Þau váru fögr álitum ok máttug. Freyr er hinn ágætasti af ásum. Hann ræðr fyrir regni ok skini sólar, ok þar með ávexti jarðar, ok á hann er gott at heita til árs ok friðar. Hann ræðr ok fésælu manna. *Gylfaginning* 24, EB's edition^[2]

Njördr in Nóatún begot afterward two children: the son was called Freyr, and the daughter Freyja; they were fair of face and mighty. Freyr is the most renowned of the Æsir; he rules over the rain and the shining of the sun, and therewithal the fruit of the earth; and it is good to call on him for fruitful seasons and peace. He governs also the prosperity of men. *Gylfaginning* XXIV, Brodeur's translation^[4]

This description has similarities to the older account by Adam of Bremen but the differences are interesting. Adam assigns control of the weather and produce of the fields to Thor but Snorri says that Freyr rules over those areas. Snorri also omits any explicitly sexual references in Freyr's description. Those discrepancies can be explained in several ways. It is possible that the Norse gods did not have exactly the same roles in Icelandic and Swedish paganism but it must also be remembered that Adam and Snorri were writing with different goals in mind. Either Snorri or Adam may also have had distorted information.

The only extended myth related about Freyr in the *Prose Edda* is the story of his marriage.



Seated on Odin's throne Hliðskjálf, the god Freyr sits in contemplation in an illustration (1908) by Frederic Lawrence

Þat var einn dag er Freyr hafði gengit í Hliðskjálf ok sá of heima alla. En er hann leit í norðrætt, þá sá hann á einum bæ mikitt hús ok fagrt, ok til þess húss gekk kona, ok er hon tók upp höndum ok lauk hurð fyrir sér þá lýsti af höndum hennar bæði í lopt ok á lög, ok allir heimar birtusk af henni. *Gylfaginning* 37, EB's edition^[5]

It chanced one day that Freyr had gone to Hliðskjálf, and gazed over all the world; but when he looked over into the northern region, he saw on an estate a house great and fair. And toward this house went a woman; when she raised her hands and opened the door before her, brightness gleamed from her hands, both over sky and sea, and all the worlds were illumined of her. *Gylfaginning* XXXVII, Brodeur's translation^[6]

The woman is Gerðr, a beautiful giantess. Freyr immediately falls in love with her and becomes depressed and taciturn. After a period of brooding, he consents to talk to Skírnir, his foot-page. He tells Skírnir that he has fallen in love with a beautiful woman and thinks he will die if he cannot have her. He asks Skírnir to go and woo her for him.

Þá svarar Skírnir, sagði svá at hann skal fara sendiferð en Freyr skal fá honum sverð sitt. Þat var svá gott sverð at sjálft vásk. En Freyr lét eigi þat til skorta ok gaf honum sverðit. Þá fór Skírnir ok bað honum konunnar ok fekk heitit hennar, ok níu nóttum síðar skyldi hon þar koma er Barey heitir ok ganga þá at brullaupinu með Frey.
Gylfaginning 37, EB's edition ^[5]

Then Skírnir answered thus: he would go on his errand, but Freyr should give him his own sword-which is so good that it fights of itself;- and Freyr did not refuse, but gave him the sword. Then Skírnir went forth and wooed the woman for him, and received her promise; and nine nights later she was to come to the place called Barrey, and then go to the bridal with Freyr.
Gylfaginning XXXVII, Brodeur's translation ^[7]

The loss of Freyr's sword has consequences. According to the *Prose Edda*, Freyr had to fight Beli without his sword and slew him with an antler. But the result at Ragnarök, the end of the world, will be much more serious. Freyr is fated to fight the fire-giant Surtr and since he does not have his sword he will be defeated.

Even after the loss of his weapon Freyr still has two magical artifacts, both of them dwarf-made. One is the ship *Skíðblaðnir*, which will have favoring breeze wherever its owner wants to go and can also be folded together like a napkin and carried in a pouch. The other is the boar *Gullinbursti* whose mane glows to illuminate the way for his owner. No myths involving *Skíðblaðnir* have come down to us but Snorri relates that Freyr rode to Baldr's funeral in a wagon pulled by *Gullinbursti*.

Skaldic poetry

Freyr is referred to several times in skaldic poetry. In *Húsdrápa*, partially preserved in the *Prose Edda*, he is said to ride a boar to Baldr's funeral.

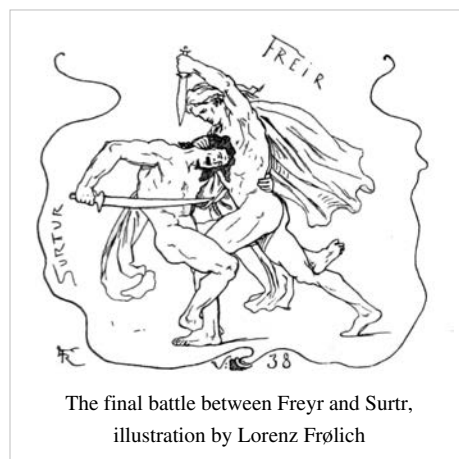
Ríðr á börg til borgar
bøðfróðr sonar Óðins
Freyr ok folkum stýrir
fyrstr enum gollu byrsta. *Húsdrápa* 7, FJ's edition ^[8]

The battle-bold Freyr rideth
First on the golden-bristled
Barrow-boar to the bale-fire
Of Baldr, and leads the people. *Húsdrápa* 7, Brodeur's translation ^[9]

In a poem by Egill Skalla-Grímsson, Freyr is called upon along with Njörðr to drive Eric Bloodaxe from Norway. The same skald mentions in *Arinbjarnarkviða* that his friend has been blessed by the two gods.

[E]n Grjótbjörn
of gæddan hefr
Freyr ok Njörðr
at féar afli. *Arinbjarnarkviða* 17, FJ's edition ^[10]

Freyr and Njord
have endowed
rock-bear
with wealth's force. *Arinbjarnarkviða* 17, Scudder's translation



The final battle between Freyr and Surtr,
illustration by Lorenz Frølich

Nafnabulur

In *Nafnabulur* Freyr is said to ride the horse Blóðughófi (*Bloody Hoof*).

Poetic Edda

Freyr is mentioned in several of the poems in the *Poetic Edda*. The information there is largely consistent with that of the *Prose Edda* while each collection has some details not found in the other.

Völuspá

Völuspá, the best known of the Eddic poems, describes the final confrontation between Freyr and Surtr during Ragnarök.



A detail from Gotland runestone G 181, in the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm. The three men are interpreted as Odin, Thor, and Freyr.

Surtr fer sunnan
með sviga lævi,
skínn af sverði
sól valtíva.
Grjótbjörg gnata,
en gífr rata,
troða halir helveg,
en himinn klofnar.
Þá kómr Hlínar
harmr annarr fram,
er Óðinn ferr
við úlf vega,
en bani Belja
bjartr at Surti,
þá mun Friggjar
falla angan. *Völuspá* 51–52, EB's edition ^[11]

Surtr moves from the south
with the scathe of branches:^[11]
there shines from his sword
the sun of Gods of the Slain.
Stone peaks clash,
and troll wives take to the road.
Warriors tread the path from Hel,
and heaven breaks apart.
Then is fulfilled Hlín's
second sorrow,
when Óðinn goes
to fight with the wolf,
and Beli's slayer,
bright, against Surtr.
Then shall Frigg's
sweet friend fall. *Völuspá* 50–51, Dronke's translation

Some scholars have preferred a slightly different translation, in which the sun shines "from the sword of the gods". The idea is that the sword which Surtr slays Freyr with is the "sword of the gods" which Freyr had earlier bargained away for Gerðr. This would add a further layer of tragedy to the myth. Sigurður Nordal argued for this view but the possibility represented by Ursula Dronke's translation above is equally possible.

Grímnismál

Grímnismál, a poem which largely consists of miscellaneous information about the gods, mentions Freyr's abode.

Alfheim Frey	Alfheim the gods to Frey
gáfu í árdaga	gave in days of yore
tívar at tannféi. <i>Grímnismál</i> 5, GJ's edition ^[12]	for a tooth-gift. <i>Grímnismál</i> 5, Thorpe's translation ^[13]

A tooth-gift was a gift given to an infant on the cutting of the first tooth. Since *Alfheimr* or *Álfheimr* means "World of Álfar (Elves)" the fact that Freyr should own it is one of the indications of a connection between the Vanir and the obscure Álfar. *Grímnismál* also mentions that the sons of Ívaldi made *Skíðblaðnir* for Freyr and that it is the best of ships.

Lokasenna

In the poem *Lokasenna*, Loki accuses the gods of various misdeeds. He criticizes the Vanir for incest, saying that Njörðr had Freyr with his sister. He also states that the gods discovered Freyr and Freyja having sex together. The god Týr speaks up in Freyr's defense.

Freyr er beztr	Frey is best
allra ballriða	of all the exalted gods
ása gördum í;	in the Æsir's courts:
mey hann né grætir	no maid he makes to weep,
né manns konu	no wife of man,
ok leysir ór höftum hvern. <i>Lokasenna</i> 37, GJ's edition ^[14]	and from bonds looses all. <i>Lokasenna</i> 37, Thorpe's translation ^[15]

Lokasenna also mentions that Freyr has servants called Byggvir and Beyla. They seem to have been associated with the making of bread.

Skírnismál

The courtship of Freyr and Gerðr is dealt with extensively in the poem *Skírnismál*. Freyr is depressed after seeing Gerðr. Njörðr and Skaði ask Skírnir to go and talk with him. Freyr reveals the cause of his grief and asks Skírnir to go to Jötunheimr to woo Gerðr for him. Freyr gives Skírnir a steed and his magical sword for the journey.



"The Lovesickness of Frey" (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

Mar ek þér þann gef,	My steed I lend thee
er þik um myrkvan berr	to lift thee o'er the weird
vísan vafrrloga,	ring of flickering flame,
ok þat sverð,	the sword also
er sjalft mun vegask	which swings itself,
ef sá er horskr, er hefr. <i>Skírnismál</i> 9, GJ's edition ^[16]	if wise be he who wields it. <i>Skírnismál</i> 9, Hollander's translation ^[17]

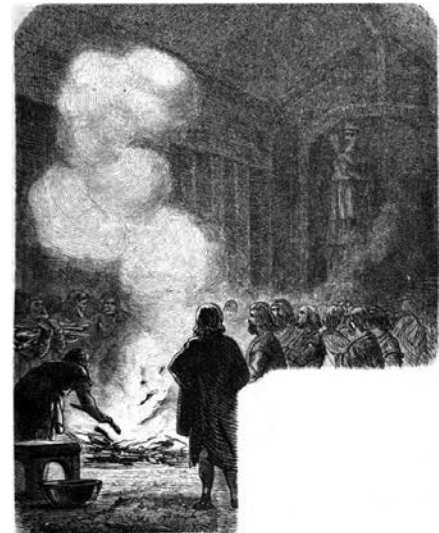
When Skírnir finds Gerðr he starts by offering her treasures if she will marry Freyr. When she declines he gets her consent by threatening her with destructive magic.

Ynglinga saga

Snorri Sturluson starts his epic history of the kings of Norway with *Ynglinga saga*, a euhemerized account of the Norse gods. Here Odin and the Æsir are men from Asia who gain power through their prowess in war and Odin's skills. But when Odin attacks the Vanir he bites off more than he can chew and peace is negotiated after the destructive and indecisive Æsir-Vanir War. Hostages are exchanged to seal the peace deal and the Vanir send Freyr and Njörðr to live with the Æsir. At this point the saga, like *Lokasenna*, mentions that incest was practised among the Vanir.



Yngvi-Freyr constructs the Temple at Uppsala in this early 19th century artwork by Hugo Hamilton.



"In Freyr's Temple near Uppsala" (1882) by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine.

Þá er Njörðr var með Vönum, þá hafði hann átta systur sína, því at þat vǫru þar lög; vǫru þeirra börn Freyr ok Freyja. En þat var bannat með Ásum at byggja svá náit at frændsemi. *Ynglinga saga* 4, Schultz's edition ^[18]

While Njord was with the Vanaland people he had taken his own sister in marriage, for that was allowed by their law; and their children were Frey and Freya. But among the Asaland people it was forbidden to intermarry with such near relations. *Ynglinga saga* 4, Laing's translation ^[19]

Odin makes Njörðr and Freyr priests of sacrifices and they become influential leaders. Odin goes on to conquer the North and settles in Sweden where he rules as king, collects taxes, and maintains sacrifices. After Odin's death, Njörðr takes the throne. During his rule there is peace and good harvest and the Swedes come to believe that Njörðr controls these things. Eventually Njörðr falls ill and dies.

Freyr tók þá ríki eptir Njörð; var hann kallaðr dróttinn yfir Svíum ok tók skattgjafir af þeim; hann var vinsæll ok ársæll sem faðir hans. Freyr reisti at Uppsölum hof mikit, ok setti þar höfuðstað sinn; lagði þar til allar skyldir sínar, lönd ok lausa aura; þá hófst Uppsala auðr, ok hefir haldizt æ síðan. Á hans dögum hófst Fróða friðr, þá var ok ár um öll lönd; kendu Svíar þat Frey. Var hann því meir dýrkaðr en önnur goðin, sem á hans dögum varð landsfólkit auðgara en fyrr af friðinum ok ári. Gerðr Gýmis dóttir hét kona hans; sonr þeirra hét Fjöltnir. Freyr hét Yngvi öðru nafni; Yngva nafn var lengi síðan haft í hans ætt fyrir tignarnafn, ok Ynglingar váru síðan kallaðir hans ættmenn. Freyr tók sótt; en er at honum leið sóttin, leituðu menn sér ráðs, ok létu fá menn til hans koma, en bjoggu haug mikinn, ok létu dyrr á ok 3 glugga. En er Freyr var dauðr, báru þeir hann leyniliga í hauginn, ok sögðu Svíum at hann lifði, ok varðveittu hann þar 3 vetr. En skatt öllum heltu þeir í hauginn, í einn glugg gullinu, en í annan silfrinu, í hinn þriðja eirpenningum. Þá hélzt ár ok friðr. *Ynglinga saga* 12, Schultz's edition^[18]

Freyr took the kingdom after Njord, and was called drot by the Swedes, and they paid taxes to him. He was, like his father, fortunate in friends and in good seasons. Freyr built a great temple at Upsal, made it his chief seat, and gave it all his taxes, his land, and goods. Then began the Upsal domains, which have remained ever since. Then began in his days the Frode-peace; and then there were good seasons, in all the land, which the Swedes ascribed to Frey, so that he was more worshipped than the other gods, as the people became much richer in his days by reason of the peace and good seasons. His wife was called Gerð, daughter of Gymis, and their son was called Fjolne. Frey was called by another name, Yngve; and this name Yngve was considered long after in his race as a name of honour, so that his descendants have since been called Ynglingar. Frey fell into a sickness; and as his illness took the upper hand, his men took the plan of letting few approach him. In the meantime they raised a great mound, in which they placed a door with three holes in it. Now when Frey died they bore him secretly into the mound, but told the Swedes he was alive; and they kept watch over him for three years. They brought all the taxes into the mound, and through the one hole they put in the gold, through the other the silver, and through the third the copper money that was paid. Peace and good seasons continued. *Ynglinga saga* 12,

Laing's translation^[19]

Þá er allir Svíar vissu, at Freyr var dauðr, en hélzt ár ok friðr, þá trúðu þeir, at svá mundi vera, meðan Freyr væri á Svíþjóð, ok vildu eigi brenna hann, ok kölluðu hann veraldar goð ok blótuðu mest til árs ok friðar alla ævi síðan. *Ynglinga saga* 13, Schultz's edition^[18]

When it became known to the Swedes that Frey was dead, and yet peace and good seasons continued, they believed that it must be so as long as Frey remained in Sweden; and therefore they would not burn his remains, but called him the god of this world, and afterwards offered continually blood-sacrifices to him, principally for peace and good seasons. *Ynglinga saga* 13, Laing's translation^[19]

Freyr had a son named Fjöltnir, who succeeds him as king and rules during the continuing period of peace and good seasons. Fjöltnir's descendants are enumerated in *Ynglingatal* which describes the mythological kings of Sweden.

Ögmundar þáttur dytts

The 14th century Icelandic *Ögmundar þáttur dytts* contains a tradition of how Freyr was transported in a wagon and administered by a priestess, in Sweden. Freyr's role as a fertility god needed a female counterpart in a divine couple (McKinnell's translation 1987^[20]):

Great heathen sacrifices were held there at that time, and for a long while Frey had been the god who was worshipped most there — and so much power had been gained by Frey's statue that the devil used to speak to people out of the mouth of the idol, and a young and beautiful woman had been obtained to serve Frey. It was the faith of the local people that Frey was alive, as seemed to some extent to be the case, and they thought he would need to have a sexual relationship with his wife; along with Frey she was to have complete control over the temple settlement and all that belonged to it.

In this short story, a man named Gunnar was suspected of manslaughter and escaped to Sweden, where Gunnar became acquainted with this young priestess. He helped her drive Freyr's wagon with the god effigy in it, but the god did not appreciate Gunnar and so attacked him and would have killed Gunnar if he had not promised himself to return to the Christian faith if he would make it back to Norway. When Gunnar had promised this, a demon jumped out of the god effigy and so Freyr was nothing but a piece of wood. Gunnar destroyed the wooden idol and dressed himself as Freyr, and then Gunnar and the priestess travelled across Sweden where people were happy to see the god visiting them. After a while he made the priestess pregnant, but this was seen by the Swedes as confirmation that Freyr was truly a fertility god and not a scam. Finally, Gunnar had to flee back to Norway with his young bride and had her baptized at the court of Olaf Tryggvason.

Other Icelandic sources

Worship of Freyr is alluded to in several Icelanders' sagas.

The protagonist of *Hrafnkels saga* is a priest of Freyr. He dedicates a horse to the god and kills a man for riding it, setting in motion a chain of fateful events.

In *Gísla saga* a chieftain named Þorgrímr Freysgoði is an ardent worshipper of Freyr. When he dies he is buried in a howe.

Varð og sá hlutur einn er nýnæmum þótti gegna að aldri festi snæ utan og sunnan á haugi Þorgríms og eigi fraus; og gátu menn þess til að hann myndi Frey svo ávarður fyrir blótin að hann myndi eigi vilja að freri á milli þeirra.^[21]

And now, too, a thing happened which seemed strange and new. No snow lodged on the south side of Thorgrim's howe, nor did it freeze there. And men guessed it was because Thorgrim had been so dear to Frey for his worship's sake that the god would not suffer the frost to come between them.^[22]

Hallfreðar saga, *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga* also mention Freyr.

Other Icelandic sources referring to Freyr include *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, and *Hervarar saga*.

Íslendingabók, written around 1125, is the oldest Icelandic source to mention Freyr, including him in a genealogy of Swedish kings. *Landnámabók* includes a heathen oath to be sworn at an assembly where Freyr, Njörðr, and "the almighty áss" are invoked. *Hervarar saga* mentions a Yuletide sacrifice of a boar to Freyr.

Gesta Danorum

The 12th Century Danish *Gesta Danorum* describes Freyr, under the name **Frø**, as the "viceroy of the gods".

Frø quoque deorum satrapa sedem haud procul Upsala cepit, ubi veterem litationis morem tot gentibus ac saeculis usurpatum tristi infandoque piaculo mutavit. Siquidem humani generis hostias mactare aggressus foeda superis libamenta persolvit. *Gesta Danorum* 3, Olrik's edition^[23]

There was also a viceroy of the gods, Frø, who took up residence not far from Uppsala and altered the ancient system of sacrifice practised for centuries among many peoples to a morbid and unspeakable form of expiation. He delivered abominable offerings to the powers above by instituting the slaughter of human victims. *Gesta Danorum* 3, Fisher's translation

That Freyr had a cult at Uppsala is well confirmed from other sources. The reference to the change in sacrificial ritual may also reflect some historical memory. There is archaeological evidence for an increase in human sacrifices in the late Viking Age^[24] though among the Norse gods human sacrifice is most often linked to Odin. Another reference to Frø and sacrifices is found earlier in the work, where the beginning of an annual *blót* to him is related. King Hadingus is cursed after killing a divine being and atones for his crime with a sacrifice.

Siquidem propitiandorum numinum gratia Frø deo rem divinam furvis hostiis fecit. Quem litationis morem annuo feriarum circuitu repetitum posteris imitandum reliquit. Frøblot Sueones vocant. *Gesta Danorum* 1, Olrik's edition^[25]

[I]n order to mollify the divinities he did indeed make a holy sacrifice of dark-coloured victims to the god Frø. He repeated this mode of propitiation at an annual festival and left it to be imitated by his descendants. The Swedes call it Frøblot. *Gesta Danorum* 1, Fisher's translation

The sacrifice of dark-coloured victims to Freyr has a parallel in Ancient Greek religion where the chthonic fertility deities preferred dark-coloured victims to white ones.

In book 9, Saxo identifies Frø as the "king of Sweden" (*rex Suetiae*):

Quo tempore rex Suetiae Frø, interfecto Norvagiensium rege Sywardo, coniuges necessariorum eius prostibulo relegatas publice constuprandas exhibuit. *Gesta Danorum* 9, Olrik's edition^[26]

About this time the Swedish ruler Frø, after killing Sivard, king of the Norwegians, removed the wives of Sivard's relatives to a brothel and exposed them to public prostitution. *Gesta Danorum* 9, Fisher's translation

The reference to public prostitution may be a memory of fertility cult practices. Such a memory may also be the source of a description in book 6 of the stay of Starcatherus, a follower of Odin, in Sweden.

Mortuo autem Bemono, Starcatherus ab athletic Biarmensibus ob virtutem accitus, cum plurima apud eos memoratu digna edidisset facinora, Sueonum fines ingreditur. Ubi cum filiis Frø septennio feriatu ab his tandem ad Haconem Daniae tyrannum se contulit, quod apud Upsalam sacrificiorum tempore constitutus effeminatos corporum motus scaenicosque mimorum plausus ac mollia nolarum crepitacula fastidiret. Unde patet, quam remotum a lascivia animum habuerit, qui ne eius quidem spectator esse sustinuit. Adeo virtus luxui resistit. *Gesta Danorum* 6, Olrik's edition ^[27]

After Bemoni's death Starkather, because of his valour, was summoned by the Biarmian champions and there performed many feats worthy of the tellings. Then he entered Swedish territory where he spent seven years in a leisurely stay with the sons of Frø, after which he departed to join Haki, the lord of Denmark, for, living at Uppsala in the period of sacrifices, he had become disgusted with the womanish body movements, the clatter of actors on the stage and the soft tinkling of bells. It is obvious how far his heart was removed from frivolity if he could not even bear to watch these occasions. A manly individual is resistant to wantonness. *Gesta Danorum* 6, Fisher's translation

Yngvi

A strophe of the Anglo-Saxon rune poem (c. 1100) records that:

Ing was first among the East Danes seen by men

This may refer to the origins of the worship of **Ingvi** in the tribal areas that Tacitus mentions in his *Germania* as being populated by the Inguieonnic tribes. A later Danish chronicler lists Ingvi as one of three brothers that the Danish tribes descended from. The strophe also states that "then he (Ingvi) went back over the waves, his wagon behind him" which could connect Ingvi to earlier conceptions of the wagon processions of Nerthus, and the later Scandinavian conceptions of Freyr's wagon journeys.

Ingvi is mentioned also in some later Anglo-Saxon literature under varying forms of his name, such as "For what doth Ingeld have to do with Christ", and the variants used in Beowulf to designate the kings as 'leader of the friends of Ing'. The compound Ingvi-Frea (OE) and Yngvi-Freyr (ON) likely refer to the connection between the god and the Germanic kings' role as priests during the sacrifices in the pagan period, as *Frea* and *Freyr* are titles meaning 'Lord'.

The Swedish royal dynasty was known as the Ynglings from their descent from Yngvi-Freyr. This is supported by Tacitus, who wrote about the Germans: "In their ancient songs, their only way of remembering or recording the past they celebrate an earth-born god Tuisco, and his son Mannus, as the origin of their race, as their founders. To Mannus they assign three sons, from whose names, they say, the coast tribes are called Ingaevones; those of the interior, Herminones; all the rest, Istaevones".

Archaeological record

Rällinge statuette

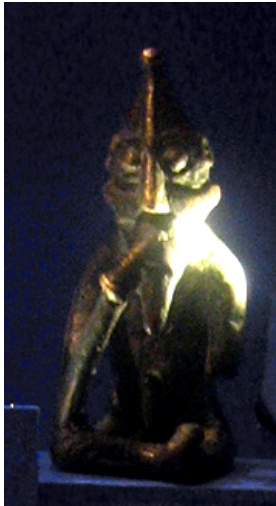
In 1904, a Viking Age statuette identified as a depiction of Freyr was discovered on the farm Rällinge in Lunda parish in the province of Södermanland, Sweden. The depiction features a cross-legged seated, bearded male with an erect penis. He is wearing a pointed cap and stroking his triangular beard. The statue is 9 centimeters tall and is displayed at the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities.^[28]

Skog Church Tapestry

A part of the Swedish 12th century Skog Church Tapestry depicts three figures that has been interpreted as allusions to Odin, Thor, and Freyr,^[29] but also as the three Scandinavian holy kings Canute, Eric and Olaf. The figures coincide with 11th century descriptions of statue arrangements recorded by Adam of Bremen at the Temple at Uppsala and written accounts of the gods during the late Viking Age. The tapestry is originally from Hälsingland, Sweden but is now housed at the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities.

Gullgubber

Small pieces of gold foil featuring engravings dating from the Migration Period into the early Viking Age (known as *gullgubber*) have been discovered in various locations in Scandinavia, at one site almost 2,500. The foil pieces have been found largely on the sites of buildings, only rarely in graves. The figures are sometimes single, occasionally an animal, sometimes a man and a woman with a leafy bough between them, facing or embracing one another. The human figures are almost always clothed and are sometimes depicted with their knees bent. Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson says that it has been suggested that the figures are taking part in a dance, and that they may have been connected with weddings, as well as linked to the Vanir group of gods, representing the notion of a divine marriage, such as in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Skírnismál*; the coming together of Gerðr and Freyr.^[30]



A phallic Viking Age statuette believed to depict Freyr



An example of the small gold pieces of foil that may depict Gerðr and Freyr

Toponyms

Norway

- *Freysakr* ("Freyr's field") - name of two old farms in Gol and Torpa.
- *Freyshof* ("Freyr's temple") - name of two old farms in Hole and Trøgstad.
- *Freysland* ("Freyr's land/field") - name of six old farms in Feda, Halse, Førde, Sogndal, Søgne and Torpa.
- *Freyslíð* ("Freyr's hill") - name of two old farms in Lunner and Torpa.
- *Freysnes* ("Freyr's headland") - name of an old farm in Sandnes.
- *Freyssetr* ("Freyr's farm") - name of two old farms in Masfjorden and Soknedal.
- *Freyssteinn* ("Freyr's stone") - name of an old farm in Lista.
- *Freysteigr* ("Freyr's field") - name of an old farm in Ramnes.
- *Freysvík* ("Freyr's inlet/bay") - name of two old farms in Fresvik and Ullensvang.
- *Freysvin* ("Freyr's meadow") - name of four old farms in Hole, Lom, Sunnylvn and Østre Gausdal.
- *Freysvollr* ("Freyr's field") - name of an old farm in Sør-Odal.
- *Freysþveit* ("Freyr's thwaite") - name of an old farm in Hedrum.

Sweden

- *Fröseke* ("Freyr's oak forest") - Småland
- *Fröslunda* ("Freyr's grove") - Uppland
- *Frösön* ("Freyr's island") - Jämtland
- *Frösve* ("Freyr's sanctuary") - Västergötland

- *Frösåker* ("Freyr's field") - Uppland
Netherlands
- *Franeker* ("Freyr's field") - Friesland

Notes

- [1] The name *Freyr* is believed to be cognate to Gothic *frauja* and Old English *frēa*, meaning *lord*. It is sometimes anglicized to *Frey* by omitting the nominative ending. In the modern Scandinavian languages the name can appear as *Frej*, *Frö*, *Frøy* or *Fröj*. In Richard Wagner's *Das Rheingold* the god appears as *Froh*. See also Ingunar-Freyr.
- [2] Haastrup 2004, pp. 18-24.
- [3] "Rällinge-Frö".
- [4] <http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose/037040.php>
- [5] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/gg/ggrpar33.html>
- [6] <http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose/045048.php>
- [7] <http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose/049052.php>
- [8] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/ugm/skindex/hdr.html>
- [9] <http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose/109112.php>
- [10] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/ugm/skindex/egar.html>
- [11] A *kenning* meaning "fire".
- [12] <http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/grimnismal.php>
- [13] http://www.northvegr.org/lore/poetic2/003_01.php
- [14] <http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/lokasenna.php>
- [15] http://www.northvegr.org/lore/poetic2/013_02.php
- [16] <http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/skirmismal.php>
- [17] <http://www.jackowitch.com/Skirmismal.html>
- [18] <http://www.heimskringla.no/original/heimskringla/ynlingasaga.php>
- [19] <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Heimskringla/ynlinga.html>
- [20] Heinrichs, Anne: *The Search for Identity: A Problem after the Conversion*, in *alvíssmál* 3. pp.54-55. (<http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~alvismal/3search.pdf>)
- [21] Gísla saga Súrssonar (<http://snerpa.is/net/isl/gisl.htm>)
- [22] Northvegr - The Story Of Gisli The Outlaw (<http://northvegr.org/lore/gisli/015.php>)
- [23] <http://www.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/3/2/index.htm>
- [24] Davidson 1999, Vol. II, p. 55.
- [25] <http://www.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/1/8/index.htm>
- [26] <http://www.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/9/4/index.htm>
- [27] <http://www.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/6/5/index.htm>
- [28] Swedish Museum of National Antiquities inventory number 14232. Viewable online: (<http://www.historiska.se/historia/jarnaldern/vikingar/hedniskagudar/relaterade-bilder-hedniska-gudar/frejstatyett/>)
- [29] Leiren, Terje I. (1999). *From Pagan to Christian: The Story in the 12th-Century Tapestry of the Skog Church*. Published online: <http://faculty.washington.edu/leiren/vikings2.html>
- [30] Davidson (1988:121).

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Preceded by Njörðr	Mythological king of Sweden	Succeeded by Fjölfnir
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Freyja

In Norse mythology, **Freyja** (Old Norse the "Lady") is a goddess associated with love, sexuality, beauty, fertility, gold, seiðr, war, and death. Freyja is the owner of the necklace Brísingamen, rides a chariot pulled by two cats, owns the boar Hildisvíni, possesses a cloak of falcon feathers, and, by her husband Óðr, is the mother of two daughters, Hnoss and Gersemi. Along with her brother Freyr (Old Norse the "Lord"), her father Njörðr, and her mother (Njörðr's sister,



Freyja by John Bauer (1882–1918)

unnamed in sources), she is a member of the Vanir. Stemming from Old Norse *Freyja*, modern forms of the name include **Freyya**, **Frejya**, **Freyia**, **Frøya**, **Frøjya**, and **Freia**.

Freyja rules over her heavenly afterlife field Fólkvangr and there receives half of those that die in battle, whereas the other half go to the god Odin's hall, Valhalla. Within Fólkvangr is her hall, Sessrúmnir. Freyja assists other deities by allowing them to use her feathered cloak, is invoked in matters of fertility and love, and is frequently sought after by powerful jötnar who wish to make her their wife. Freyja's husband, the god Óðr, is frequently absent. She cries tears of red gold for him, and searches for him under assumed names. Freyja has numerous names, including *Gefn*, *Hörn*, *Mardöll*, *Sýr*, *Valfreyja*, and *Vanadís*.

Freyja is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; in the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, both written by Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century; in several Sagas of Icelanders; in the short story *Sörla þáttur*; in the poetry of skalds; and into the modern age in Scandinavian folklore, as well as the name for Friday in many Germanic languages.

Scholars have theorized about whether or not Freyja and the goddess Frigg ultimately stem from a single goddess common among the Germanic peoples; about her connection to the valkyries, female battlefield choosers of the slain; and her relation to other goddesses and figures in Germanic mythology, including the thrice-burnt and thrice-reborn Gullveig/Heiðr, the goddesses Gefjon, Skaði, Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr and Irpa, Menglöð, and the 1st century CE "Isis" of the Suebi. Freyja's name appears in numerous place names in Scandinavia, with a high concentration in southern Sweden. Various plants in Scandinavia once bore her name, but it was replaced with the name of the Virgin Mary during the process of Christianization. Rural Scandinavians continued to acknowledge Freyja as a supernatural figure into the 19th century, and Freyja has inspired various works of art.

Etymology

The name *Freyja* is in fact a title meaning "lady", from Proto-Germanic **frawjōn*, cognate with West Frisian *frou*, Dutch *vrouw*, Low German *Fro*, *Fru*, German *Frau*. The theonym *Freyja* was thus an epithet in origin, replacing a personal name that is now unattested.^[1] The connection with and possible earlier identification of Freyja with Frigg in the Proto-Germanic period (Frigg and Freyja origin hypothesis) is a matter of scholarly debate.^[1]

Like the name of the group of gods to which Freyja belongs, the Vanir, the name *Freyja* is not attested outside of Scandinavia, as opposed to the name of the goddess *Frigg*, who is attested as a goddess common among all Germanic peoples, and whose name is reconstructed as Proto-Germanic **Frijjō*. Proof for the existence of a common Germanic goddess once known as **Fraujon* does not exist, but scholars have commented that this may simply be due to lack of evidence.^[1]

Regarding a Freyja-Frigg origin hypothesis, scholar Stephan Grundy comments that "the problem of whether Frigg or Freyja may have been a single goddess originally is a difficult one, made more so by the scantiness of pre-Viking Age references to Germanic goddesses, and the diverse quality of the sources. The best that can be done is to survey the arguments for and against their identity, and to see how well each can be supported."^[2]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, Freyja is mentioned or appears in the poems *Völuspá Grímnismál*, *Lokasenna*, *Brymskviða*, *Oddrúnargrátr*, and *Hyndluljóð*.

Völuspá contains a stanza that mentions Freyja, referring to her as "Óðr's girl"; Freyja being the wife of her husband, Óðr. The stanza recounts that Freyja was once promised to an unnamed builder, later revealed to be a jötunn and so killed by Thor (recounted in detail in *Gylfaginning* chapter 42—see *Prose Edda* section below).^[3] In the poem *Grímnismál*, Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) tells the young Agnar that every day Freyja allots seats to half of those that are slain in her hall Fólkvangr, while Odin owns the other half.^[4]



Nuzzled by her boar Hildisvíni, Freyja gestures to a jötunn in an illustration (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

In the poem *Lokasenna*, where Loki accuses nearly every female in attendance of promiscuity and/or unfaithfulness, an aggressive exchange occurs between Loki and Freyja. The introduction to the poem notes that among other gods and goddesses, Freyja attends a celebration held by Ægir. In verse, after Loki has flyted with the goddess Frigg, Freyja interjects, telling Loki that he is insane for dredging up his terrible deeds, and that Frigg knows the fate of everyone, though she does not tell it. Loki tells her to be silent, and says that he knows all about her—that Freyja is not lacking in blame, for each of the gods and elves in the hall have been her lover. Freyja objects. She says that Loki is lying, that he is just looking to blather about misdeeds, and since the gods and goddesses are furious at him, he can expect to go home defeated. Loki tells Freyja to be silent, calls her a malicious witch, and conjures a scenario where Freyja was once astride her brother when all of the gods, laughing, surprised the two.

Njörðr interjects—he says that a woman having a lover other than her husband is harmless, and he points out that Loki has borne children, and calls Loki a pervert. The poem continues in turn.^[5]

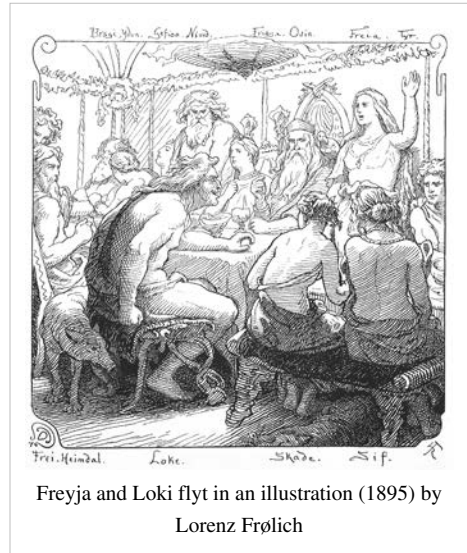
The poem *Þrymskviða* features Loki borrowing Freyja's cloak of feathers and Thor dressing up as Freyja to fool the lusty jötunn Þrymr. In the poem, Thor wakes up to find that his powerful hammer, Mjölnir, is missing. Thor tells Loki of his missing hammer, and the two go to the beautiful court of Freyja. Thor asks Freyja if she will lend him her cloak of feathers, so that he may try to find his hammer. Freyja agrees:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

"That I would give thee, although of gold it were,
and trust it to thee, though it were of silver."^[6]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

"Thine should it be though it of silver bright,
And I would give it though 'twere of gold."^[7]



Loki flies away in the whirring feather cloak, arriving in the land of Jötunheimr. He spies Þrymr sitting on top of a mound. Þrymr reveals that he has hidden Thor's hammer deep within the earth and that no one will ever know where the hammer is unless Freyja is brought to him as his wife. Loki flies back, the cloak whistling, and returns to the courts of the gods. Loki tells Thor of Þrymr's conditions.^[8]

The two go to see the beautiful Freyja. The first thing that Thor says to Freyja is that she should dress herself and put on a bride's head-dress, for they shall drive to Jötunheimr. At that, Freyja is furious—the halls of the gods shake, she snorts in anger, and from the goddess the necklace Brísingamen falls. Indignant, Freyja responds:



While Freyja's cats look on, the god Thor is unhappily dressed as Freyja in *Ah, what a lovely maid it is!* (1902) by Elmer Boyd Smith

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

"Know of me to be of women the lewdest,
if we thee I drive to Jötunheim."^[9]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

"Most lustful indeed should I look to all
If I journeyed with thee to the giants' home."^[10]

The gods and goddesses assemble at a thing and debate how to solve the problem. The god Heimdallr proposes to dress Thor up as a bride, complete with bridal dress, head-dress, jingling keys, jewelry, and the famous Brísingamen. Thor objects but is hushed by Loki, reminding him that the new owners of the hammer will soon be settling in the land of the gods if the hammer isn't returned. Thor is dressed as planned and Loki is dressed as his maid. Thor and Loki go to Jötunheimr.^[11]

In the meantime, Thrym tells his servants to prepare for the arrival of the daughter of Njörðr. When "Freyja" arrives in the morning, Thrym is taken aback by her behavior; her immense appetite for food and mead is far more than what he expected, and when Thrym goes in for a kiss beneath "Freyja's" veil, he finds "her" eyes to be terrifying, and he jumps down the hall. The disguised Loki makes excuses for the bride's odd behavior, claiming that she simply has not eaten or slept for eight days. In the end, the disguises successfully fool the jötnar and, upon sight of it, Thor regains his hammer by force.^[12]

In the poem *Oddrúnargrátr*, Oddrún helps Borgny give birth to twins. In thanks, Borgny invokes vættir, Frigg, Freyja, and other unspecified deities.^[13]

Freyja is a main character in the poem *Hyndluljóð*, where she assists her faithful servant Óttar in finding information about his ancestry so that he may claim his inheritance. In doing so, Freyja turns Óttar into her boar, Hildisvíni, and, by means of flattery and threats of death by fire, Freyja successfully pries the information that Óttar needs from the jötunn Hyndla. Freyja speaks throughout the poem, and at one point praises Óttar for constructing a hörgr (an altar of stones) and frequently making blót (sacrifices) to her:



Reclining atop her boar Hildisvíni, Freyja visits Hyndla in an illustration (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

An offer-stead to me he raised,
with stones constructed;
now is the stone
as glass become.
With the blood of oxen
he newly sprinkled it.
Ottar ever trusted the Asyniur.^[14]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

For me a shrine of stones he made,
And now to glass the rock has grown;
Oft with the blood of beasts was it red;
In the goddesses ever did Ottar trust.^[15]

Prose Edda

Freyja appears in the *Prose Edda* books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*. In chapter 24 of *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High says that after the god Njörðr split with the goddess Skaði, he had two beautiful and mighty children (no partner is mentioned); a son, Freyr, and a daughter, Freyja. Freyr is "the most glorious" of the gods, and Freyja "the most glorious" of the goddesses. Freyja has a dwelling in the heavens, Fólkvangr, and that whenever Freyja "rides into battle she gets half the slain, and the other half to Odin [...]." In support, High quotes the *Grímnismál* stanza mentioned in the *Poetic Edda* section above.^[16]

High adds that Freyja has a large, beautiful hall called Sessrúmnir, and that when Freyja travels she sits in a chariot and drives two cats, and that Freyja is "the most approachable one for people to pray to, and from her name is derived the honorific title whereby noble ladies are called *fruvor* [noble ladies]." High adds that Freyja has a particular fondness for love songs, and that "it is good to pray to her concerning love affairs."^[16]

In chapter 29, High recounts the names and features of various goddesses, including Freyja. Regarding Freyja, High says that, next to Frigg, Freyja is highest in rank among them and that she owns the necklace Brísingamen. Freyja is married to Óðr, who goes on long travels, and the two have a very fair daughter by the name of Hnoss. While Óðr is absent, Freyja stays behind and in her sorrow she weeps tears of red gold. High notes that Freyja has many names, and explains that this is because Freyja adopted them when looking for Óðr and traveling "among strange peoples." These names include Gefn, Hörn, Mardöll, Sýr, and Vanadís.^[17]

Freyja plays a part in the events leading to the birth of Sleipnir, the eight-legged horse. In chapter 42, High recounts that, soon after the gods built the hall Valhalla, a builder (unnamed) came to them and offered to build for them in three seasons a fortification so solid that no jötunn would be able to come in over from Midgard. In exchange, the



Freyja (1882) by Carl Emil Doepler

builder wants Freyja for his bride, and the sun and the moon. After some debate the gods agree, but with added conditions. In time, just as he is about to complete his work, it is revealed that the builder is, in fact, himself a jötunn, and he is killed by Thor. In the mean time, Loki, in the form of a mare, has been impregnated by the jötunn's horse, Svaðilfari, and so gives birth to Sleipnir. In support, High quotes the *Völuspá* stanza that mentions Freyja.^[18] In chapter 49, High recalls the funeral of Baldr and says that Freyja attended the funeral and there drove her cat-chariot, the final reference to the goddess in *Gylfaginning*.^[19]

At the beginning of the book *Skáldskaparmál*, Freyja is mentioned among eight goddesses attending a banquet held for Ægir.^[20] Chapter 56 details the abduction of the goddess Iðunn by the jötunn Þjazi in the form of an eagle. Terrified at the prospect of death and torture due to his involvement in the abduction of Iðunn, Loki asks if he may use Freyja's "falcon shape" to fly north to Jötunheimr and retrieve the missing goddess. Freyja allows it, and using her "falcon shape" and a furious chase by eagle-Þjazi, Loki successfully returns her.^[21]

In chapter 6, a means of referring to Njörðr is provided that refers to Freyja ("father of Freyr and Freyja"). In chapter 7, a means of referring to Freyr is provided that refers to the goddess ("brother of Freyja"). In chapter 8, ways of referring to the god Heimdallr are provided, including "Loki's enemy, recoverer of Freyja's necklace", inferring a myth involving Heimdallr recovering Freyja's necklace from Loki.^[22]

In chapter 17, the jötunn Hrungrnir finds himself in Asgard, the realm of the gods, and becomes very drunk. Hrungrnir boasts that he will move Valhalla to Jötunheimr, bury Asgard, and kill all of the gods—with the exception of the goddesses Freyja and Sif, who he says he will take home with him. Freyja is the only one of them that dares to bring him more to drink. Hrungrnir says that he will drink all of their ale. After a while, the gods grow bored of Hrungrnir's antics and invoke the name of Thor. Thor immediately enters the hall, hammer raised. Thor is furious and demands to know who is responsible for letting a jötunn in to Asgard, who guaranteed Hrungrnir safety, and why Freyja "should be serving him drink as if at the Æsir's banquet."^[23]



Heimdallr returns the necklace Brísingamen to Freyja (1846) by Nils Blommér

In chapter 18, verses from the 10th century skald's composition *Þórsdrápa* are quoted. A kenning used in the poem refers to Freyja.^[24] In chapter 20, poetic ways to refer to Freyja are provided; "daughter of Njörðr", "sister of Freyr", "wife of Óðr", "mother of Hnoss", "possessor of the fallen slain and of Sessrumnir and tom-cats", possessor of Brísingamen, "Van-deity", Vanadís, and "fair-tear deity".^[25] In chapter 32, poetic ways to refer to gold are provided, including "Freyja's weeping" and "rain or shower [...] from Freyja's eyes".^[26]

Chapter 33 tells that once the gods journeyed to visit Ægir, one of whom was Freyja.^[26] In chapter 49, a quote from a work by the skald Einarr Skúlason employs the kenning "Óðr's bedfellow's eye-rain", which refers to Freyja and means "gold".^[27]

Chapter 36 explains again that gold can be referring to as Freyja's weeping due to her red gold tears. In support, works by the skalds Skúli Þórsteinsson and Einarr Skúlason are cited that use "Freyja's tears" or "Freyja's weepings" to represent "gold". The chapter features additional quotes from poetry by Einarr Skúlason that references the goddess and her child Hnoss.^[28] Freyja receives a final mention in the *Prose Edda* in chapter 75, where a list of goddesses is provided that includes Freyja.^[29]

Heimskringla

The *Heimskringla* book *Ynglinga saga* provides an Euhemerized account of the origin of the gods, including Freyja. In chapter 4, Freyja is introduced as a member of the Vanir, the sister of Freyr, and the daughter of Njörðr and his sister (whose name is not provided). After the Æsir–Vanir War ends in a stalemate, Odin appoints Freyr and Njörðr as priests over sacrifices. Freyja becomes the priestess of sacrificial offerings and it was she who introduced the practice of seiðr to the Æsir, previously only practiced by the Vanir.^[30]

In chapter 10, Freyja's brother Freyr dies, and Freyja is the last survivor among the Æsir and Vanir. Freyja keeps up the sacrifices and becomes famous. The saga explains that, due to Freyja's fame, all women of rank become known by her name—*frúvor* ("ladies"), a woman who is the mistress of her property is referred to as *freyja*, and *húsfreyja* ("lady of the house") for a woman who owns an estate.^[31]

The chapter adds that not only was Freyja very clever, but that she and her husband Óðr had two immensely beautiful daughters, Gersemi and Hnoss, "who gave their names to our most precious possessions."^[31]



Freja (1901) by Anders Zorn

Other

Freyja is mentioned in the sagas *Egils saga*, *Njáls saga*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, and in *Sörla þáttur*.

Egils saga

In *Egils saga*, when Egill Skallagrímsson refuses to eat, his daughter Þorgerðr (here anglicized as "Thorgerd") says she will go without food and thus starve to death, and in doing so will meet the goddess Freyja:

Thorgerd replied in a loud voice, 'I have had no evening meal, nor will I do so until I join Freyja. I know no better course of action than my father's. I do not want to live after my father and brother are dead.'^[32]

Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka

In the first chapter of the 14th century legendary saga *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, King Alrek has two wives, Geirhild and Signy, and cannot keep them both. He tells the two women that he would keep whichever of them that brews the better ale for him by the time he has returned home in the summer. The two compete and during the brewing process Signy prays to Freyja and Geirhild to Hött ("hood"), a man she had met earlier (earlier in the saga revealed to be Odin in disguise). Hött answers her prayer and spits on her yeast. Signy's brew wins the contest.^[33]

Sörla þáttur

In *Sörla þáttur*, a short, late 14th century narrative from a later and extended version of the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* found in the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript, an euhmerized account of the gods is provided. In the account, Freyja is described as having been a concubine of Odin, who bartered sex to four dwarfs for a golden necklace. In the work, the Æsir once lived in a city called Asgard, located in a region called "Asialand or Asiahome". Odin was the king of the realm, and made Njörðr and Freyr temple priests. Freyja was the daughter of Njörðr, and was Odin's concubine. Odin deeply loved Freyja, and she was "the fairest of woman of that day." Freyja had a beautiful bower, and when the door was shut no one could enter without Freyja's permission.^[34]

Chapter 1 records that one day Freyja passed by an open stone where dwarfs lived. Four dwarfs were smithying a golden necklace, and it was nearly done. Looking at the necklace, the dwarfs thought Freyja to be most fair, and she the necklace. Freyja offered to buy the collar from them with silver and gold and other items of value. The dwarfs said that they had no lack of money, and that for the necklace the only thing she could offer them would be a night with each of them. "Whether she liked it better or worse", Freyja agreed to the conditions, and so spent a night with each of the four dwarfs. The conditions were fulfilled and the necklace was hers. Freyja went home to her bower as if nothing happened.^[35]

As related in chapter 2, Loki, under the service of Odin, found out about Freyja's actions and told Odin. Odin told Loki to get the necklace and bring it to him. Loki said that since no one could enter Freyja's bower against her will, this wouldn't be an easy task, yet Odin told him not to come back until he had found a way to get the necklace. Howling, Loki turned away and went to Freyja's bower but found it locked, and that he couldn't enter. So Loki transformed himself into a fly, and after having trouble finding even the tiniest of entrances, he managed to find a tiny hole at the gable-top, yet even here he had to squeeze through to enter.^[35]

Having made his way into Freyja's chambers, Loki looked around to be sure that no one was awake, and found that Freyja was asleep. He landed on her bed and noticed that she was wearing the necklace, the clasp turned downward. Loki turned into a flea and jumped on to Freyja's cheek and there bit her. Freyja stirred, turning about, and then fell asleep again. Loki removed his flea's shape and undid her collar, opened the bower, and returned to Odin.^[35]

The next morning Freyja woke and saw that the doors to her bower were open, yet unbroken, and that her precious necklace was gone. Freyja had an idea of who was responsible. She got dressed and went to Odin. She told Odin of the malice he had allowed against her and of the theft of her necklace, and that he should give her back her jewelry.^[36]

Odin said that, given how she obtained it, she would never get it back. That is, with one exception: she could have it back if she could make two kings, themselves ruling twenty kings each, battle one another, and cast a spell so that each time one of their numbers falls in battle, they will again spring up and fight again. And that this must go on eternally, unless a Christian man of a particular stature goes into the battle and smites them, only then will they stay dead. Freyja agreed.^[36]



Freyja in the Dwarf's Cave (1891) by Louis Huard

Post-Christianization and Scandinavian folklore

Although the Christianization of Scandinavia beheld a new institution in Scandinavia, the church, that sought to demonize the native gods, belief and reverence in the gods, including Freyja, remained into the modern period and melded into Scandinavian folklore. In Iceland, Freyja was called upon for assistance by way of Icelandic magical staves as late as the 18th century, and as late as the 19th century, Freyja is recorded as retaining elements of her role as a fertility goddess among rural Swedes.^[37]

In the province of Småland, Sweden, an account is recorded connecting Freyja with sheet lightning in this respect. Writer Johan Alfred Göth recalled a Sunday in 1880 where men were walking in fields and looking at nearly ripened rye, where Måns in Karryd said: "Now Freyja is out watching if the rye is ripe". Along with this, Göth recalls another mention of Freyja in the countryside:

When as a boy I was visiting the old Proud-Katrina, I was afraid of lightning like all boys in those days. When the sheet lightning flared at the night, Katrina said: "Don't be afraid little child, it is only Freyja who is out making fire with steel and flintstone to see if the rye is ripe. She is kind to people and she is only doing it to be of service, she is not like Thor, he slays both people and livestock, when he is in the mood" [...] I later heard several old folks talk of the same thing in the same way.^[38]

In Värend, Sweden, Freyja could also arrive at Christmas night and she used to shake the apple trees for the sake of a good harvest and consequently people left some apples in the trees for her sake. However, it was dangerous to leave the plough outdoors, because if Freyja sat on it, it would no longer be of any use.^[1]

A 12th century depiction of a cloaked but otherwise nude woman riding a large cat appears on a wall in the Schleswig Cathedral in Schleswig-Holstein, Northern Germany. Beside her is similarly a cloaked yet otherwise nude woman riding a distaff. Due to iconographic similarities to the literary record, these figures have been theorized as depictions of Freyja and Frigg respectively.^[39]



Ripe rye in Northern Europe

Eponyms

Several plants were named after Freyja, such as *Freyja's tears* and *Freyja's hair* (*Polygala vulgaris*), but during the process of Christianization, the name of the goddess was replaced with that of the Virgin Mary.^[40] In the pre-Christian period, the Orion constellation was called either Frigg's distaff or Freyja's distaff (Swedish *Frejerock*).^[40]

Place names in Norway and Sweden reflect devotion to the goddess, including the Norwegian place name Frøihov (originally **Freyjuhof*, literally "Freyja's hof") and Swedish place names such as Frövi (from **Freyjuvé*, literally "Freyja's vé").^[41] In a survey of toponyms in Norway, M. Olsen tallies at least 20 to 30 location names compounded with *Freyja*. Three of these place names appear to derive from **Freyjuhof* ('Freyja's hof'), whereas the goddess's name is frequently otherwise compounded with words for 'meadow' (such as *-þveit*, *-land*) and similar land formations. These toponyms are attested most commonly on the west coast though a high frequency is found in the southeast.^[42]

Place names containing *Freyja* are yet more numerous and varied in Sweden, where they are widely distributed. A particular concentration is recorded in Uppland, among which a number derive from the above mentioned **Freyjuvé* and also **Freyjulundr* ('Freyja's sacred grove'), place names that indicate public worship of Freyja. In addition, a variety of place names (such as *Frøal* and *Fröale*) have been seen as containing an element cognate to Gothic *alhs* and Old English *ealh* ('temple'), although these place names may be otherwise interpreted. In addition, *Freyja* appears as a compound element with a variety of words for geographic features such as fields, meadows, lakes, and natural objects such as rocks.^[43]

The Freyja name *Hörn* appears in the Swedish place names Härnevi and Järnevi, stemming from the reconstructed Old Norse place name **Hörnar-vé* (meaning "Hörn's vé").^[44]

Theories

Relation to other goddesses and figures

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, a figure by the name of Gullveig is burnt three times yet is three times reborn. After her third rebirth, she is known as Heiðr. This event is generally accepted as precipitating the Æsir–Vanir War. Starting with scholar Gabriel Turville-Petre, scholars such as Rudolf Simek, Andy Orchard, and John Lindow have theorized that Gullveig/Heiðr is the same figure as Freyja, and that her involvement with the Æsir somehow led to the events of the Æsir–Vanir War.^[45]

Outside of theories connecting Freyja with the goddess Frigg (see etymology section above), some scholars, such as Hilda Ellis Davidson and Britt-Mari Näsström, have theorized that other goddesses in Norse mythology, such as Gefjon, Gerðr, and Skaði, may be forms of Freyja in different roles and/or ages.^[46]



Freyja's hair—*Polygala vulgaris*—a species of the genus *Polygala*.

Receiver of the slain

Freyja and her afterlife field *Fólkvangr*, where she receives half of the slain, has been theorized as connected to the valkyries. Scholar Britt-Mari Näsström points out the description in *Gylfaginning* where it is said of Freyja that "whenever she rides into battle she takes half of the slain," and interprets *Fólkvangr* as "the field of the Warriors". Näsström notes that, just like Odin, Freyja receives slain heroes who have died on the battlefield, and that her house is *Sessrumnir* (which she translates as "filled with many seats"), a dwelling that Näsström posits likely fills the same function as Valhalla. Näsström comments that "still, we must ask why there are two heroic paradises in the Old Norse view of afterlife. It might possibly be a consequence of different forms of initiation of warriors, where one part seemed to have belonged to Óðinn and the other to Freyja. These examples indicate that Freyja was a war-goddess, and she even appears as a valkyrie, literally 'the one who chooses the slain'."^[47]

Siegfried Andres Dobat comments that "in her mythological role as the chooser of half the fallen warriors for her death realm *Fólkvangr*, the goddess Freyja, however, emerges as the mythological role model for the *Valkyrjar* [*sic*] and the *dísir*."^[48]

Modern influence

Freyja is mentioned in the first stanza ("it is called old Denmark and it is Freja's hall") of the civil national anthem of Denmark, *Der er et yndigt land*, written by 19th century Danish poet Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger in 1819.^[49] In addition, Oehlenschläger wrote a comedy entitled *Freyjas alter* (1818) and a poem *Freais sal* featuring the goddess.^[50]

The 19th century German composer Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* opera cycle features *Freia*, the goddess Freyja combined with the apple-bearing goddess *Iðunn*.^[51]

In late 19th century and early 20th century Northern Europe, Freyja was the subject of numerous works of art, including *Freyja* by H. E. Freund (statue, 1821–1822), *Freja sökande sin make* (painting, 1852) by Nils Blommér, *Freyjas Aufnahme uner den Göttern* (charcoal drawing, 1881) and *Frigg; Freyja* (drawing, 1883) by Karl Ehrenberg, *Freyja* (1901) by Carl Emil Doepler d. J., and *Freyja and the Brisingamen* by J. Doyle Penrose (painting, 1862–1932).^[50]

Vanadís, one of Freyja's names, is the source of the name of the chemical element vanadium, so named because of its many colored compounds.^[52]



Freia—a combination of Freyja and the goddess Iðunn—from Richard Wagner's opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen* as illustrated (1910) by Arthur Rackham

Notes

- [1] Grundy (1998:56–66).
- [2] Grundy (1998:57).
- [3] Larrington (1996:7).
- [4] Larrington (1999:53).
- [5] Larrington (1990:84 and 90).
- [6] Thorpe (1866:62).
- [7] Bellows (1923:175).
- [8] Larrington (1999:98).
- [9] Thorpe (1866:64).
- [10] Bellows (1923:177).
- [11] Larrington (1999:99–100).
- [12] Larrington (1999:100–101).
- [13] Larrington (1999:206).
- [14] Thorpe (1866:108).
- [15] Bellows (1936:221).
- [16] Faulkes (1995:24).
- [17] Faulkes (1995:29–30).
- [18] Faulkes (1995:35–36).
- [19] Faulkes (1995:50).
- [20] Faulkes (1995:59).
- [21] Faulkes (1995:60).
- [22] Faulkes (1995:75–76).
- [23] Faulkes (1995:68).
- [24] Faulkes (1995:85).
- [25] Faulkes (1995:86).
- [26] Faulkes (1995:95).
- [27] Faulkes (1995:119).
- [28] Faulkes (1995:98).
- [29] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [30] Hollander (2007:8).
- [31] Hollander (2007:14).
- [32] Scudder (2001:151).
- [33] Tunstall (2005).
- [34] Morris (1911:127).
- [35] Morris (1911:128).
- [36] Morris (1911:129).
- [37] For Freyja in Iceland, see Flowers (1989:73 and 80). For Freyja in Sweden, see Schön (2004:227–228).
- [38] Schön (2004:227–228).
- [39] Jones and Pennick (1995:144–145).
- [40] Schön (2004:228).
- [41] Simek (2007:91) and Turville-Petre (1964:178–179).
- [42] Turville-Petre (1964:178).
- [43] Turville-Petre (1964:178–179).
- [44] Simek (2007:156–157) and Turville-Petre (1964:178).
- [45] Simek (2007:123–124), Lindow (2002:155), and Orchard (1997:67).
- [46] Davidson (1998:85–86).
- [47] Näsström (1999:61).
- [48] Dobat (2006:186).
- [49] Andersen (1899:157).
- [50] Simek (2007:91).
- [51] Simek (2007:90).
- [52] Wiberg, Wiberg, and Holleman (2001:1345).

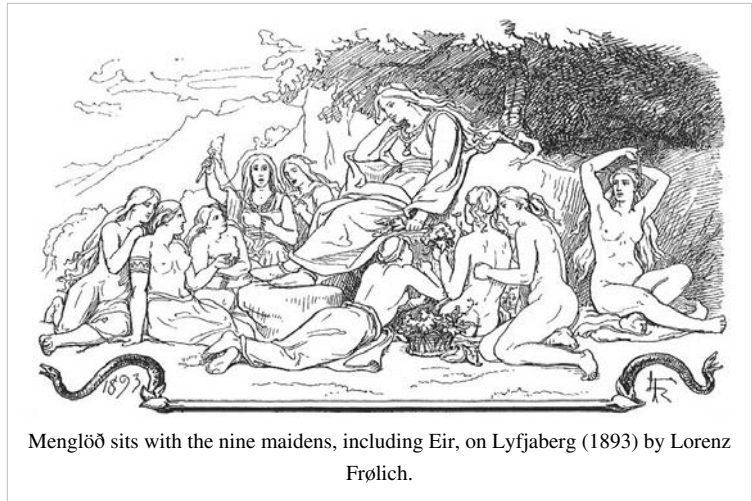
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Ásynjur

Eir

In Norse mythology, **Eir** (Old Norse "help, mercy"^[1]) is a goddess and/or valkyrie associated with medical skill. Eir is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; and in skaldic poetry, including a runic inscription from Bergen, Norway from around 1300. Scholars have theorized about whether or not these three sources refer to the same figure, and debate whether or not Eir may have been originally a healing goddess and/or a valkyrie. In addition, Eir has been theorized as a form of the goddess Frigg and has been compared to the Greek goddess Hygiea.



Menglöð sits with the nine maidens, including Eir, on Lyfjaberg (1893) by Lorenz Frølich.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Fjölsvinismál*, the watchman Fjölsviðr presents a list of the maidens that attend the lady of the keep—Menglöð—that includes Eir, and states that they all sit on the hill Lyfjaberg (Old Norse "hill of healing"^[2] or "healing mountain"^[3]). The exchange between the hero Svipdagr and Fjölsviðr mentioning Eir is as follows:

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Svipdagr spake:

"Now answer me, Fjölsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What maidens are they that at Mengloth's knees
Are sitting so gladly together?"

Fjölsvith spake:

"Hlif is one named, Hlifthrasa another,
Thjothvara call they the third;
Bjort and Bleik, Blith and Frith,
Eir and Aurbotha."^[2]

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Vindkald.

Tell me, Fjölsvith! etc.,
how these maids are called,
who sit at Menglod's knees
in harmony together?

Fjölsvith.

Hlif the first is called, the second Hlifthursa,
the third Thiodvarta,
Biort and Blid, Blidr, Frid,
Eir, and Orboda."^[4]

After the exchange, Svipdagr asks if these figures will give aid if blóts are made to them. Fjölsviðr responds that Svipdagr is correct:

Fjolsvith spake:

"Soon aid they all who offers give
On the holy altars high;
And if danger they see for the sons of men,
Then each day from ill do they guard."^[5]

Fiolsvith.

Every summer in which men offer to them,
at the holy place,
no pestilence so great shall come to the sons of men,
but they will free each from peril.^[4]

Prose Edda

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High provides brief descriptions of 16 ásynjur. High lists Eir third, and says no more about her other than noting that "she is an extremely good physician."^[6] In chapter 75 of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál* Eir appears within a list of valkyrie names, but Eir is not included in the list of ásynjur in the same chapter.^[7]

Skaldic poetry and runic inscription

In skaldic poetry, the name Eir is frequent in kennings for women. A sample construction is *Eir aura* ("Eir of riches"), occurring in *Gísla saga*.^[8] The name is already used in this way by the 10th century poets Kormákr Ögmundarson and Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld.^[9] Similarly, the name Eir is used in a woman kenning in a runic inscription inscribed on a stick from Bergen, Norway around the year 1300. The stick records a common mercantile transaction followed by a verse from a displeased scribe (edits applied per the translator's notes):

'Wise Var of wire ["woman of filigree," meaning "wise bejeweled woman"] makes (me) sit unhappy.

Eir [woman] of mackerels' ground [likely gold] takes often and much sleep from me."^[10]

Mindy Macleod and Bernard Mees posit that the first line of the inscription essentially means "women make me miserable" or potentially "marriage makes me miserable," whereas the second line means "women often take a lot of sleep from me."^[10]

The name remained frequently used in woman kennings in rímur poetry.^[11]

Theories

Regarding the seemingly three different, seemingly conflicting, mentions of Eir, Andy Orchard says that the etymology of the name *Eir* may appear to fit the role of Eir as a goddess and servant of Menglöð best, but that one should consider that the valkyries also have the ability to waken the dead.^[1] John Lindow is skeptical of there having been a belief in Eir as a goddess, stating that "whether we should trust Snorri and imagine the existence of a goddess Eir is problematic."^[12] Rudolf Simek says that Eir may originally have been simply a valkyrie rather than a goddess, and lists the servant of Menglöð by the same name as a separate figure.^[13]

Hilda Ellis Davidson comments that "virtually nothing" is known about Eir outside of her association with healing, and points out that she is "singled out as one of the Norns who shape the lives of children." Davidson adds that "no satisfactory conclusions" have been drawn from her name, and considers all mentions of Eir as of the same figure. Davidson says that, in reference to Eir's appearance among Menglöð's maidens, that the names of these maidens "suggest that they are guardian spirits, and [they are] said to 'shelter and save' those who make offerings of them. The could be akin to protective spirits of the house, guarding both men and women." She additionally draws a link between these spirits and Lyfjaberg:

Lyfjaberg is where the goddess sits surrounded by her helpful spirits. Although healing by a goddess - or indeed by a god either - has left little mark on Norse myths as they have come down to us, there is no doubt that the healing power of goddesses was of enormous importance in daily life in the pre-Christian period, as was that of many women saints in Christian times. The goddess who presided over childbirth was held to possess power over life and death, and was revered as a lifegiver, both in the family home

and in the courts of kings, though she might also pass sentence of death.^[14]

Henry Adams Bellows proposes a relationship between Eir and the place name *Lyfjaberg*, which he translates as "hill of healing." Bellows notes that manuscripts vary about the spelling of the place name, and that he, as others, has followed 19th century scholar Sophus Bugge's choice. Bellows states that the stanza mentioning Lyfjaberg "implies that Mengloth is a goddess of healing, and hence, perhaps an hypostasis of Frigg, as already intimated by her name [...]. In stanza 54, Eir appears as one of Mengloth's handmaidens, and Eir, according to Snorri (*Gylfaginning*, 35) is herself the Norse Hygeia. Compare this stanza to stanza 32."^[2]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:36).
- [2] Bellows (1923:248).
- [3] Simek (2007:198).
- [4] Thorpe (1907:100).
- [5] Bellows (1923:249).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:29).
- [7] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [8] Olsen (1996:270).
- [9] Finnur Jónsson (1931:104).
- [10] MacLeod, Mees (2006:59).
- [11] Finnur Jónsson (1926-28:74).
- [12] Lindow (2001:105).
- [13] Simek (2007:71–72).
- [14] Davidson (1998:162–163).

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Frigg

Frigg (sometimes anglicized as **Frigga**) is a major goddess in Norse paganism, a subset of Germanic paganism. She is said to be the wife of Odin, and is the "foremost among the goddesses" and the queen of Asgard.^[1] Frigg appears primarily in Norse mythological stories as a wife and a mother. She is also described as having the power of prophecy yet she does not reveal what she knows.^[2] Frigg is described as the only one other than Odin who is permitted to sit on his high seat Hlidskjalf and look out over the universe. The English term Friday derives from the Anglo-Saxon name for Frigg, Frige.^[3]

Frigg is the mother of Baldr. Her stepchildren are Thor, Hermóðr, Heimdallr, Týr, Bragi, Víðarr, Váli, Skjöldur, and Höðr. Frigg's companion is Eir, a goddess associated with medical skills. Frigg's attendants are Hlín, Gná, and Fulla.

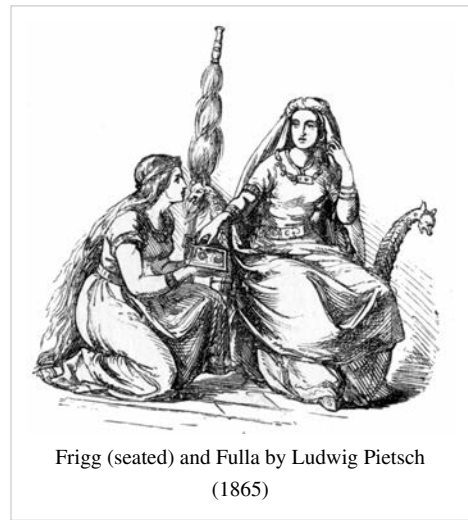
In the Poetic Edda poem *Lokasenna* 26, Frigg is said to be *Fjörgyns mær* ("Fjörgynn's maiden"). The problem is that in Old Norse *mær* means both "daughter" and "wife," so it is not fully clear if Fjörgynn is Frigg's father or another name for her husband Odin, but Snorri Sturluson interprets the line as meaning Frigg is Fjörgynn's daughter (*Skáldskaparmál* 27), and most modern translators of the Poetic Edda follow Snorri. The original meaning Wikipedia:Disputed statement of *ffjörgynn* was the earth, cf. feminine version Fjorgyn, a byname for *Jörð*, the earth. The other piece of evidence lies with the goddess Fjorgyn, who is the mother of Thor, and whose name can be translated into Earth. Since Fjorgyn is not only the name of a goddess, but the feminine byname for Earth, it is relatively safe to assume that "mær", in this case, means "daughter".^[4]

Etymology

Old Norse *Frigg* (genitive *Friggjar*), Old Saxon *Fri*, and Old English *Frig* are derived from Common Germanic *Frijjō*.^[5] Frigg is cognate with Sanskrit *prīyā* which means 'wife; dear/beloved one'^[5] which is the derivation of the word *sapphire*. The root also appears in Old Saxon *fri* which means "beloved lady", in Swedish as *fria* ("to propose for marriage") and in Icelandic as *frjá* which means "to love."^[5] All of these names, as well as the words *friend* and *affray* are ultimately from the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root **pri-** meaning 'to love.'



"Frigga Spinning the Clouds" by J. C. Dollman.



Frigg (seated) and Fulla by Ludwig Pietsch (1865)

Attributes

The asterism Orion's Belt was known as "Frigg's Distaff/spinning wheel" (*Friggerock*) or "Freyja's Distaff" (*Frejerock*).^[6] Some have pointed out that the constellation is on the celestial equator and have suggested that the stars rotating in the night sky may have been associated with Frigg's spinning wheel.^[7] The Norse name for the planet Venus was *Friggjarstjarna* 'Frigg's star'.

Frigg's name means "love" or "beloved one" (Proto-Germanic *frijjō, cf. Sanskrit priyā "beloved") and was known among many northern European cultures with slight name variations over time: e.g. Friggja in Sweden, Frīg (genitive Frīge) in Old English, and Fricka in Richard Wagner's operatic cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.^[8] Modern English translations have sometimes altered Frigg to *Frigga*. It has been suggested that "Frau Holle" of German folklore is a survival of Frigg.^[9]

Frigg's hall in Asgard is Fensalir, which means "Marsh Halls."^[10] This may mean that marshy or boggy land was considered especially sacred to her but nothing definitive is known. The goddess Saga, who was described as drinking with Odin from golden cups in her hall "Sunken Benches," may be Frigg by a different name.^[11]

Frigg was a goddess associated with married women. She was called up by women to assist in giving birth to children, and Scandinavians used the plant Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) as a sedative, they called it *Frigg's grass*.^[6]

See also Friday.

Myths

Death of Baldr

Frigg plays a major role in section 49 of the 13th century Prose Edda book *Gylfaginning* written by Snorri Sturluson, where a version of a story relating the death of Baldr is recorded by Snorri. Baldr has had a series of ominous dreams. As Baldr was popular amongst the Æsir, after Baldr told the Æsir about his dreams, they met together at the *thing* and decided it wise to provide a truce for Baldr that would maintain his safety. Frigg, his mother, here takes an oath from all things, which includes disease, poisons, the elements, objects and all living beings that none will harm Baldr.

After the oaths were taken, the Æsir, aware of Baldr's newly gained invincibility, had Baldr stand in front of the *thing*. There, the Æsir hit Baldr with blows, shot objects at him, and some would hit him with stones. Nothing harmed him and everyone felt it was remarkable.

Loki witnessed this and was angered by Baldr's invulnerability. Loki changed himself into a woman and visited Frigg at her hall Fensalir. There, Frigg asked the woman if she knew what was happening at the *thing*. The woman told her that the Æsir were shooting at Baldr and yet he remained unharmed. Frigg responded that nothing could harm Baldr, as she had taken oaths from all things.



Frigg's grass.



"Baldr's Death" (1817) by Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg.

The woman asked Frigg if all things had indeed promised not to hurt Baldr, to which Frigg reveals that:

"A shoot of wood grows west of Valhalla. It is called mistletoe, and it seemed too young for me to demand its oath."^[12]

Immediately after Frigg revealed this, the woman vanished. Loki then took hold of the mistletoe, broke it off and went to the *thing*.

There, Höðr, since he was blind, stood at the edge of the circle of people. Loki offered to help Höðr in honoring Baldr by shooting things at him. Höðr took the mistletoe from Loki and, following Loki's directions, shot at Baldr. The mistletoe went directly through Baldr and he fell to the ground. Baldr was dead.

The gods were speechless and devastated, unable to react due to their grief. After the gods gathered their wits from the immense shock and grief of Baldr's death, Frigg asked the Æsir who amongst them wished "to gain all of her love and favor"^[12] by riding the road to Hel. Whoever agreed was to offer Hel a ransom in exchange for Baldr's return to Asgard. Hermóðr agrees to this and set off with Sleipnir to Hel.

While Hermóðr rides to Hel, Frigg arrives at the cremation with Odin, Hugin and Munin, and the Valkyries. With them came various other gods and beings during which a grand funeral for Baldr was held. After a long journey, Hermóðr arrives in Hel, meets with Hel and pleads for the return of Baldr on behalf of Frigg. Hel gives the condition that all things must weep for Baldr if Baldr will be returned to Asgard. Nanna, the wife of Baldr (whose heart burst upon seeing the corpse of Baldr and was placed upon the pyre with Baldr), gives gifts to Hermóðr to return to Asgard with. "Along with other gifts,"^[12] only two gifts are specifically mentioned: a white linen robe for Frigg and a golden ring for Fulla.

The Æsir then sent forth messengers to all things to have them weep for Baldr, so that he may return from Hel. All things did but a giantess by the name of Þökk, regarding whom Snorri writes that "people believe that the giantess was Loki."^[12] Afterwards, in sections 50 and 51, a series of events occur where the gods take revenge upon Loki by binding him and thus furthering the onset of Ragnarök, though Frigg is not mentioned further

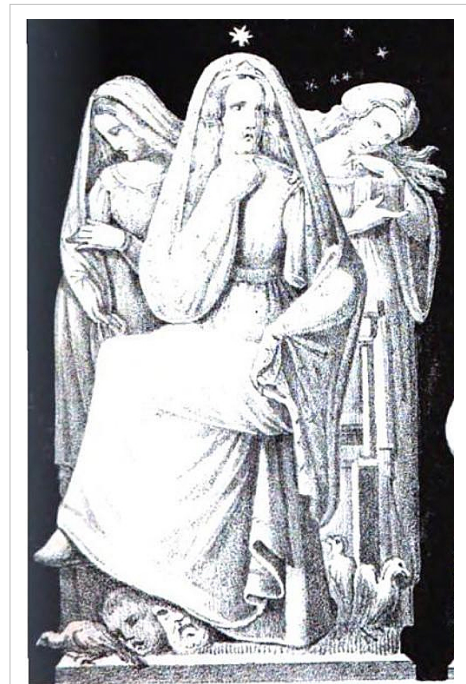
Vili and Ve

The story of Frigg and Odin's brothers, Vili and Ve, has survived in very brief form. In the *Ynglinga Saga* of Snorri Sturluson the entire story is told as follows:

"Othin [Odin] had two brothers. One was called Ve, and the other Vili. These, his brothers, governed the realm when he was gone. One time when Othin was gone to a great distance, he stayed away so long that the Æsir thought he would never return. Then his brothers began to divide his inheritance; but his wife Frigg they shared between them. However, a short while afterwards, Othin returned and took possession of his wife again."^[13]

The same story is referenced in one stanza of the poem, *Lokasenna*, in which Loki insults Frigg by accusing her of infidelity with Odin's brothers:

*Hush thee, Frigg, who art Fjorgyn's daughter:
Thou hast ever been mad after men.
Vili and Ve, thou, Vithrir's spouse, [Vithrir=Odin]
Didst fold to thy bosom both.*^[14]



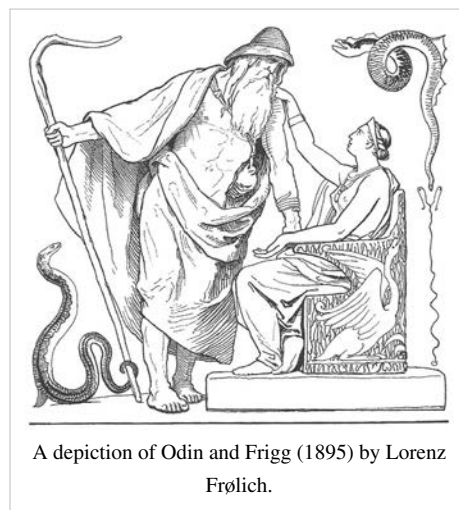
"Frigga" (1832) from *Die Helden und Götter des Nordens, oder Das Buch der sagen*.

Modern scholars such as Lee Hollander explain that *Lokasenna* was intended to be humorous and that the accusations thrown by Loki in the poem are not necessarily to be taken as "generally accepted lore" at the time it was composed. Rather they are charges that are easy for Loki to make and difficult for his targets to disprove, or which they do not care to refute.^[15]

Comparisons have been proposed regarding Frigg's role in this story to that of sacred queens during certain periods in ancient Egypt, when a king was king by virtue of being the queen's husband.^[16]

Historia Langobardorum

The Langobard historian Paul the Deacon, who died in southern Italy in the 790s, was proud of his tribal origins and related how his people once had migrated from southern Scandinavia.^[17] In his work *Historia Langobardorum*, Paul relates how Odin's wife Frea (Frigg/Freyja) had given victory to the Langobards in a war against the Vandals.^[17] She is depicted as a wife who knows how to get her own way even though her husband thinks he is in charge. The Winnili and the Vandals were two warring tribes. Odin favored the Vandals, while Frea favored the Winnili. After a heated discussion, Odin swore that he would grant victory to the first tribe he saw the next morning upon awakening—knowing full well that the bed was arranged so that the Vandals were on his side. While he slept, Frea told the Winnili women to comb their hair over their faces to look like long beards so they would look like men and turned the bed so the Winnili women would be on Odin's side. When he woke up, Odin was surprised to see the disguised women first and asked who these long bearded men were, which was where the tribe got its new name, the Langobards ("longbeards"). Odin kept his oath and granted victory to the Winnili (now known as the Lombards), and eventually saw the wisdom of Frea's choice.



A depiction of Odin and Frigg (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Gesta Danorum

Saxo Grammaticus wrote in his *Gesta Danorum* another story about Frigg:

"At this time there was one Odin, who was credited over all Europe with the honour, which was false, of godhead, but used more continually to sojourn at Upsala; and in this spot, either from the sloth of the inhabitants or from its own pleasantness, he vouchsafed to dwell with somewhat especial constancy.

The kings of the North, desiring more zealously to worship his deity, embounded his likeness in a golden image; and this statue, which betokened their homage, they transmitted with much show of worship to Byzantium, fettering even the effigied arms with a serried mass of bracelets. Odin was overjoyed at such notoriety, and greeted warmly the devotion of the senders. But his queen Frigg, desiring to go forth more beautified, called smiths, and had the gold stripped from the statue.

Odin hanged them, and mounted the statue upon a pedestal, which by the marvellous skill of his art he made to speak when a mortal touched it. But still Frigg preferred the splendour of her own apparel to the divine honours of her husband, and submitted herself to the embraces of one of her servants; and it was by this man's device she broke down the image, and turned to the service of her private wantonness that gold which had been devoted to public idolatry. Little thought she of practicing unchastity, that she might the easier satisfy her greed, this woman so unworthy to be the consort of a god; but what should I here add, save that such a godhead was worthy of such a wife? So great was the error that of old befooled the minds of men.

Thus Odin, wounded by the double trespass of his wife, resented the outrage to his image as keenly as that to his bed; and, ruffled by these two stinging dishonours, took to an exile overflowing with noble shame, imagining so to wipe off the slur of his ignominy. At home, Frigg went with a certain Mith-Othin and took over Odin's properties, until Odin came back and drove them away. Frigg's death later cleared Odin's name and he regained his reputation." (*Gesta Danorum*, Book I)^[18]

In Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, however, the gods and goddesses are heavily euhemerized, and Saxo's view on pagan deities is extremely biased, therefore most stories related to pagan gods written in it might not exist in ancient lore. Georges Dumézil linked Saxo's account of Frigg's infidelity and the stolen gold with the burning of Gullveig.

Connection between Frigg and Freyja

Frigg is the highest goddess of the Æsir, while Freyja is the highest goddess of the Vanir. Many arguments have been made both for and against the idea that Frigg and Freyja are really the same goddess, avatars of one another.^[19] Some arguments are based on linguistic analysis, others on the fact that Freyja was not known in southern Germany, only in the north, and in some places the two goddesses were considered to be the same, while in others they were considered to be different.^[20] There are clearly many similarities between the two: both had flying cloaks of falcon feathers and engaged in shape-shifting, Frigg was married to Odin while Freyja was married to Óðr, both had special necklaces, both had a personification of the Earth as a parent, both were called upon for assistance in childbirth, etc.

There is also an argument that Frigg and Freyja are part of a triad of goddesses (together with a third goddess such as Hnoss or Iðunn) associated with the different ages of womankind.^[21] Wikipedia:Identifying reliable sources The areas of influence of Frigg and Freyja do not quite match up with the areas of influence often seen in other goddess triads. This may mean that the argument is not a good one, or it may show something interesting about northern European culture as compared to Celtic and southern European culture.

Finally, there is an argument that Frigg and Freyja are similar goddesses from different pantheons who were first conflated into each other and then later seen as separate goddesses again (see also Frige). This is consistent with the theological treatment of some Greek, Roman, and Egyptian deities in the late classical period.



Fricka rides a chariot in this illustration by Arthur Rackham to Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Toponyms

In Västergötland, Sweden, there is a place called Friggeråker.^[5] An English charter from 936 AD displays the name *Frigedune*, which means "Valley of Frig," thus implying that Friden in Derbyshire is named after Frigg.^[1] The villages of Froyle ("Frigg's Hill") and Freefolk ("Frigg's People") in Hampshire, England may also be named after Frigg.^[22]

Friday

The name Friday comes from the Old English *Frīġedæg*, meaning the "day of Frigg", a result of an old convention associating the Old English goddess Frige with the Roman goddess Venus, with whom the day is associated in many different cultures.

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Fulla

In Germanic mythology, **Fulla** (Old Norse, possibly "bountiful"^[1]) or **Volla** (Old High German) is a goddess. In Norse mythology, Fulla is described as wearing a golden snood and as tending to the ashen box and the footwear owned by the goddess Frigg, and, in addition, Frigg confides in Fulla her secrets. Fulla is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; and in skaldic poetry. Volla is attested in the "Horse Cure" Merseburg Incantation, recorded anonymously in the 10th century in Old High German, in which she assists in healing the wounded foal of Phol and is referred to as Frigg's sister. Scholars have proposed theories about the implications of the goddess.



A depiction of Fulla kneeling beside her mistress, Frigg, (1865) by Ludwig Pietsch.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the prose introduction to the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál*, Frigg makes a wager with her husband—the god Odin—over the hospitality of their human patrons. Frigg sends her servant maid Fulla to warn the king Geirröd—Frigg's patron—that a magician (actually Odin in disguise) will visit him. Fulla meets with Geirröd, gives the warning, and advises to him a means of detecting the magician:



The goddess Frigg surrounded by three other goddesses. Fulla holds Frigg's eski on the bottom left. Illustration (1882) by Emil Doepler.

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Frigg sent her handmaiden, Fulla, to Geirröth. She bade the king beware lest a magician who was come thither to his land should bewitch him, and told this sign concerning him, that no dog was so fierce as to leap at him.^[2]

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Frigg sent her waiting-maid Fulla to bid Geirröd be on his guard, lest the trollmann who was coming should do him harm, and also say that a token whereby he might be known was, that no dog, however fierce,^[3] would attack him.

Prose Edda

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, High provides brief descriptions of 16 ásynjur. High lists Fulla fifth, stating that, like the goddess Gefjun, Fulla is a virgin, wears her hair flowing freely with a gold band around her head. High describes that Fulla carries Frigg's *eski*, looks after Frigg's footwear, and that in Fulla Frigg confides secrets.^[4]

In chapter 49 of *Gylfaginning*, High details that, after the death of the deity couple Baldr and Nanna, the god Hermóðr wagers for their return in the underworld location of Hel. Hel, ruler of the location of the same name, tells Hermóðr a way to resurrect Baldr, but will not allow Baldr and Nanna to leave until the deed is accomplished. Hel does, however, allow Baldr and Nanna to send gifts to the living; Baldr sends Odin the ring Draupnir, and Nanna sends Frigg a robe of linen, and "other gifts." Of these "other gifts" sent, the only specific item that High mentions is a finger-ring for Fulla.^[5]

The first chapter of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Fulla is listed among eight ásynjur who attend an evening drinking banquet held for Ægir.^[6] In chapter 19 of *Skáldskaparmál*, poetic ways to refer to Frigg are given, one of which is by referring to her as "queen [...] of Fulla."^[7] In chapter 32, poetic expressions for gold are given, one of which includes "Fulla's snood."^[8] In chapter 36, a work by the skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir is cited that references Fulla's golden snood ("the falling sun [gold] of the plain [forehead] of Fulla's eyelashes shone on [...]").^[9] Fulla receives a final mention in the *Prose Edda* in chapter 75, where Fulla appears within a list of 27 ásynjur names.^[10]

"Horse Cure" Merseburg Incantation

One of the two Merseburg Incantations (the "horse cure"), recorded in Old High German, mentions Volla. The incantation describes how Phol and Wodan rode to a wood, and there Balder's foal sprained its foot. Sinthgunt sang charms, her sister Sunna sang charms, Friia sang charms, her sister Volla sang charms, and finally Wodan sang charms, followed by a verse describing the healing of the foal's bone. The charm reads:

Phol and Wodan went to the forest.
 Then Balder's horse sprained its foot.
 Then Sinthgunt sang charms, and Sunna her sister;
 Then Friia sang charms, and Volla her sister;
 Then Wodan sang charms, as he well could:
 be it bone-sprain, be it blood-sprain, be it limb-sprain:
 bone to bone, blood to blood,
 limb to limb, so be they glued together.^[11]

Theories

Andy Orchard comments that the seeming appearance of Baldr with Volla in the Merseburg Incantation is "intriguing" since Fulla is one of the three goddesses (the other two being Baldr's mother Frigg and his wife Nanna) the deceased Baldr expressly sends gifts to from Hel.^[1] John Lindow says that since the name *Fulla* seems to have something to do with fullness, it may also point to an association with fertility.^[12]

Rudolf Simek comments that while Snorri notes that Baldr sends Fulla a golden ring from Hel in *Gylfaginning*, "this does not prove that she plays any role in the Baldr myth, but merely shows that Snorri associated her with gold" because of kennings used associating Fulla with gold. Simek says that since Fulla appears in the poetry of Skalds as early as the 10th century that she was likely "not a late personification of plenty" but that she is very likely identical with Volla from the Merseburg Incantation. Simek adds that it is unclear as to who Fulla actually is; Simek says that she may be an independent deity or simply identical with the goddess Freyja or with Frigg.^[13]

John Knight Bostock says that theories have been proposed that the Fulla may at one time have been an aspect of Frigg. As a result, this notion has resulted in theory that a similar situation may have existed between the figures of the goddesses Sinthgunt and Sunna, in that the two may have been understood as aspects of one another rather than entirely separate figures.^[14]

Hilda Ellis Davidson states that the goddesses Gefjun, Gerðr, Fulla, and Skaði "may represent important goddesses of early times in the North, but little was remembered about them by the time Snorri was collecting his material." On the other hand, Davidson notes that it is also possible that these goddesses are viewable as aspects of a single Great Goddess.^[15] Davidson calls Fulla and Volla "vague, uncertain figures, emerging from odd references to goddesses which Snorri has noted in the poets, but they suggest the possibility that at one time three generations were represented among the goddesses of fertility and harvest in Scandinavia."^[16]



Fulla holds Frigg's *eski* in *Frigg and Her Maidens* (1902).

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:49).
- [2] Bellows (1923:86).
- [3] Thorpe (1866:20).
- [4] Faulkes (1995:29).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:50).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:59).
- [7] Faulkes (1995:86).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:94).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:97–98).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [11] Lindow (2001:227).
- [12] Lindow (2001:132).
- [13] Simek (2007:96).
- [14] Bostock (1976:29).
- [15] Davidson (1998:10).
- [16] Davidson (1998:86).

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Gerðr

In Norse mythology, **Gerðr** (Old Norse "fenced-in"^[1]) is a jötunn, goddess, and the wife of the god Freyr. Gerðr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; and in the poetry of skalds. *Gerðr* is sometimes modernly anglicized as **Gerd** or **Gerth**.

In both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, Freyr sees Gerðr from a distance, becomes deeply lovesick at the sight of her shimmering beauty, and has his servant Skírnir go to Jötunheimr (where Gerðr and her father Gymir reside) to gain her love. In the *Poetic Edda* Gerðr initially refuses, yet after a series of threats by Skírnir she finally agrees. In the *Prose Edda*, no mention of threats is made. In both sources, Gerðr agrees to meet Freyr at a fixed time at the location of Barri and, after Skírnir returns with Gerðr's response, Freyr laments that the meeting could not occur sooner. In both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, Gerðr is described as the daughter of Gymir and the mountain jötunn Aurboða.

In *Heimskringla*, Gerðr is recorded as the wife of Freyr, euhemerized as having been a beloved king of Sweden. In the same source, the couple are the founders of the Yngling dynasty and produced a son, Fjölfnir, who rose to kingship after Freyr's passing and continued their line. Gerðr is commonly theorized to be a goddess associated with the earth. Gerðr has inspired works of art and literature.



Skirnir's Message to Gerd (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

Attestations

Gerðr is attested in two poems in the *Poetic Edda*, in two books of the *Prose Edda*, and in two books in *Heimskringla*.

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Skírnismál*, the god Freyr sat on the high seat Hlidskjalf and looked into all worlds. Freyr saw a beautiful girl walking from the hall of her father to a storehouse. Freyr became heartsick for the girl. Freyr has a page named Skírnir. Freyr's father Njörðr and, in verse, the goddess Skaði tell Skírnir to find out what is the matter with Freyr. An exchange occurs between Freyr and Skírnir in verse, where Freyr tells Skírnir that he has seen a wonderous girl with shining arms at the home of (her father) Gymir, yet that the gods and elves do not wish for the two to be together:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

In Gýmir's courts I saw walking
a maid for whom I long.
Her arms gave forth light wherewith shone
all air and water.
Is more desirable to me that maid
than to any youth in early days;
yet will no one, Æsir or Alfar,
that we together live.^[2]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

"From Gymir's house I behold forth
A maiden dear to me;
Her arms glittered, and from their gleam
Shone all the sea and sky."
"To me more dear than in days of old
Was ever maiden to man;
But no one of gods or elves will grant
That we be together should be."^[3]

Skírnir requests that Freyr give him a horse and Freyr's sword; a sword which fights jötnar by itself. Under the cover of darkness, Skírnir rides the horse over nations and dew-covered mountains until he reaches Jötunheimr, the home of the jötnar, and proceeds to Gymir's courts. Ferocious dogs are tied before the wooden fence that surrounds Gerðr's hall. Skírnir rides out to a herdsman (unnamed) sitting on a mound, greets him, and asks the herdsman how he may speak to the maiden beyond Gymir's dogs. An exchange occurs between the herdsman and Skírnir, during which the herdsman tells Skírnir that he will never speak to the girl.^[4]

Hearing a terrible noise in her dwellings, Gerðr asks where it is coming from, noting that the earth trembles and that all of Gymir's courts shake. A serving maid (unnamed) notes that outside a man has dismounted his horse and has let it graze. Gerðr tells the serving maid to invite the man to come into their hall and to partake of some of their "famous mead," yet Gerðr expresses fear that the man outside may be her "brother's slayer".^[5]

Gerðr asks the stranger if he is of the elves, Æsir, or the Vanir, and why he comes alone "over the wild fire" to seek their company. Skírnir responds that he is of none of these groups, yet that he has indeed sought her out. Skírnir offers Gerðr 11 golden apples (or apples of eternal life, in a common emendation) to gain her favor. Gerðr rejects the apples—no matter who offers them—and adds that neither will she and Freyr be together as long as they live. Skírnir offers Gerðr a ring, here unnamed, that produces eight more gold rings every ninth night and "was burned with Odin's young son". Gerðr responds that she is not interested in the ring, for she shares her father's property, and Gymir has no lack of gold.^[6]



Gerðr refuses Skírnir's offer of eleven golden apples and the ring gift as illustrated (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Skírnir turns to threats; he points out to Gerðr that he holds a sword in his hand and he threatens to cut her head from her neck unless she agrees. Gerðr refuses; she says that she will not endure the coercion of any man, and says that if Gymir encounters Skírnir then a battle can be expected. Skírnir again reminds Gerðr of his blade and predicts that Gerðr's jötunn father will meet his doom with it. Skírnir warns Gerðr that he will strike her with his Gambanteinn, a wand, that it will tame her to his desires, and says that she will never again be seen by "the sons of men". From early morning, Gerðr will sit on an eagle's mound, looking outward to the world, facing Hel, and that "food shall be more hateful to you than to every man is the shining serpent among men".^[7]

Skírnir declares that when Gerðr comes out she will be a spectacle; Hrímgrímnir will "glare" at her, "everything" will stare at her, she will become more famous than the watchman of the gods, and that she will "gape through the bars". Gerðr will experience "madness and howling, tearing affliction and unbearable desire" and that, in grief, tears will flow from her. Skírnir tells Gerðr to sit down, for her fate will be even worse yet. She will be harassed by fiends all her weary days. From the court of jötnar to the halls of the hrimthurs, Gerðr shall everyday crawl without choice, nor hope of choice. Gerðr will weep rather than feel joy, suffering tearfully. She will live the rest of her life in misery with a three-headed thurs or otherwise be without a man altogether. Skírnir commands for Gerðr's mind to be seized, that she may waste away with pining, and that she be as the thistle at the end of the harvest; crushed.^[7]

Skírnir says that he has been to a wood to get a "potent branch", which he found. He declares that the gods Odin and Thor are angry with Gerðr, and that Freyr will hate her; she has "brought down the potent wrath of the gods". Skírnir declares to the hrimthursar, thursar, the sons of Suttungr, and the "troops of the Æsir" that he has denied both pleasure and benefit from men to Gerðr. Skírnir details that the thurs's name who will own her below the gates of Nágrind is Hrímgrímnir and that there, at the roots of the world, the finest thing Gerðr will be given to drink is the urine of goats. He carves "thurs" (the runic character *thurisaz) on Gerðr and three runes (unnamed) symbolizing lewdness, frenzy, and unbearable desire, and comments that he can rub them off just as he has carved them—if he wishes.^[8]

Gerðr responds with a welcome to Skírnir and tells him to take a crystal cup containing ancient mead, noting that she thought she would never love one of the Vanir. Skírnir asks her when she will meet with Freyr. Gerðr says that they shall meet at a tranquil location called Barri, and that after nine nights she will there grant Freyr her love:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Barri is the grove named, which we both know,
the grove of tranquil paths.

Nine nights hence, there to Niörd's son
Gerd will grant delight.^[9]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Barri there is, which we both know well,

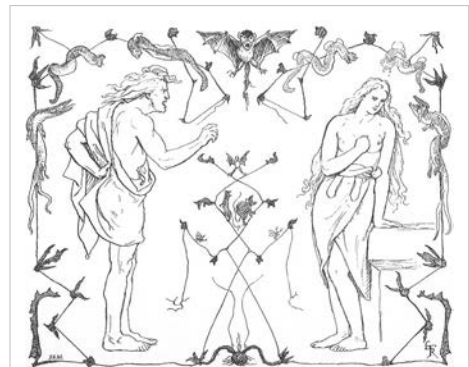
A forest fair and still;

And nine nights hence to the son of Njorth
Will Gerth grant delight.^[10]

Skírnir rides home. Standing outside, Freyr immediately greets Skírnir and asks for news. Skírnir tells him that Gerðr says she will meet with him at Barri. Freyr, impatient, comments that one night is long, as is two nights, and questions how he will bear three, noting that frequently a month seemed shorter than half a night before being with



Skírnir has turned to threats, describing Gerðr's fate at her refusal, as illustrated (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.



Skírnir continues his threats as illustrated (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Gerðr.^[11]

A stanza in the poem *Lokasenna* refers to Gerðr. In the poem, Loki accuses the god Freyr of having purchased Gymir's daughter (Gerðr) with gold and comments that, in the process, Freyr gave away his sword. Referring to Freyr as a "wretch", Loki then posits how Freyr intends to fight when the Sons of Muspell ride over the wood Myrkviðr (an event during Ragnarök). Freyr's servant, Byggvir, interjects and the poem continues.^[12]

In the poem *Hyndluljóð*, Óttar's ancestry is recounted and information is provided about the gods. One stanza that actually belongs to *Völuspá hin skamma* relates that Freyr and Gerðr were married, that Gerðr is the daughter of the jötunn Gymir, that Gerðr's mother is Aurboða, and that they are related to Þjazi (the nature of the kinship is not specified)—father of the goddess and jötunn Skaði.^[13]

Prose Edda

In chapter 37 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, Gerðr is introduced by the enthroned figure of High as the daughter of Gymir and the mountain jötunn Aurboða, and is described as "the most beautiful of all women". High reports that Freyr went into Hlidskjalf and looked over all worlds. When Freyr looked to the north he saw a distant homestead with a large and magnificent building. A woman went to the building, and when she lifted her arms and opened the door to the building "light was shed from her arms over both sky and sea, and all worlds were made bright by her". In punishment for "his great presumption" in having sat in the holy seat, Freyr went away filled with grief.^[14]

Freyr arrives home and neither sleeps nor drinks, remaining in silence. No one dares speak to him. The god Njörðr sends Freyr's servant Skírnir to speak to Freyr. Freyr tells Skírnir that he saw a beautiful woman, so beautiful that he was filled with grief and that he would soon die if he could not have her. Freyr tells Skírnir that he must go gain her hand on his behalf—whether the woman's father agrees or not—and he will be rewarded. Skírnir replies that he accepts the mission but only in exchange for Freyr's sword, which can fight on its own. Freyr gives him the sword and Skírnir sets off. Skírnir asks for the woman's hand for Freyr and receives her promise. Nine nights later she is to meet with Freyr at a location called Barey. Skírnir delivers the news to Freyr and Freyr responds with the final stanza from the *Poetic Edda* poem *Skírnismál*, lamenting that he must wait.^[14]

At the beginning of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, eight goddesses are listed as attending a feast held by Ægir on the island of Hlsey (modernly Læsø, Denmark), including Gerðr.^[14] In chapter 19, different ways of referring to the goddess Frigg are provided. One of these names is "rival of Gerðr";^[15] however, this is probably a scribal error (see "Theories" section below). In chapter 57, various goddesses are listed, including Gerðr (between Snotra and Gefjon).^[16]

Heimskringla

In chapter 12 of *Ynglinga saga* (as collected in *Heimskringla*), an euhemerized prose account relates that Freyr was a much loved king in what is now Sweden. Freyr's wife was Gerðr and their son was Fjölfnir. Gerðr's fate is not provided, but after Freyr's death their son goes on to become king and their family line, the Ynglings, continues.^[17]

In a verse stanza found in chapter 16 of *Haralds saga Gráfeldar*, Gerðr is mentioned in a kenning for "woman" ("Gerðr-of-gold-rings").^[18]



Skírnir Persuades Gerðr to Follow Him (1882)
by Karl Ehrenberg.

Archaeological record

Small pieces of gold foil featuring engravings dating from the Migration Period into the early Viking Age (known as *gullgubber*) have been discovered in various locations in Scandinavia, almost 2,500 at one location. The foil pieces have been found largely at sites of buildings, only rarely in graves. The figures are sometimes single, occasionally an animal, sometimes a man and a woman with a leafy bough between them, facing or embracing one another. The human figures are almost always clothed and are sometimes depicted with their knees bent. Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson says that it has been suggested that the figures are partaking in a dance, and that they may have been connected with weddings, as well as linked to the Vanir group of gods, representing the notion of a divine marriage, such as in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Skírnismál*; the coming together of Gerðr and Freyr.^[19]



A leafy bough between them, two figures embrace on a small piece of gold foil dating from the Migration Period to the early the Viking Age

Theories

"Rival of Frigg"

In chapter 19 of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Gerðr is listed among "rivals" of the goddess Frigg, a list of sexual partners of Frigg's husband, Odin.^[15] Instead of *Gerðr*, the jötnunn Gríðr, mother of Odin's son Víðarr according to the *Prose Edda*, was probably intended. One manuscript has Gríðr corrected to Gerðr.^[20] Andy Orchard notes that it may nonetheless be an intentional inclusion in view of "Odin's notorious appetites".^[1]

Earth and fertility

Scholar John Lindow comments that Gerðr's name has been etymologically associated with the earth and enclosures and that the wedding of Gerðr and Freyr is commonly seen as "the divine coupling of sky and earth or at least fertility god and representative of the soil." Lindow adds that, at the same time, the situation can be read as simply the gods getting what they want from the jötnar.^[21]

Hilda Ellis Davidson comments that Gerðr's role in *Skírnismál* has parallels with the goddess Persephone from Greek mythology, "since it is made clear that if [Gerðr] remains below in the dark kingdom of the underworld there will be nothing to hope for but sterility and famine. She does not become the bride of the underworld, however; her bridal is to be in the upper world when she consents to meet Freyr at Barri."^[22]

Modern influence

Gerðr has inspired works of art and literature. The Danish poet Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger wrote a series of poems referencing Gerðr as collected in (1819) *Nordens Guder*. Esaias Tegnér's (1782–1846) unfinished epic poem *Gerda* also references the goddess. K. Ehrenberg depicted the goddess in his illustration (1883) *Freyr und Gerda, Skade und Niurd*.^[23]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:54).
- [2] Thorpe (1866:80).
- [3] Bellows (1923:110).
- [4] Larrington (1999:62—63).
- [5] Larrington (1999:64).
- [6] Larrington (1999:64). Regarding alternate translation of "eleven", see Larrington (1999:271).
- [7] Larrington (1999:65).
- [8] Larrington (1999:66—67).
- [9] Thorpe (1866:84).
- [10] Bellows (1923:119).
- [11] Larrington (1999:68).
- [12] Larrington (1999:91—92).
- [13] Larrington (1999:257).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:31).
- [15] Faulkes (1995:86).
- [16] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [17] Hollander (2007:14).
- [18] Hollander (2007:143).
- [19] Davidson (1988:121).
- [20] Finnur Jónsson (1900:90); he emends the text. In his 1931 diplomatic Arnarnagæan edition he notes the same.
- [21] Lindow (2001:139).
- [22] Davidson (1999:86).
- [23] Simek (2007:105).

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Gefjon

In Norse mythology, **Gefjon** or **Gefjun** (with the alternate spelling **Gefion**) is a goddess associated with ploughing, the Danish island of Zealand, the legendary Swedish king Gylfi, the legendary Danish king Skjöldr, foreknowledge, and virginity. Gefjon is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; in the works of skalds; and appears as a gloss for various Greco-Roman goddesses in some Old Norse translations of Latin works.



Detail of the Gefjon Fountain (1908) by Anders Bundgaard

The *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla* both report that Gefjon plowed away what is now lake Mälaren, Sweden, and with this land formed the island of Zealand, Denmark. In addition, the *Prose Edda* describes that not only is Gefjon a virgin herself, but that all who die a virgin become her attendants. *Heimskringla* records that Gefjon married the legendary Danish king Skjöldr and that the two dwelled in Lejre, Denmark.

Scholars have proposed theories about the etymology the name of the goddess, connections to fertility and ploughing practices, the implications of the references made to her as a virgin, five potential mentions of the goddess in the Old English poem *Beowulf*, and potential connections between Gefjon and Grendel's Mother and/or the goddesses Freyja and Frigg.

Etymology

The etymology of the name *Gefjon* has been a matter of dispute. In modern scholarship, the element *Gef-* in *Gef-jon* is generally theorized as related to the element *Gef-* in the name *Gef-n*. The name *Gefn* is one of the numerous names for the goddess Freyja, and likely means "she who gives (prosperity or happiness)."^[1] The connection between the two names has resulted in etymological results of Gefjun meaning "the giving one."^[2] The names *Gefjun* and *Gefn* are both related to the Matron groups the Alagabiae or Ollogabiae.^[3]

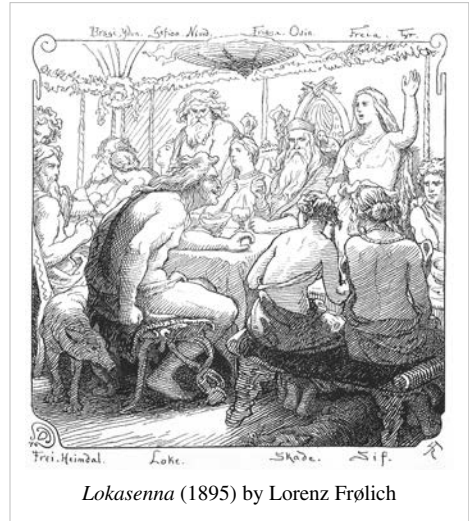
Albert Murey Sturtevant notes that "the only other feminine personal name which contains the suffix *-un* is *Njor-un*, recorded only in the *pulur* [...], and among the *kvenna heiti okend*. Whatever the stem syllable *Njor-* represents (perhaps **ner-* as in **Ner-puz>Njorðr*), the addition of the *n-* and *un-* suffixes seems to furnish an exact parallel to *Gef-n* : *Gefj-un* (cf. *Njor-n* : *Njor-un*)."^[4]

A Finnish word for "bride's outfit, trousseau" may derive from Gefjon's name.^[5]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, Gefjon appears solely in three stanzas of the poem *Lokasenna*, where an exchange occurs between Gefjon and Loki at a dinner feast, and the god Odin comes to Gefjon's defense. After an exchange occurs between Loki and the goddess Iðunn, Gefjon questions why Loki wants to bring negativity into the hall with the assembled gods:



Lokasenna (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Gefjon.

Why will ye, Æsir twain, here within,
strive with reproachful words?

Loft perceives not that he is deluded,
and is urged on by fate.^[6]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Gefjun spake:

"Why, ye gods twain, with bitter tongues
Raise hate among us here?

Lokis is famed for his mockery foul,
And the dwellers in heaven he hates.^[7]

The last two lines of the stanza above differ greatly by translation. Henry Adams Bellows comments that the manuscript text for these two lines is "puzzling" and that as a result they have been "freely amended."^[7] In the stanza that follows, Loki responds to Gefjon, commenting that a youthful male once gave her a necklace, and that with this youth Gefjon slept:

Loki.

Be silent, Gefjon! I will now just mention,
how that fair youth thy mind corrupted,
who thee a necklace gave,
and around whom thou thy limbs didst twine?^[6]

Loki spake

Be silent, Gefjun! for now shall I say
Who led thee to evil life;
The boy so fair gave a necklace bright,
And about him thy leg was laid.^[7]

Odin interjects; stating that Loki must be quite insane to incur the wrath of Gefjon, for she knows the destinies of mankind just as well as Odin himself:

Thou art raving mad, Loki! and hast lost thy wits,
in calling Gefjon's anger on thee;
for all men's destinies,
I ween, she knows as thoroughly as I do.^[6]

Mad art thou, Loki, and little of wit,
The wrath of Gefjun to rouse;
For the fate that is set for all she sees.
Even as I, methinks.^[8]

Prose Edda

The *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning* begins with a prose account stating that King Gylfi was once the ruler of "what is now called Sweden," and that he was said to have given "a certain vagrant woman, as reward for his entertainment, one plough-land in his kingdom, as much as four oxen could plow up in a day and night." This woman was "of the race of the Æsir" and her name was Gefjun. Gefjun took four oxen from Jötunheimr in the north. These oxen were her sons from a jötunn (name not provided). Gefjun's plough "cut so hard and deep that it uprooted the land, and the oxen drew the land out into the sea to the west and halted in a certain sound." Gefjun there placed the land, and bestowed upon it the name Zealand. Where the land had been taken from a lake stands. According to Snorri, the lake is now known as Lake Mälär, located in Sweden, and the inlets in this lake parallel the headlands of Zealand;^[9] however, since this is much more true of Lake Vänern, the myth was probably originally about Vänern, not Mälaren.^[10]



Gefjun Plows Zealand with her Oxen (1882) by Karl Ehrenberg

As a reference, the prose account presents a stanza from a work attributed to the 9th century skald Bragi Boddason:

Gefjun dragged from Gylfi,
gladly the land beyond value.
Denmark's increase,
steam rising from the swift-footed bulls.
The oxen bore eight
moons of the forehead and four heads,
hauling as they went in front of
the grassy isle's wide fissure.^[11]

In chapter 35 of *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High presents a list of goddesses. High presents Gefjun fourth, and says that Gefjun is a virgin, and all who die as virgins attend her. In relation, High notes that, like Gefjun, the goddess Fulla is also a virgin.^[12] At the beginning of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Gefjun is listed among nine goddesses who attend a banquet for Ægir on the island of Hlesey (modern Læsø, Denmark).^[13] In chapter 32, Gefjun is listed among six goddesses who attend a party held by Ægir.^[14] In chapter 75, Gefjun is included among a list of 27 ásynjur names.^[15] In addition, *Gefjun* appears in a kenning for the völva Gróa ("ale-Gefjun") employed in the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir's composition *Haustlög* as quoted in chapter 17 of *Skáldskaparmál*.^[16]

Heimskringla

In chapter 5 of *Ynglinga saga* (as collected in *Heimskringla*), an euhemerized prose account relates that Odin sent Gefjun from Odense, Funen "north over the sound to seek for land." There, Gefjun encountered king Gylfi "and he gave her ploughland." Gefjun went to the land of Jötunheimr, and there bore four sons to a jötunn (whose name is not provided). Gefjun transformed these four sons into oxen, attached them to a plough, and drew forth the land westward of the sea, opposite to Odense. The saga adds that this land is now called Zealand, and that Gefjun married Skjöldr (described here as "a son of Odin"). The two dwelled in Lejre thereafter. From where Gefjun took the land that formed Zealand, a lake was left behind call Lögrinn, and the saga posits that the bays in lake Lögrinn correspond to the nesses of Zealand. This is followed by the same stanza used in *Gylfaginning* above composed by the skald Bragi Boddason.^[17]



Gefjun and King Gylphi (1906) by Lorenz Frølich

Völsa þátr

Gefjun is sworn by in the þátr *Völsa þátr*, where the daughter of a thrall reluctantly worships a penis severed from a horse:

Old Norse	Modern English
Þess sver eg við Gefjun	I swear by Gefjun
og við goðin önnur,	and the other gods
að eg nauðug tek	that against my will
við nosa rauðum.	do I touch this red proboscis.
Þiggi mörnir	May giantesses
þetta blæti,	accept this holy object,
en þræll hjóna,	but now, slave of my parents,
þríf þú við Völsa. ^[18]	grab hold of Völsi. ^[18]

Glosses

Gefjun appears in some Old Norse translations of Latin works as a gloss on the names of goddesses from Greco-Roman mythology. In several works, including *Breta sögur* (based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*) the goddess Diana is glossed as *Gefjon*.^[19] In *Stjórn*, Gefjun appears as a gloss for the goddess Aphrodite.^[20] In other works, Gefjun glosses the goddesses Athena and Vesta.^[21]

Theories

Ploughing, folk customs, parallels, and fertility

A reoccurring theme in legend and folktale consists of a man or, more often, a woman who is challenged to gain as much land as can be traveled within a limited amount of time. This motif is attested by Livy around 1 CE, 5th century BCE Greek historian Herodotus, and in folktales from Northern Europe. In six tales from Jutland, Denmark and one from Germany a plough is used similarly as in Livy's account, though the conditions are often met by walking or riding.^[22]

Hilda Ellis Davidson points out a tale from Iceland that features a female settler "whose husband had died on the voyage out, establishing her claim to a piece of land by driving a young hieffer round it."

Davidson notes that in *Landnámabók*, this is recorded as a recognized method for a woman to claim land, and the work further details that "she might not possess more than she could encircle in this way between sunrise and sunset on a spring day." Davidson comments that "this sounds like a ritual taking over of land rather than a legal requirement, like the custom of men lighting fires when taking new land, and it is possible that the women's custom was linked with the fertility goddess."^[23] In addition, Davidson notes that Zealand is the most fertile region of Denmark.^[23]

Davidson further links folk customs recorded in the 19th century involving ploughs in Northern and Eastern Europe to practices involving Gefjon from the heathen period. Davidson points out that in eastern Europe, a custom is recorded in Russia where women with loosened hair and clad in white would assemble and drag a plough three times around their village during serious disease outbreaks. In Western Europe, yearly ploughing rituals occurring in England and Denmark in preparation for spring sowing which are, in eastern England, held on Plough Monday after the Christmas break. Gangs of young men dragged round a plough, while taking various names. Davidson states that "Gefjon with her giant sons transformed into oxen seems a fitting patroness of ceremonies of this kind."^[24]

Davidson finds similar elements and parallels in non-Germanic traditions, such as a folktale regarding the Lady of the Lake from Wales recorded in the 19th century. In the tale, the Lady brings forth a "a herd of wondrous cattle" from the water after she consents to marrying a local farmer. Years later, he unwittingly breaks conditions that she had laid down. As a result, the Lady returns to her dwelling beneath the lake, and calls for her cattle to accompany her, calling them by name. In one version of the tale, the Lady calls forth four gray oxen who were ploughing in a field six miles away. Responding to her call, the oxen dragged the plough with them, and the gash in the land that the plough produced was said to have once been clearly visible.^[24]

A woman was recorded in 1881 as having claimed to recall that people once gathered at the lake on the first Sunday of August, waiting to see whether or not the water would boil up as an indication that the Lady and her oxen would make an appearance. Davidson notes that "here again a supernatural woman is linked both with water and ploughing land."^[24]

Davidson states that in Germanic areas of Europe, traditions also exist of supernatural women who travel about the countryside with a plough, examples including Holde and Holle (from the western and central regions of Germany) and Berchte and Perchte in traditions from upper Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. Davidson explains that "they were frequently said to travel with a plough around the countryside, in a way reminiscent of the journey of the fertility goddess to bless the land in pre-Christian times, and on these occasions they might be accompanied by a host of tiny children; it was suggested that these children who died unbaptized, or human offspring replaced by changelings, but another possibility is that they were the souls of the unborn." Davidson details that some local tales feature the plough breaking down, the supernatural woman gaining assistance from a helper, and the supernatural woman giving him wooden chips, only for the chips to later to turn to gold.^[25]

Regarding the plough and Gefjon, Davidson concludes that "the idea behind the taking of the plough round the countryside seems to be that it brought good fortune and prosperity, gifts of a benevolent goddess. Gefjon and her



Gefjon ploughs the earth in Sweden by Lorenz Frølich

plough thus fit into a large framework of the cult of a goddess associated with fertility of both land and water."^[25]

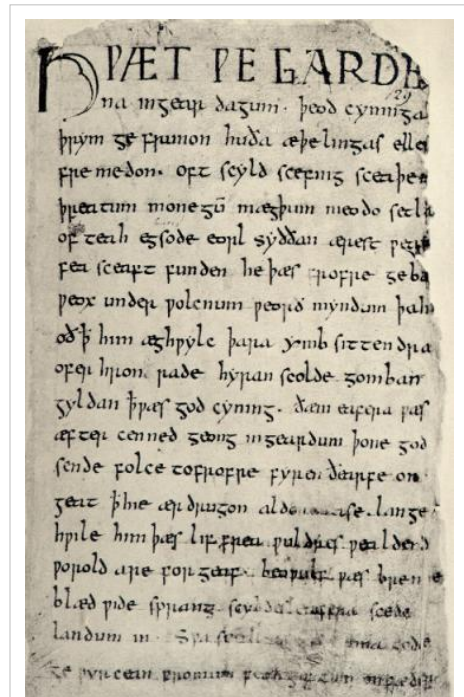
Possible *Gylfaginning* manuscript alteration

Questions have been proposed over the seemingly contradictory description of Gefjon as a virgin in *Gylfaginning*, yet also as attested as having sexual relations (*Lokasenna*, *Heimskringla*) and marrying (*Heimskringla*). John Lindow says that the Gefjon/Gylfi story in *Gylfaginning* is absent in one branch of manuscripts of the work, and that "the fact that Gylfi is reintroduced directly after it in the other manuscripts, suggests that that it was not part of Snorri's [author of the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*] original text but may have been added by a later scribe." Lindow says that if Snorri did not write it, the possibility exists that whoever added the story either was aware of an association made between Gefjon and the Greek goddess Diana (as in the "glosses" section above) "or took the view of the pagan gods as demons and therefore made a whore out of Gefjon." However, Lindow adds that the reference to Gefjon made by Loki in *Lokasenna* suggest that the notion of Gefjon partaking in sexual activity may have been widespread.^[5]

Beowulf and *Gabia*

Mentions of Gefjon may appear in *Beowulf* in five passages (line 49, line 362, line 515, line 1394, and line 1690). Scholar Frank Battaglia refers to these passages as "the Gefjon passages," and asks "Does *Beowulf* oppose the Earth Goddess of ancient Germanic religion? The possibility of such an interpretation follows upon the discovery that the name *Gefion*, by which early Danes called their female chthonic deity, may occur in the Old English poem five times."^[26] Battaglia further theorizes that:

The five Gefjon passages seem to highlight the championing of a new order antagonistic to goddess worship. In light of what appears to be an elaborate thematic statement about patrilineage in the poem, the new order may also have entailed a change in kinship systems. Grendel and his mother may stand as types of earlier, matrilineal tribes. Further the hall which is the object of struggle between *Beowulf* and the first two monsters may symbolize the consolidation of new hierarchical social organization among the northern Germanic peoples.^[26]



The first page of the *Beowulf* manuscript

Battaglia says that if the passages are taken to represent Gefjon, *gēafon* mentioned in line 49 refers directly to Gefjon's sadness at Skjöldr's (described as having wed Gefjon in *Heimskringla*) death, and that here "we may with some confidence conclude that in a poem about Scyld's funeral for an Anglo-Danish audience, the word *gēafon* could probably not have been used without invoking Gefjon."^[27]

Battaglia posits translations for line 362 (*Geofenes begang*) as "Gefion's realm," line 515 (*Geofon yðum wēol*) as "Gefion welled up in waves," line 1394 (*nē on Gyfenes grund, gā þær hē wille*) as "not (even) in the ground of Gefion, go where he will," and line 1690 (*Gifen gēotende gīgante cyn;*) as "Gefion gushing, the race of giants."^[28]

Scholar Richard North theorizes that Old English *geofon* and Old Norse *Gefjun* and Freyja's name *Gefn* may all descend from a common origin; *gabia* a Germanic goddess connected with the sea, whose name means "giving".^[29]

Frigg and Freyja

Some scholars have proposed a connection between Gefjon and the goddesses Frigg and Freyja due to perceived similarities. Britt-Mari Näsström theorizes that Gefjon is simply another aspect of Freyja, and that the "white youth" that Freyja is accused of sleeping with by Loki in *Gylfaginning* may be the god Heimdallr.^[30]

Hilda Ellis Davidson says that "there seems ample indication that Gefjon represents one aspect of a once powerful goddess of the north, the figure representing in Scandinavian myths as either Frigg, the wife of Odin, or Freyja, sister of fertility god Freyr. Freyja, desired by gods, giants and dwarves alike, acted as dispenser of bounty and inspirer of sexual love between men and women like the Greek Aphrodite."^[21] In addition, Davidson says that "as Axel Olrik (1901) pointed out long ago, we know very little about Gefjon, and it is possible that she can be identified with Frigg or Freyja" and not only does the *Prose Edda* associate her with an afterlife realm of the dead, "in *Lokasenna*, Loki claims that Gefjon was given a jewel by a lover, traditions that would fit in very well with what we know of Freyja."^[31]

Regarding parallels drawn between Freyja and Gefjon proposed from the exchange found in *Lokasenna*, Rudolf Simek says that *Lokasenna* is a "late composition and the reproach is too much of a stereotype to carry much weight." Simek says that, regardless, even if Gefjon shouldn't be identified with Freyja, Gefjon could still be considered "one of the fertility and protective goddesses because of the meaning of her name ('the giving one')."^[20]

Modern influence

Gefjon appears prominently as the allegorical mother of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark in the forty-page Swedish Romantic poem *Gefjon, a Poem in Four Cantos* by Eleonora Charlotta d'Albedyhll (1770–1835).^[32] A fountain depicting Gefjon driving her oxen sons to pull her plough (The Gefion Fountain, 1908) by Anders Bundgaard stands in Copenhagen, Denmark, on the island of Zealand, as in the myth.^[33] The Gefion family, a family of asteroids,^[34] and asteroid 1272 Gefion (discovered in 1931 by Karl Wilhelm Reinmuth^[35]) both derive their names from that of the goddess.



The Gefion Fountain (1908) by Anders Bundgård

Notes

[1] Sturtevant (1952:166).

[2] Orchard (1997:52).

[3] Davidson (1998:79).

[4] Sturtevant (1952:167).

[5] Lindow (2001:136).

[6] Thorpe (1907:87).

[7] Bellows (1923:158).

[8] Bellows (1923:159).

[9] Faulkes (1995:7).

[10] Heimir Pálsson, 'Tertium vero datur: A study of the text of DG 11 4to', p. 44 <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-126249>.

[11] Byock (2006:9).

[12] Faulkes (1995:29).

[13] Faulkes (1995:59).

[14] Faulkes (1995:95).

[15] Faulkes (1995:157).

[16] Faulkes (1995:81).

[17] Hollander (2007:9).

[18] Eybjorn (2000).

[19] Ross (1978:155).

[20] Simek (2007:102).

- [21] Davidson (1999:58).
- [22] Davidson (1990:52—53).
- [23] Davidson (1999:53).
- [24] Davidson (1999:56).
- [25] Davidson (1999:57).
- [26] Battaglia (1991:415).
- [27] Battaglia (1991:418).
- [28] Battaglia (1999:426, 428, 432, and 437).
- [29] North (1998:226).
- [30] Näsström (1999:71).
- [31] Davidson (1998:65).
- [32] Benson (1914:87).
- [33] Mouritsen. Spooner (2004:74).
- [34] Barnes-Svarney (2003:96).
- [35] Schmadel (2003:105).

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Gná and Hófvarpnir

In Norse mythology, **Gná** is a goddess who runs errands in other worlds for the goddess Frigg and rides the flying, sea-treading horse **Hófvarpnir** (Old Norse "he who throws his hoofs about",^[1] "hoof-thrower"^[2] or "hoof kicker"^[3]). Gná and Hófvarpnir are attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Scholarly theories have been proposed about Gná as a "goddess of fullness" and as potentially cognate to Fama from Roman mythology. Hófvarpnir and the eight-legged steed Sleipnir have been cited examples of transcendent horses in Norse mythology.

Attestations

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High provides brief descriptions of 16 ásynjur. High lists Gná thirteenth, and says that Frigg sends her off to different worlds to run errands. High adds that Gná rides the horse Hófvarpnir, and that this horse has the ability to ride through the air and atop the sea.^[3] High continues that "once some Vanir saw her path as she rode through the air" and that an unnamed one of these Vanir says, in verse:

"What flies there?
 What fares there?
 or moves through the air?"^[4]

Gná responds in verse, in doing so providing the parentage of Hófvarpnir; the horses Hamskerpir and Garðrofa:

"I fly not
 though I fare
 and move through the air
 on Hofvarpnir
 the one whom Hamskerpir got
 with Gardrofa."^[4]



Gná is flanked by the horse Hófvarpnir, while standing before the enthroned Frigg in an illustration (1882) by Carl Emil Doepler

The source for these stanzas is not provided and they are otherwise unattested. High ends his description of Gná by saying that "from Gna's name comes the custom of saying that something *gnaefir* [looms] when it rises up high."^[4] In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Gná is included among a list of 27 ásynjur names.^[5]

Theories

Rudolf Simek says that the etymology that Snorri presents in *Gylfaginning* for the name *Gná* may not be correct, yet it is unclear what the name may otherwise mean, though *Gná* has also been etymologically theorized as a "goddess of fullness."^[6] John Lindow calls the verse exchange between the Vanir and *Gná* "strange" and points out that it's unclear why it should specifically be the Vanir that witness *Gná* flying through the air.^[7]

Ulla Loumand cites *Hólfvarpnir* and the eight-legged horse *Sleipnir* as "prime examples" of horses in Norse mythology as being able to "mediate between earth and sky, between *Ásgarðr*, *Miðgarðr* and *Útgarðr* and between the world of mortal men and the underworld."^[8] In the 19th century, Jacob Grimm proposed a cognate in the personified rumor in Roman mythology; *Fama*. However, Grimm notes that unlike *Fama*, *Gná* is not described as winged but rather that *Hólfvarpnir*, like the winged-horse *Pegasus*, may have been.^[9]



Frigg sends *Gná*, riding on *Hólfvarpnir*, on an errand in *Frigg and her Maidens* (1902).

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:157).
- [2] Lindow (2001:146).
- [3] Byock (2005:43).
- [4] Byock (2005:44).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [6] Simek (2007:113).
- [7] Lindow (2001:147).
- [8] Loumand (2006:133).
- [9] Grimm (1883:896—897).

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Hlín

In Norse mythology, **Hlín** (Old Norse "protectress"^[1]) is a goddess associated with the goddess Frigg. Hlín appears in a poem in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and in kennings found in skaldic poetry. Hlín has been theorized as possibly another name for Frigg.

Attestations

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, Hlín receives a mention regarding the foretold death of the god Odin during the immense battle waged at Ragnarök:

Then is fulfilled Hlín's
 second sorrow,
 when Óðinn goes
 to fight with the wolf,
 and Beli's slayer,
 bright, against Surtr.
 Then shall Frigg's
 sweet friend fall.^[2]



"Frigg And Her Servants" (1882) by Carl Emil Doepler.

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, Hlín is cited twelfth among a series of sixteen goddesses. High tells Gangleri (earlier in the book described as King Gylfi in disguise) that Hlín "is given the function of protecting people whom Frigg wishes to save from some danger." High continues that, from this, "someone who escapes finds refuge (*hleinar*)."^[3] In chapter 51, the above mentioned *Völuspá* stanza is quoted.^[4] In chapter 75 of the book *Skáldskaparmál* Hlín appears within a list of 27 *ásynjur* names.^[5]

In skaldic poetry, the name Hlín is frequent in kennings for women. Examples include *Hlín hringa* ("Hlín of rings"), *Hlín goðvefjar* ("Hlín of velvet") and *arm-Hlín* ("arm-Hlín"). The name is already used frequently in this way by the 10th-century poet Kormákr Ögmundarson and remains current in skaldic poetry through the following centuries, employed by poets such as Þórðr Kolbeinsson, Gizurr Þorvaldsson and Einarr Gilsson.^[6] The name remained frequently used in woman kennings in rímur poetry, sometimes as **Lín**.^[7]

In a verse in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, the phrase *á Hlín fallinn* ("fallen on Hlín") occurs. Some editors have emended the line^{[8][9]} while others have accepted the reading and taken Hlín to refer to the earth.^[10]

Theories

Andy Orchard says that in *Völuspá*, Hlín appears to be just another name for Frigg, and adds that "the numerous occurrences of the name in skaldic poetry in poetic periphrases or kennings for women do nothing to dispel the confusion."^[1] Rudolf Simek agrees that Hlín seems to appear as another name for Frigg in *Völuspá*, and that in skaldic poetry Hlín was a well known mythological figure by the 10th century. Simek states that Hlín is likely simply another name for Frigg, and that Snorri "misunderstood her to be a goddess in her own right in his reading of the *Völuspá* stanza."^[11]

However, in the same work, Rudolf Simek also says that the goddesses Sága, Hlín, Sjöfn, Snotra, Vár, and Vör should be considered vaguely defined figures who "should be seen as female protective goddesses" that are all responsible for "specific areas of the private sphere, and yet clear differences were made between them so that they are in many ways similar to matrons."^[12] John Lindow observes that if Hlín is indeed Frigg, then this means that Hlín's "second sorrow" in *Völuspá* is the death of Odin, the first being the death of Baldr.^[13]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:86).
- [2] Dronke (1997:21).
- [3] Faulkes (1995:30).
- [4] Faulkes (1995:55).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [6] Finnur Jónsson (1931:263).
- [7] Finnur Jónsson (1926-28:175,245).
- [8] Gísli Brynjúlfsson (1860:174).
- [9] Finnur Jónsson (1912-1915a:191), (1912-1915b:181).
- [10] Björn Karel Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943:341).
- [11] Simek (2007:153).
- [12] Simek (2007:274).
- [13] Lindow (2001:177).

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Ilmr

In Norse mythology, **Ilmr** is a goddess. Ilmr is attested (between Iðunn and Bil) within a list of ásynjur contained within the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*. No further information outside of her name is provided there.^[1] Jacob Grimm points out that while the goddess name *Ilmr* is feminine, the masculine word *ilmr* means "pleasant scent" (*suavis odor*).^[2]

Notes

[1] Faulkes (1995:157).

[2] Grimm (1888:1374).

References

- Faulkes, Anthony (Trans.) (1995). *Edda*. Everyman. ISBN 0-460-87616-3
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Iðunn

In Norse mythology, **Iðunn** is a goddess associated with apples and youth. Iðunn is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In both sources, she is described as the wife of the skaldic god Bragi, and in the *Prose Edda*, also as a keeper of apples and granter of eternal youthfulness.

The *Prose Edda* relates that Loki was once forced by the jötunn Þjazi to lure Iðunn out of Asgard and into a wood, promising her interesting apples. Þjazi, in the form of an eagle, snatches Iðunn from the wood and takes her to his home. Iðunn's absence causes the gods to grow old and gray, and they realize that Loki is responsible for her disappearance. Loki promises to return her and, in the form of a falcon, finds her alone at Þjazi's home. He turns her into a nut and takes her back to Asgard. After Þjazi finds that Iðunn is gone, he turns into an eagle and furiously chases after Loki. The gods build a pyre in Asgard and, after a sudden stop by Loki, Þjazi's feathers catch fire, he falls, and the gods kill him.

A number of theories surround Iðunn, including her links to fertility, and her potential origin in Proto-Indo-European religion. Long the subject of artworks, Iðunn is sometimes referenced in modern popular culture.



Ydun (1858) by Herman Wilhelm Bissen

Name

The name *Iðunn* has been variously explained as meaning "ever young", "rejuvenator", or "the rejuvenating one".^[1] As the modern English alphabet lacks the eth (ð) character, *Iðunn* is sometimes anglicized as **Idun**, **Idunn** or **Ithun**.^[2] An -a suffix is sometimes applied to denote femininity, resulting in forms such as **Iduna** and **Idunna**.^[3]

As a personal name, the name *Iðunn* appears as a personal name in several historical sources and the *Landnámabók* records that it has been in use in Iceland as a personal name since the pagan period (10th century). *Landnámabók* records two incidents of women by the name of *Iðunn*; Iðunn Arnardóttir, the daughter of an early settler, and Iðunn Molda-Gnúpsdóttir, granddaughter of one of the earliest settlers recorded in the book.^[4] The name *Iðunn* has been theorized as the origin of the Old English name *Idonae*. 19th century author Charlotte Mary Yonge writes that the derivation of *Idonae* from *Idunn* is "almost certain," noting that although *Idonae* may be "the feminine of the Latin *idoneus* (fit), its absence in the Romance countries may be taken as an indication that it was a mere classicalizing of the northern goddess of the apples of youth."^[5]

19th-century scholar Jacob Grimm proposed a potential etymological connection to the idisi. Grimm states that "with the original form *idis* the goddess Idunn may possibly be connected."^[6] Grimm further states that Iðunn may have been known with another name, and that "Iðunn would seem by Saem. 89a to be an Elvish word, but we do not hear of any other name for the goddess."^[7]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

Iðunn appears in the Poetic Edda poem *Lokasenna* and, included in some modern editions of the *Poetic Edda*, in the late poem *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*.

Iðunn is introduced as Bragi's wife in the prose introduction to the poem *Lokasenna*, where the two attend a feast held by Ægir. In stanzas 16, 17, and 18, dialog occurs between Loki and Iðunn after Loki has insulted Bragi. In stanza 16, Iðunn (here anglicized as *Idunn*) says:

Idunn said:

I ask you, Bragi, to do a service to your blood-kin
and all the adoptive relations,
that you shouldn't say words of blame to Loki,
in Ægir's hall.

Loki said:

Be silent, Idunn, I declare that of all women
you're the most man-crazed,
since you placed your arms, washed bright,
about your brother's slayer.

Idunn said:

I'm not saying words of blame to Loki,
in Ægir's hall
I quietened Bragi, made talkative with beer;
and all living things love him.^[8]



Bragi sitting playing the harp, Iðunn standing behind him (1846) by Nils Blommér

In this exchange, Loki has accused Iðunn of having slept with the killer of her brother. However, neither this brother nor killer are accounted for in any other surviving source.^[9] Afterward, the goddess Gefjon speaks up and the poem continues in turn.

In the poem *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, additional information is given about Iðunn, though this information is otherwise unattested. Here, Iðunn is identified as descending from elves, as one of "Ivaldi's elder children" and as a *dís* who dwells in dales. Stanza 6 reads:

In the dales dwells,
the prescient Dís,
from Yggdrasil's
ash sunk down,
of alfen race,
Idun by name,
the youngest of Ivaldi's
elder children.^[10]

Prose Edda

Iðunn is introduced in the Prose Edda in section 26 of the Prose Edda book *Gylfaginning*. Here, Iðunn is described as Bragi's wife and keeper of an *eski* (a wooden box made of ash wood and often used for carrying personal possessions) within which she keeps apples. The apples are bitten into by the gods when they begin to grow old and they then become young again, which is described as occurring up until Ragnarök. Gangleri (described as King Gylfi in disguise) states that it seems to him that the gods depend greatly upon Iðunn's good faith and care. With a laugh, High responds that misfortune once came close, that he could tell Gangleri about it, but first he must hear the names of more of the Æsir, and he continues providing information about gods.^[11]

In the book *Skáldskaparmál*, Iðunn is mentioned in its first chapter (numbered as 55) as one of eight ásynjur (goddesses) sitting in their thrones at a banquet in Asgard for Ægir.^[12] In chapter 56, Bragi tells Ægir about Iðunn's abduction by the jötunn Þjazi. Bragi says that after hitting an eagle (Þjazi in disguise) with a pole, Loki finds himself stuck to the bird. Loki is pulled further and further into the sky, his feet banging against stones, gravel, and trees. Loki feels that his arms might be pulled out from his shoulders. Loki shouts and begs the eagle for a truce, and the eagle responds that Loki would not be free unless he made a solemn vow to have Iðunn come outside of Asgard with her apples. Loki accepts Þjazi's conditions and returns to his friends Odin and Hœnir. At the time Þjazi and Loki agreed on, Loki lures Iðunn out of Asgard into "a certain forest", telling her that he had discovered some apples that she would find worth keeping, and told Iðunn that she ought to bring her own apples with her so that she may compare them with the apples he has discovered. Þjazi arrives in eagle shape, snatches Iðunn, flies away with her and takes her to his home, Þrymheimr.^[13]

The Æsir begin to grow grey and old at the disappearance of Iðunn. The Æsir assemble at a thing where they ask one another when Iðunn had been seen last. The Æsir realize that the last time that Iðunn was seen was when she was going outside of Asgard with Loki, and so they have Loki arrested and brought to the thing. Loki is threatened with death and torture. Terrified, Loki says that if the goddess Freyja will lend him her "falcon shape" he will search for



Loki and Idun (1911) by John Bauer

Iðunn in the land of Jötunheimr. Freyja lends the falcon shape to Loki, and with it he flies north to Jötunheimr. One day later, Loki arrives at Þjazi's home. There he finds that Þjazi is out at sea in a boat, and that Iðunn is home alone. Loki turns her into a nut, holds her in his claws, and flies away with her as fast as possible.^[13]

When Þjazi arrives home he finds that Iðunn is gone. Þjazi gets "his eagle shape", and chases Loki, which causes a storm wind. The Æsir see a falcon flying with a nut, as well as the pursuing eagle, so they bring out loads of wood shavings. The falcon flies over the fortification of Asgard and drops down by the wall. The eagle, however, misses the falcon and is unable to stop. His feathers catch fire and the eagle falls within the gates of Asgard. The Æsir kill the jötunn Þjazi "and this killing is greatly renowned."^[13]

In chapter 10, "husband of Iðunn" is given as a means of referring to Bragi.^[14] In chapter 86, means of referring to Iðunn are given: "wife of Bragi", "keeper of the apples", and her apples "the Æsir's age old cure". Additionally, in connection to the story of her abduction by Þjazi, she may be referred to as "Þjazi's booty". A passage of the 10th-century poem *Haustlög* where the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir gives a lengthy description of a richly detailed shield he has received that features a depiction of the abduction of Iðunn. Within the cited portions of *Haustlög*, Iðunn is referred to as "the maid who knew the Æsir's age-old cure", "the gods' lady", "ale-Gefn", "the Æsir's girl-friend", and once by name.^[15]

In chapter 33, Iðunn is cited as one of the six ásynjur visiting Ægir.^[16] Iðunn appears a final time in the *Prose Edda* in chapter 75, where she appears in a list of ásynjur.^[17]

Theories

Apples and fertility

Some surviving stories regarding Iðunn focus on her youth-maintaining apples. English scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson links apples to religious practices in Germanic paganism. She points out that buckets of apples were found in the 9th-century Oseberg ship burial site in Norway and that fruit and nuts (Iðunn having been described as being transformed into a nut in *Skáldskaparmál*) have been found in the early graves of the Germanic peoples in England and elsewhere on the continent of Europe which may have had a symbolic meaning and also that nuts are still a recognized symbol of fertility in Southwest England.^[18]

Davidson notes a connection between apples and the Vanir, a tribe of gods associated with fertility in Norse mythology, citing an instance of eleven "golden apples" being given to woo the beautiful Gerðr by Skírnir, who was acting as messenger for the major Vanir god Freyr in stanzas 19 and 20 of *Skírnismál*. In *Skírnismál*, Gerðr mentions her brother's slayer in stanza 16, which Davidson states has led to some suggestions that Gerðr may have been connected to Iðunn as they are similar in this way. Davidson also notes a further connection between fertility and apples in Norse mythology; in chapter 2 of the *Völsunga saga* when the major goddess Frigg sends King Rerir an apple after he prays to Odin for a child, Frigg's messenger (in the guise of a crow) drops the apple in his lap as he sits atop a mound.^[18] Rerir's wife's consumption of the apple results in a six-year pregnancy and the caesarean section birth of their son—the hero Völsung.^[19]

Davidson points out the "strange" phrase "apples of Hel" used in an 11th-century poem by the skald Þórbjörn Brúnason. Davidson states this may imply that the apple was thought of by the skald as the food of the dead. Further, Davidson notes that the potentially Germanic goddess Nehalennia is sometimes depicted with apples and parallels exist in early Irish stories. Davidson asserts that while cultivation of the apple in Northern Europe extends back to at least the time of the Roman Empire and came to Europe from the Near East, the native varieties of apple trees growing in Northern Europe are small and bitter. Davidson concludes that in the figure of Iðunn "we must have a dim reflection of an old symbol: that of the guardian goddess of the life-giving fruit of the other world."^[18]

Indo-European basis

David Knipe theorizes Iðunn's abduction by Thjazi in eagle form as an example of the Indo-European motif "of an eagle who steals the celestial means of immortality." In addition, Knipe says that "a parallel to the theft of Iðunn's apples (symbols of fertility) has been noted in the Celtic myth where Brian, Iuchar, and Icharba, the sons of Tuirenn, assume the guise of hawks in order to steal sacred apples from the garden of Hisberna. Here, too, there is pursuit, the guardians being female griffins."^[20]

Other

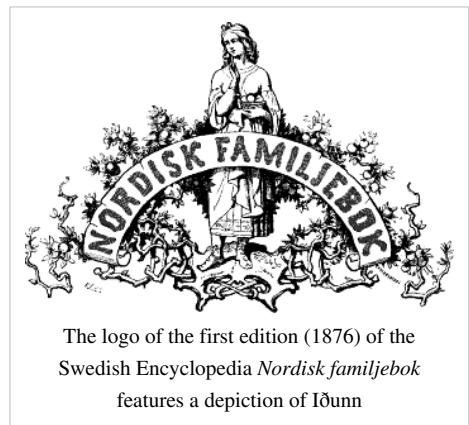
John Lindow theorizes that the possible etymological meaning of *Iðunn*—"ever young"—would potentially allow Iðunn to perform her ability to provide eternal youthfulness to the gods without her apples, and further states that *Haustlöng* does not mention apples but rather refers to Iðunn as the "maiden who understood the eternal life of the Æsir." Lindow further theorizes that Iðunn's abduction is "one of the most dangerous moments" for the gods, as the general movement of female jötnar to the gods would be reversed.^[1]

Regarding the accusations leveled towards Iðunn by Loki, Lee Hollander opines that *Lokasenna* was intended to be humorous and that the accusations thrown by Loki in the poem are not necessarily to be taken as "generally accepted lore" at the time it was composed. Rather they are charges that are easy for Loki to make and difficult for his targets to disprove, or which they do not care to refute.^[21]

In his study of the skaldic poem *Haustlöng*, Richard North comments that "[Iðunn] is probably to be understood as an aspect of Freyja, a goddess whom the gods rely on for their youth and beauty [...]"^[22]

Modern influence

Iðunn has been the subject of a number of artistic depictions. These depictions include "Idun" (statue, 1821) by H. E. Freund, "Idun" (statue, 1843) and "Idun som bortrövas av jätten Tjasse i örnhamn" (plaster statue, 1856) by C. G. Qvarnström, "Brage sittande vid harpan, Idun stående bakom honom" (1846) by Nils Blommér, "Iduns Rückkehr nach Valhalla" by C. Hansen (resulting in an 1862 woodcut modeled on the painting by C. Hammer), "Bragi und Idun, Balder und Nanna" (drawing, 1882) by K. Ehrenberg, "Idun and the Apples" (1890) by J. Doyle Penrose, "Brita as Iduna" (1901) by Carl Larsson, "Loki och Idun" (1911) by John Bauer, "Idun" (watercolor, 1905) by B. E. Ward, and "Idun" (1901) by E. Doepler.



The 19th-century composer Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* opera cycle features Freia, a version of the goddess Freyja combined with the Iðunn.^[23]

Idunn Mons, a mons of the planet Venus, is named after Iðunn. The publication of the United States-based Germanic neopagan group The Troth (*Idunna*, edited by Diana L. Paxson) derives its name from that of the goddess.^[24]

The Swedish magazine *Idun* was named after the goddess; she appears with her basket of apples on its banner.

Notes

- [1] For "every young", see Lindow (2001:198-199). For "Rejuvenator", see Orchard (1997:95). For "The rejuvenating one", see Simek (2007:171).
- [2] Examples include *Idun* in Davidson (1965), *Idunn* in Larrington (1999), and *Ithun* in Hollander (1990).
- [3] Examples include *Iduna* in Thorpe (1907) and *Idunna* in Gräter (1812).
- [4] See Turville-Petre (186:1964) and the *Landnámabók*, available online (<http://www.snerpa.is/net/snorri/landnama.htm>).
- [5] Yonge (1884:307).
- [6] Grimm (1882:402-403).
- [7] Grimm (1882:333).
- [8] Larrington (1999:87-88).
- [9] Lindow (2001:198-199).
- [10] Thorpe (1866:29).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:25). For *eski* see Byock (2006:141).
- [12] Faulkes (1995:59).
- [13] Faulkes (1995:60).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:76).
- [15] Faulkes (1995:86-88).
- [16] Faulkes (1995:95).
- [17] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [18] Davidson (1965:165-166).
- [19] Davidson (1998:146-147).
- [20] Knipe (1967:338-339).
- [21] Hollander (1990:90).
- [22] North (1997:xiv).
- [23] Simek (2007:90).
- [24] Rabinovitch. Lewis (2004:209).

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Jörð

In Norse mythology, **Jörð** (Icelandic "earth", pronounced [ˈjœrð] and from Old Norse *jǫrð*, pronounced [ˈjœrð], sometimes Anglicized as **Jord** or **Jorth**; also called **Jarð**, [jɑrð] as in Old East Norse), is a female jötunn. She is the mother of Thor and the personification of the Earth. Fjörgyn and **Hlóðyn** are considered to be other names for Jörð. Jörð is reckoned a goddess, like other jötnar who coupled with the gods.^[1] Jörð's name appears in skaldic poetry both as a poetic term for the land and in kennings for Thor.



A statue depicting Jörð as a matriarchal figure

Etymology

Jörð is the common word for *earth* in Old Norse, as are the word's descendants in the modern Scandinavian languages; Icelandic *jörð*, Faroese *jørð*, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian *jord*. It is cognate to English "earth" through Old English *eorðe*.^[2]

Attestations

Gylfaginning

In *Gylfaginning*, the first part of the Prose Edda, Jörð is described as one of Odin's concubines and the mother of Thor. She is "counted among the ásynjar (goddesses)" and is the daughter of Annar and Nótt and half-sister of Auðr and Dagr.^{[3][4]}

However, scholar Haukur Thorgeirsson points out that the four manuscripts of *Gylfaginning* vary in their descriptions of the family relations between Nótt, Jörð, Dagr, and Delligr. In other words, depending on the manuscript, either Jörð or Nótt is the mother of Dagr and partner of Delligr. Haukur details that "the oldest manuscript, U, offers a version where Jǫrð is the wife of Delligr and the mother of Dagr while the other manuscripts, R, W and T, cast Nótt in the role of Delligr's wife and Dagr's mother", and argues that "the version in U came about accidentally when the writer of U or its antecedent shortened a text similar to that in RWT. The results of this accident made their way into the Icelandic poetic tradition".^[5]

Skáldskaparmál

In Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál*, Jörð (as the personified earth) is called the rival of Odin's wife Frigg and his other giantess concubines, Rindr and Gunnlöd, the mother-in-law of Sif, Thor's wife, daughter of Nótt, and sister of Auðr and Dagr.^{[4][6]}

Poetic Edda

In *Lokasenna*, Thor is called *Jarðar burr* ("son of Jörð").^{[7][8]}

In the same verse in *Völuspá*, he is referred to as *mógr Hlóðyniar* and *Fjörgyniar burr* (child of Hlóðyn, Fjörgyn's child).^{[9][10]} The otherwise unknown Hlóðyn was therefore another name of Jörð.^[11] She is usually thought to be identical with Hludana, to whom Roman votive tablets have been found on the Lower Rhine.^[12]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:98).
- [2] "Earth" in Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=earth>).
- [3] *Gylfaginning* 10, 36.
- [4] Lindow (2001:205).
- [5] Haukur (2008:159—168).
- [6] *Skáldskaparmál* 33 (24).
- [7] *Lokasenna* 58.
- [8] In *Hárbarðsljóð* 9, Thor calls himself son of Odin and brother of Meili, who therefore may also be Jörð's son.
- [9] *Völuspá* 53 (56).
- [10] Dronke (1997:22).
- [11] Lindow (2001:206).
- [12] Dronke (1997:150).

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Lofn

In Norse mythology, **Lofn** (Old Norse, possibly "comforter,"^[1] "the comforter, the mild,"^[2] or "loving"^[3]) is a goddess. Lofn is attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson and in kennings found in skaldic poetry. In the *Prose Edda*, Lofn is described as gentle in manner and as an arranger of marriages, even when they have been forbidden. Scholars have proposed theories about the implications of the goddess.

Attestations

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, High provides brief descriptions of 16 ásynjur. High lists Lofn eighth and about her says that:

'She is so gentle and so good to invoke that she has permission from All-Father or Frigg to arrange unions between men and women, even if earlier offers have been received and unions have been banned. From her name comes the word *lof*, meaning permission as well as high praise.'^[4]

In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Lofn is included among a list of 27 ásynjur names.^[5] Elsewhere in *Skáldskaparmál*, Lofn appears in a kenning for "woman" in a work by the skald Ormr Steinþórsson.^[6] Otherwise Lofn appears frequently as a base word in skaldic kennings for "woman."^[7]

Theories

John Lindow says that scholars have generally followed Snorri's etymological connection with the root *lof*-, meaning "praise." Lindow says that, along with many other goddess, some scholars theorize that Lofn may simply be another name for the goddess Frigg.^[7] Rudolf Simek theorizes that Snorri used skaldic kennings to produce his *Gylfaginning* commentary about the goddess, while combining several etymologies with the Old Norse personal name *Lofn*.^[2]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:104).
- [2] Simek (2007:190).
- [3] Byock (2005:168).
- [4] Byock (2005:43).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:142).
- [7] Lindow (2001:213).

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Nanna (Norse deity)

In Norse mythology, **Nanna Nepsdóttir** or simply **Nanna** is a goddess associated with the god Baldr. Accounts of Nanna vary greatly by source. In the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, Nanna is the wife of Baldr and the couple produced a son, the god Forseti. After Baldr's death, Nanna dies of grief. Nanna is placed on Baldr's ship with his corpse and the two are set aflame and pushed out to sea. In Hel, Baldr and Nanna are united again. In an attempt to bring back Baldr from the dead, the god Hermóðr rides to Hel and, upon receiving the hope of resurrection from the being Hel, Nanna gives Hermóðr gifts to give to the goddess Frigg (a robe of linen), the goddess Fulla (a finger-ring), and other gifts (unspecified). Nanna is frequently mentioned in the poetry of skalds and a Nanna, who may or may not be the same figure, is mentioned once in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources.

An account provided by Saxo Grammaticus in his 12th century work *Gesta Danorum* records Nanna as a human female, the daughter of King Gevar, and the love interest of both the demi-god Baldr and the human Höðr. Spurred by their mutual attraction to Nanna, Baldr and Höðr repeatedly do battle. Nanna is only interested in Höðr and weds him, while Baldr wastes away from nightmares about Nanna.

The Setre Comb, a comb from the 6th or early 7th century featuring runic inscriptions, may reference the goddess. The etymology of the name *Nanna* is a subject of scholarly debate. Scholars have debated connections between Nanna and other similarly named deities from other cultures and the implications of the goddess's attestations.



Nanna (1857) by Herman Wilhelm Bissen.

Etymology and place names

The etymology of the name of the goddess *Nanna* is debated. Some scholars have proposed that the name may derive from a babble word, *nanna*, meaning "mother". Scholar Jan de Vries connects the name *Nanna* to the root **nanþ-*, leading to "the daring one". Scholar John Lindow theorizes that a common noun may have existed in Old Norse, *nanna*, that roughly meant "woman".^[1] Scholar John McKinnell notes that the "mother" and **nanþ-* derivations may not be distinct, commenting that *nanna* may have once meant "she who empowers".^[2]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Hyndluljóð*, a figure by the name of *Nanna* is listed as the daughter of *Nökkvi* and as a relative of *Óttar*. This figure may or may not be the same *Nanna* as *Baldr's* wife.^[3]



Baldr and Nanna (1882) by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine

Prose Edda

In chapter 38 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High explains that *Nanna Nepsdóttir* (the last name meaning "Nep's daughter") and her husband *Baldr* produced a son, the god *Forseti*.^[4]

Later in *Gylfaginning* (chapter 49), High recounts *Baldr's* death in *Asgard* at the unwitting hands of his blind brother, *Höðr*. *Baldr's* body is taken to the seaside and, when his body is placed onto his ship *Hringhorni*, *Nanna's* collapses and dies of grief. Her body is placed upon *Hringhorni* with *Baldr*, the ship is set aflame, and the god *Thor* hallows the pyre with his hammer *Mjöllnir*.^[5]

Sent by *Baldr's* mother, the goddess *Frigg*, the god *Hermóðr* rides to the location of *Hel* to resurrect *Baldr*. *Hermóðr* finally arrives in *Hel* to find *Baldr* in a hall, seated in the seat of honor and with his wife *Nanna*. *Hermóðr* bargains with *Hel*, the being, for *Baldr's* resurrection. *Hel* and *Hermóðr* come to an agreement and then *Baldr* and *Nanna* accompany *Hermóðr* out of the hall. *Baldr* gives *Hermóðr* the ring *Draupnir*, which the god *Odin* had placed on *Baldr's* pyre, to return to *Odin*. *Nanna* presents to *Hermóðr* a series of gifts: a linen robe for *Frigg*, a golden ring for the goddess *Fulla*, and other unspecified items. *Hermóðr* returns to *Asgard*.^[6]



In Hel Baldr, holding Nanna, waves to Hermóðr (1893) by George Percy Jacomb-Hood

In the first chapter of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, *Nanna* is listed among 8 goddesses attending a feast held in honor of *Ægir*.^[7] In chapter 5 of *Skáldskaparmál*, means of referring to *Baldr* are provided, including "husband of *Nanna*".^[8] In chapter 19, means of referring to *Frigg* are provided, including "mother-in-law of *Nanna*".^[9] In chapter 75, *Nanna* is included among a list of goddesses.^[10] In chapter 18, the skald *Eilífr Goðrúnarson's* work *Þórsdrápa* is quoted, which includes a kenning that references *Nanna* ("wake-hilt-*Nanna*" for "troll-wife").^[11]

Chronicon Lethrense

The chronicle which departs most from the *Prose Edda* is the Danish *Chronicon Lethrense* (and the included *Annales Lundenses*). They tell that Höðr's son, the Danish king Rorik Slengeborre was succeeded by his son Wiglek. This Wiglek married Nanna and he ruled in peace. He died in his bed and was succeeded by his son Wermund, the father of Offe (Offa).

Gesta Danorum

In book III of *Gesta Danorum*, Nanna is not a goddess but rather a daughter of the mortal King Gevar. Nanna is attracted to her foster-brother Höðr (also here a human), son of Hothbrodd, and "seeks his embraces". One day, Baldr, who Saxo describes as the son of the god Odin, witnesses Nanna bathing and lusts for her; "the sheen of her graceful body inflamed him and her manifest charms seared his heart, for there is no stronger incitement to lust than beauty." Fearing that Höðr will serve as an obstacle for his conquest of Nanna, Baldr resolves to slay Höðr.^[12]

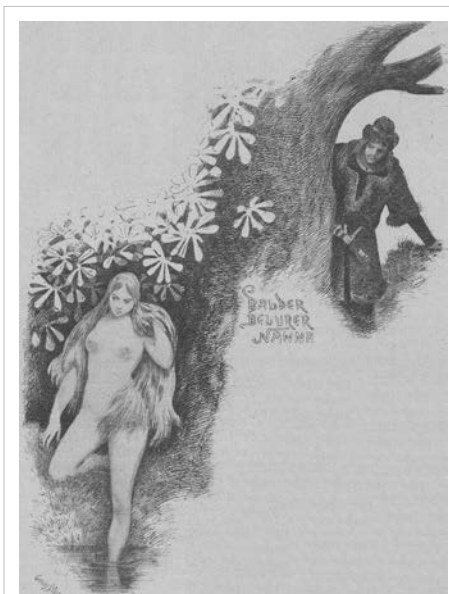
While out hunting, Höðr loses his path in a mist and a group of forest maidens greet him by name. The maidens tell him that they are able to guide fate, and that they appear invisibly on battlefields, where they award victory or defeat at their whim. They inform Höðr that Baldr witnessed Nanna bathing, yet warn Höðr not to challenge Baldr to combat—no matter what he may do—for Baldr sprang from divine seed and is therefore a demi-god. The maidens and their dwelling vanish and Höðr finds himself standing in a wide open plain. Saxo explains that Höðr had been tricked by means of magic.^[13]

Höðr returns home, recounts to King Gevar that he had lost his path and been tricked by the forest maidens, and immediately asks King Gevar for his daughter Nanna's hand in wedlock. Gevar tells Höðr that he would most certainly approve of the marriage, but that Baldr has already requested Nanna's hand. Gevar says that he fears Baldr's wrath, for Baldr's body is infused with a holy strength and cannot be harmed by steel. Gevar is, however, aware of a sword that will kill Baldr, and he explains that it is very well protected, and tells him how to retrieve the sword.^[14]

After Höðr retrieves the loot, a series of events occur unrelated to Baldr and Nanna. Meanwhile, Baldr takes arms and goes into Gevar's kingdom to claim Nanna as his own. Gevar tells Baldr to reason with Nanna, and this Baldr does with care. However, Baldr makes no progress; Nanna dodges his advances by arguing that the offspring of a deity cannot marry a mortal due to the differences in their nature. Höðr learns of Baldr's actions. Helgi and Höðr battle Baldr and other gods (who are unnamed outside of Thor and Odin), resulting in a victory for Höðr's forces. After the victory, Baldr again asks Gevar for Nanna's hand and so wins Nanna's embraces. Baldr and Nanna go to Sweden and there Baldr becomes ruler.^[15]

In Sweden, Höðr is attacked by Baldr and defeated. Höðr flees back to Denmark with Nanna. Despite the victory, Baldr is tormented at night by visions of Nanna, resulting in his deterioration:

[Baldr] was incessantly tormented at night by phantoms which mimicked the shape of Nanna and caused him to fall into such an unhealthy condition that he could not even walk properly. For this reason he took to travelling in a chariot or carriage. The violent passion that soaked his heart brought him almost to the verge of collapse. He judged that victory had yielded him nothing if it had not given him Nanna as a prize.^[16]



Baldr secretly watches Nanna bathing (1898) by Louis Moe

Archaeological record

The Setre Comb, a comb from the 6th or early 7th century featuring runic inscriptions, may reference the goddess. The comb is the subject of an amount of scholarly discourse as most experts accept the reading of the Germanic charm word *alu* and *Nanna*, though there exists questions as to if *Nanna* is the same figure as the goddess from later attestations.^[17]

Theories

Some scholars have attempted to link Old Norse *Nanna* with the Sumerian goddess Inanna, the goddess Nannar/Babylonian Ishtar, or the Phrygian goddess Nana, mother of the god Attis. Scholar Rudolf Simek opines that identification with Inanna, Nannar or Nana is "hardly likely" due to the large distances in time and location between the figures.^[18] Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson says that while "the idea of a link with Sumerian Inanna , 'Lady of Heaven', was attractive to early scholars" the notion "seems unlikely."^[19]

Notes

- [1] For "babble word" etymology, see Simek (2007:227), Orchard (1997:117), and Lindow (2001:236). For Jan de Vries' root theory, see Simek (2007:227). For John Lindow's common noun theory, see Lindow (2001:236).
- [2] McKinnell (2005:144).
- [3] Larrington (1997:314).
- [4] Faulkes (1995:26).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:49).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:49—50).
- [7] Faulkes (1995:59).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:74).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:86).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:83).
- [12] Davidson, Fisher (2008:69).
- [13] Davidson, Fisher (2008:68—69).
- [14] Davidson, Fisher (2008:70).
- [15] Davidson, Fisher (2008:70—73).
- [16] Davidson, Fisher (2008:73).
- [17] Macleod (2006:24)
- [18] Simek (2007:227).
- [19] Davidson, Fisher (2008:51).

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Njörun

In Norse mythology, **Njörun** is a goddess attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and various kennings (including once in the *Poetic Edda*). Scholarly theories have proposed that Njörun may represent the earth. Possible etymological connections to the Norse god Njörðr and the Roman goddess Nerio have been proposed. The Old Norse name *Njörun* is sometimes modernly anglicized as **Niorun**.

Attestations

Njörun is listed (after Bil) as an *ásynja* within the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*. No further information outside of her name is provided there.^[1] In addition, the name occurs in kennings for women in poetry by Kormákr Ögmundarson, Hrafn Öundurson and Rögnvaldr Kali as well as in *Krákumál* and verses in *Íslendinga saga*, *Njáls saga* and *Harðar saga*.^[2] *Eld-Njörun* (meaning "fire-Njörun") occurs in women kennings in poetry by Gísli Súrsson and Björn Breiðvíkingakappi^[3] while *hól-Njörun* occurs in a somewhat dubious kenning in a stanza by Björn hítðælakappi.^[4] *Draum-Njörun* (meaning "dream-Njörun") is cited in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Alvíssmál* as a word from the language of the dwarves for the night. The same word occurs in *Nafnapulur*.^[5]

Theories

The name *Njörun* may be etymologically related to the names of the Norse god Njörðr and the Roman goddess Nerio.^[6] Andy Orchard says that Njörun is a "mysterious (and possibly fictitious) figure" of whom nothing else is known.^[7] Finnur Jónsson suggested that Njörun may be a name for the earth.^[2]

Albert Murey Sturtevant notes that next to the goddess name *Gefjon*, "the only other feminine personal name which contains the suffix *-un* is *Njör-un*, recorded only in the *pulur* [...], and among the *kvenna heiti ókend*. Whatever the stem syllable *Njör-* represents (perhaps **ner-* as in **Ner-puz>Njörðr*), the addition of the *n-* and *un-* suffixes seems to furnish an exact parallel to *Gef-n* : *Gefj-un* (cf. *Njör-n* : *Njör-un*)."^[8]

Notes

[1] Faulkes (1995:157).

[2] Finnur Jónsson (1931:429).

[3] Finnur Jónsson (1931:106).

[4] Finnur Jónsson (1931:276).

[5] Finnur Jónsson (1931:84).

[6] Finnur Jónsson (1913:110) suggests a Njörðr connection, Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1989:671) additionally suggests a connection between Njörun and Nerio.

[7] Orchard (1997:119).

[8] Sturtevant (1952:167).

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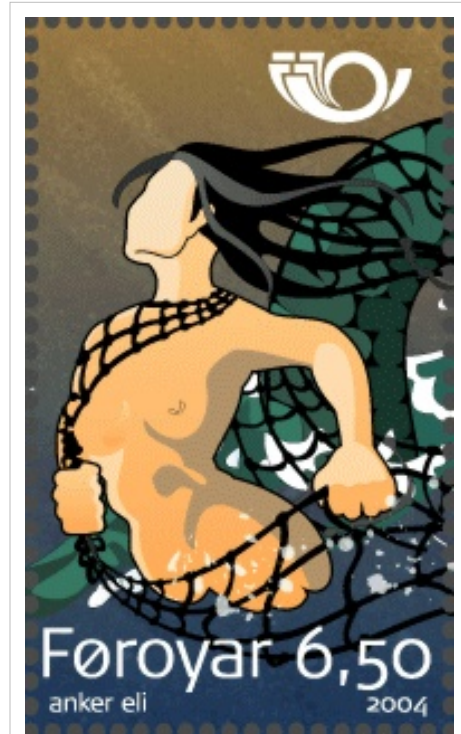
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Rán

In Norse mythology, **Rán** (Old Norse "sea") is a sea goddess. According to Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda book *Skáldskaparmál*, in his retelling of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Lokasenna*, she is married to Ægir and they have nine daughters together. Snorri also reports that she had a net in which she tried to capture men who ventured out on the sea:

Ran is the name of Ægir's wife, and their daughters are nine, even as we have written before. At this feast all things were self-served, both food and ale, and all implements needful to the feast. Then the Æsir became aware that Rán had that net wherein she was wont to catch all men who go upon the sea.^[1]

Her net is also mentioned in *Reginismál* and in the *Völsunga saga*, where she lends it to Loki so that he can capture Andvari. She is also associated with the practice of sailors bringing gold with them on any voyage, so that if they drowned while at sea, Rán would be pleased by their gift.^[2]



"Rán" (2004) by Anker Eli Petersen.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

Her willingness to capture sailing men is referred to in this citation from the Eddic poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* where escaping the perils of the sea is referred to as escaping Rán:



"Rán" (1901) by Johannes Gehrts.

En þeim sjalfum	But from above
Sigrún ofan	did Sigrun brave
folkdjörf of barg	Aid the men and
ok fari þeira;	all their faring;
snerisk ramliga	Mightily came
Rán ór hendi	from the claws of Ron
gjalfdrýr konungs	The leader's sea-beast ^[4]
at Gnipalundi. ^[3]	off Gnipalund. ^[5]

Whether men drowned by her doing or not, she appears to have received those drowned at sea, as exemplified in the section called *Hrímgerðarmál* in the Eddic poem *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, where the giantess *Hrímgerðr* is accused of having wanted to give the king's warriors to Rán, i.e. to drown them:

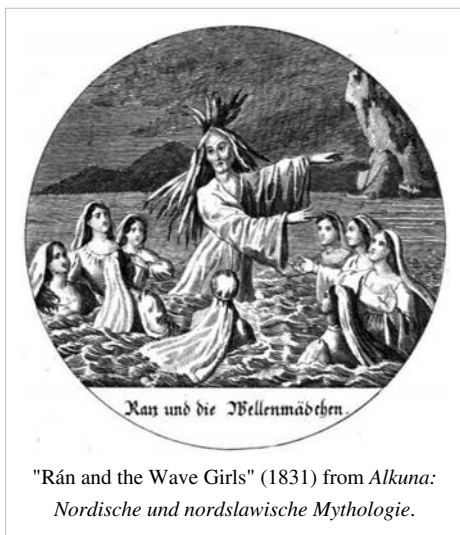
18. "Þú vart, hála,	18. "Witch, in front
fyr hildings skipum	of the ship thou wast,
ok látt í fjarðar mynni fyrir;	And lay before the fjord;
ræsis rekka	To Ron wouldst have given
er þú vildir Rán gefa,	the ruler's men,
ef þér kæmi-t í þverst þvari." ^[6]	If a spear had not stuck in thy flesh." ^[7]

Prose Edda

In addition, Snorri says in *Skáldskaparmál* that "Rán's husband" (*verr Ránar*) and "land of Rán" (*land Ránar*) are kennings for the sea.^{[8][9]} Furthermore, her close association with the sea permitted the kenning for gold "brightness of the sea" to be rendered as "brightness of Rán" (*gull er kallat eldr eða ljós eða birti Ægis, Ránar eða*).^{[1][8]} Not surprisingly, the sea was also referred to as "Rán's road" (*Ránar vegr*), as in the following stanza by the skald Njáll Þorgeirsson quoted by Snorri:



Rán tugs on a rope connected to a ship's anchor in "Ægir and Rán" (1882) by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine.



"Rán and the Wave Girls" (1831) from *Alkuna: Nordische und nordslawische Mythologie*.

290. Hrauð í himin upp glóðum
hafs, gekk sær af afli.
Börð, hygg ek, at ský skerðu.
Skaut Ránar vegr mána.^[8]

To the sky shot up the Deep's Gledes,
With fearful might the sea surged:
Methinks our stems the clouds cut,-
Rán's Road to the moon soared upward.^[10]

Rán was a dangerous goddess and Snorri adds a stanza of poetry by the skald Refr where the voracious sea is called "Ægir's wide mouth" and "Rán's mouth".

87. Færir björn, þar er bára
brestr, undinna festa
oft í Ægis kjafta
úrsvöl Gymis völvu.
88. En sægnípu Sleipnir
slítr úrdrifinn hvítrar
Ránar, rauðum steini
runnit, brjóst ór munni.^[8]

Gymir's wet-cold Spae-Wife
Wiles the Bear of Twisted Cables
Oft into Ægir's wide jaws,
Where the angry billow breaketh.
And the Sea-Peak's Sleipnir slitteth
The stormy breast rain-driven,
The wave, with red stain running
Out of white Rán's mouth.^[9]

In this poem "Gymir's wet-cold Spae-Wife (*völvu*)" is likely a reference to Rán, as Snorri and the skald present Gymir as another name for Ægir.

Friðþjófs saga hins frækna

In the legendary saga *Friðþjófs saga hins frækna*, Friðþjófr and his men find themselves in a violent storm, and the protagonist mourns that he will soon rest in Rán's bed.



Rán with her family by Fredrik Sander (1898)

"Sat ek á bólstri
í Baldrshaga,
kvað, hvat ek kunna,
fyr konungs dóttur.
Nú skal ek Ránar
raunbeð troða,
en annar mun
Ingibjargar."^[11]

"On bolster I sat
In Baldur's Mead erst,
And all songs that I could
To the king's daughter sang;
Now on Ran's bed belike
Must I soon be a-lying,
And another shall be
By Ingibiorg's side."^[12]

The protagonist then decides that as they are to "go to Rán" (*at til Ránar skal fara*) they would better do so in style with gold on each man. He divides the gold and talks of her again:

"Nú hefir fjórum
of farit várum
lögr lagsmönnum,
þeim er lifa skyldu,
en Rán gætir
röskum drengjum,
siðlaus kona,
sess ok rekkju."^[11]

"The red ring here I hew me
Once owned of Halfdan's father,
The wealthy lord of erewhile,
Or the sea waves undo us,
So on the guests shall gold be,
If we have need of guesting;
Meet so for mighty men-folk
Amid Ran's hall to hold them."^[12]

Notes

- [1] Section XXXIII of *Skáldskaparmál* (http://www.cybersamurai.net/Mythology/nordic_gods/LegendsSagas/Edda/ProseEdda/) in translation by Arthur G. Brodeur (1916, 1923)
- [3] Helgakviða Hundingsbana I (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/helgakvidahundingsbanaa.php>) at Norrøne Tekster og Kvad, Norway.
- [4] Ship.
- [5] *The First Lay of Helgi Hundingsbane* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe19.htm>), Henry A. Bellows' translation (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [6] *Hrímgærðarmál* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/helgakvidahjorvardssonar.php>) at Norrøne Tekster og Kvad, Norway.
- [7] *Hrímgærðarmál* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe18.htm>), Henry A. Bellows' translation (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [8] *Skáldskaparmál* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Skáldskaparmál>) at Norrøne Tekster og Kvad, Norway.
- [9] Section XXV of *Skáldskaparmál* (http://www.cybersamurai.net/Mythology/nordic_gods/LegendsSagas/Edda/ProseEdda/) in translation by Arthur G. Brodeur (1916, 1923).
- [10] Section LX of *Skáldskaparmál* (http://www.cybersamurai.net/Mythology/nordic_gods/LegendsSagas/Edda/ProseEdda/) in translation by Arthur G. Brodeur (1916, 1923).
- [11] *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/fornaldersagaene/fridthjofssaga.php>) at Norrøne Tekster og Kvad, Norway.
- [12] "The Story of Frithjof the Bold" in *Three Northern Love Stories and Other Tales* ([http://books.google.com/books?id=mmQJAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA75&dq="THE+beginning+of+this+saga+is,+that+king+Bele+ruled+over+the+Sogn+fylke"&hl=en&ei=zC7wTYG4KcPv0gHI-6z0DA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q="THE+beginning+of+this+saga+is,+that+king+Bele+ruled+over+the+Sogn+fylke"&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=mmQJAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA75&dq=)), in translation by Magnússon and Morris (1901).

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Rindr

Rindr (Old Norse) or **Rinda** (Latin) (sometimes Anglicized **Rind**) is a female character in Norse mythology, alternatively described as a giantess, a goddess or a human princess from the east (somewhere in present-day Russia). She was impregnated by Odin and gave birth to Váli.

The main account of Rindr is book III of the *Gesta Danorum*, written by Saxo Grammaticus around the early thirteenth century. There she is called **Rinda** and is the daughter of the King of the Ruthenians. After Balderus' death Odin consulted seers on how to get revenge. On their advice Odin went to the Ruthenians disguised as a warrior called Roster. There he was twice turned down by Rinda. He then disguised himself as a medicine woman called Wecha. When Rinda later fell ill, the disguised Odin said he had medicine with which to cure her but it would cause a violent reaction. On advice from Odin the king tied Rinda to her bed. Odin then proceeded to rape her. From the rape was born Bous who would later avenge Balderus.

Óðinn's seduction of Rindr is described once outside the *Gesta Danorum*, in a line of stanza 3 of *Sigurðarkviða*, a poem by Kormákr Ögmundarson praising Sigurðr Hlaðajarl, who ruled around Trondheim in the mid-tenth century. Like other such praise-poems, it is generally assumed to be genuine rather than a later pseudo-historical composition. Kormákr's verse mentions that 'Óðinn seið til Rindar' ('Óðinn 'enchanted Rindr'),^[1] denoting Óðinn's magical seduction of Rindr with the verb *seiða*. This suggests that Kormákr thought the magic known as *seiðr* was integral to Óðinn's wooing of Rindr, and is important evidence for Óðinn's association with this kind of magic.

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[1] Finnur Jónsson (ed.). 1912–15. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 4 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal), BI 69

Sif

In Norse mythology, **Sif** is a goddess associated with earth. Sif is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and in the poetry of skalds. In both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, Sif is the wife of the god Thor and is known for her golden hair.

In the *Prose Edda*, Sif is named as the mother of the goddess Þrúðr by Thor and of Ullr with a father whose name is not recorded. The *Prose Edda* also recounts that Sif once had her hair shorn by Loki, and that Thor forced Loki to have a golden headpiece made for Sif, resulting in not only Sif's golden tresses but also five other objects for other gods.

Scholars have proposed that Sif's hair may represent fields of golden wheat, that she may be associated with fertility, family, wedlock and/or that she is connected to rowan, and that there may be an allusion to her role or possibly her name in the Old English poem *Beowulf*.



Sif (1893) by Jenny Nyström

Etymology

The name *Sif* is the singular form of the plural Old Norse word *sifjar*. *Sifjar* only appears in singular form when referring to the goddess as a proper noun. *Sifjar* is cognate to the Old English *sib* (meaning "affinity, connection, by marriage") and in other Germanic languages: Gothic language *sibbia*, Old High German *sibba*, and German *sippe*. *Sifjar* appears not only in ancient poetry and records of law, but also in compounds (*byggja sifjar* means "to marry").^[1] Using this etymology, scholar John Lindow gives the meanings "in-law-relationship", scholar Andy Orchard provides "relation", and scholar Rudolf Simek gives "relation by marriage".^[2]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In stanza 48 of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Hárbarðsljóð*, Hárbarðr (Odin, father of Thor, in disguise) meets Thor at an inlet of a gulf. The two engage in flyting, and Hárbarðr refuses to ferry Thor across the bay. Among numerous other insults, Hárbarðr claims that Sif has a lover at home. In response, Thor says that Hárbarðr is speaking carelessly "of what seems worst to me" and also lying.^[3]

In stanzas 53 and 54 of the poem *Lokasenna*, after pouring Loki a crystal cup of mead during his series of insults towards the gods, Sif states that there is nothing Loki can say only in regard to her. In response, Loki claims that Sif has had an affair with him:

Then Sif went forward and poured out mead for Loki into a crystal cup and said:

Welcome now, Loki, and take the crystal cup
full of ancient mead,
you should admit, that of the children of the Æsir,
that I alone am blameless.

He took the horn and drank it down:

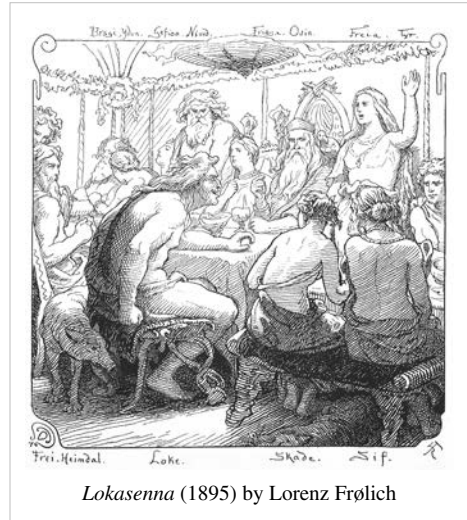
That indeed you would be, if you were so,
if you were shy and fierce towards men;
I alone know, as I think I do know,
your love beside Thor,
and that was the wicked Loki.^[4]

Sif does not respond, and the exchange turns to *Beyla*.^[5] Sif is additionally mentioned in two kennings found in poems collected in the *Poetic Edda*; *Hymiskviða* (where Thor is referred to as the "Husband of Sif" thrice^[6]), and *Þrymskviða* (where Thor is once referred to as "Husband of Sif"^[7]).

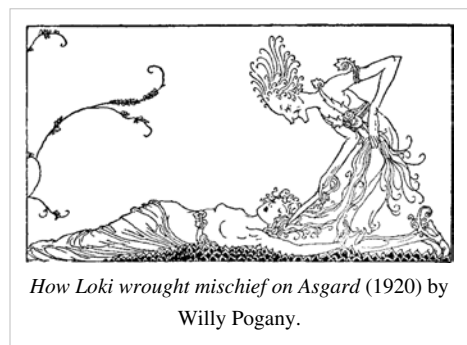
Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda*, Sif is mentioned once in the Prologue, in chapter 31 of *Gylfaginning*, and in *Skáldskaparmál* as a guest at Ægir's feast, the subject of a jötunn's desire, as having her hair shorn by Loki, and in various kennings.

Sif is introduced in chapter three of the Prologue section of the *Prose Edda*; Snorri's euhemerized account of the origins of Viking mythology. Snorri states that Thor married Sif, and that she is known as "a prophetess called Sibyl, though we know her as Sif".^[8] Sif is further described as "the most loveliest of women" and with hair of gold.^[8] Although he lists her own ancestors as unknown, Snorri writes that Thor and Sif produced a son by the name of Lóriði, who "took after his father".^[9] Lóriði is attributed an extended genealogical list of descendants, including figures such as Godwulf and Odin (though outside of this continuity Odin is described as the father of Thor).



Lokasenna (1895) by Lorenz Frølich



How Loki wrought mischief on Asgard (1920) by Willy Pogany.

In chapter 31 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, Ullr is referred to as a son of Sif and a stepson of Thor (though his father is not mentioned):

Ull is the name of one. The son of Sif, he is the stepson of Thor. He is so skillful a bowman and skier that no one can compete with him. He is beautiful to look at, and is an accomplished warrior. He is also a good person to pray to when in single combat.^[10]

As reported in the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Thor once engages in a duel with Hrungrnir, there described as the strongest of the jötnar. Prior to this, Hrungrnir had been drunkenly boasting of his desire to, amongst other things, kill all of the gods except Freyja and Sif, whom he wanted to take home with him. However, at the duel, Hrungrnir is quickly killed by the enraged Thor.^[11]

Further in *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri relates a story where Loki cuts off Sif's hair as a prank. When Thor discovers this, he grabs hold of Loki, resulting in Loki swearing to have a headpiece made of gold to replace Sif's locks. Loki fulfills this promise by having a headpiece made by dwarfs, the Sons of Ivaldi. Along with the headpiece, the dwarfs produced Odin's spear, Gungnir. As the story progresses, the incident leads to the creation of the ship Skíðblaðnir and the boar Gullinbursti for Freyr, the multiplying ring Draupnir for Odin, and the mighty hammer Mjöllnir for Thor.^[12]

Sif also appears in *Skáldskaparmál* listed as a heiti for "earth",^[13] appears in a kenning for a gold-keeping woman,^[14] and once for Hildir.^[15] Poetic means of referring to Sif calling her "wife of Thor", "mother of Ullr", "the fair-haired deity", "rival of Járnsaxa", and as "mother of Þrúðr".^[16]



The third gift — an enormous hammer (1902) by Elmer Boyd Smith. The bottom right corner depicts the ship Skíðblaðnir "afloat" Sif's new hair.

Swedish folklore

19th-century scholar Jacob Grimm records that in his time residents of Värmland, Sweden "call[ed] Thor's wife *godmor*, good mother."^[17]

Theories

Beowulf

In Old English, *sib* ("family") is cognate with Old Norse *Sif* and *sif*. In the Old English poem *Beowulf* (lines 2016 to 2018), Hroðgar's wife, Wealhþeow, moves through the hall serving mead to the warriors and defusing conflict. Various scholars beginning with Magnus Olsen have pointed to the similarity with what Sif does at the feast described in *Lokasenna*.^{[18][19]} Richard North further notes that unusually, *sib* is personified here and in lines 2599 to 2661, and suggests they may be references to Sif in Danish religion: "Both instances may indicate that the poet of *Beowulf* was in a position to imagine a sixth-century Scandinavia on the basis of his knowledge of contemporary Danish legends."^[20]

Hair as wheat and potential cognates

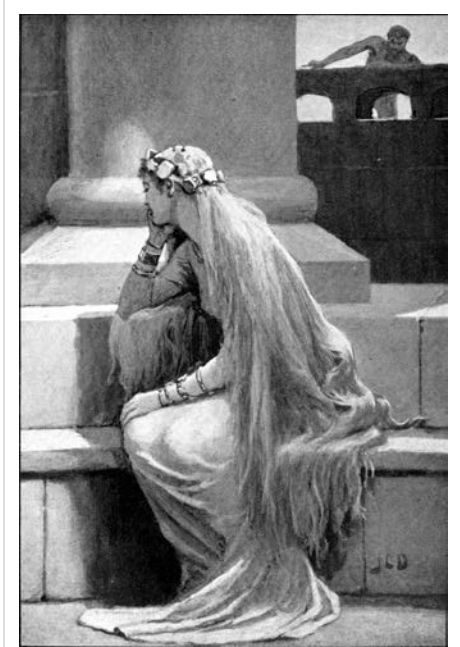
19th-century scholar Jacob Grimm proposes a reconstruction of a Germanic deity cognate to Sif in other Germanic cultures, and proposes a similar nature to that of the goddesses Frigg and Freyja:

The Goth. *sibja*, OHG. *sippia*, *sippa*, AS. *sib* gen. *sibbe*, denote peace, friendship, kindred; from these I infer a divinity *Sibja*, *Sippia*, *Sib*, corresponding to ON. *Sif* gen. *Sifjar*, the wife of Thôrr, for the ON. too has a pl. *sifjar* meaning cognatio, *sifi amicus* (OHG. *sippio*, *sippo*), *sift* genus, cognatio. By this sense of the word, *Sif* would appear to be, like Frigg and Freyja, a goddess of loveliness and love; as attributes of Oðinn and Thôrr agree, their wives Frigg and Sif have also a common signification.^[21]

Grimm connects Eddic references to Sif's golden hair (gold is referred to as *Sifjar haddr*; Sif's hair) with the herb name *haddr Sifjar* (*polytrichum aureum*). Grimm says that "expositors see in this the golden fruits of the Earth burnt up by fire and growing again, they liken Sif to Ceres", and Grimm says that "with it agrees the fact that O. Slav. *Siva* is a gloss on 'Ceres dea frumenti'" but cites etymological problems between the potential cognate. Grimm says that Thor's mother was the earth, and not his wife, yet "we do find the simple *Sif* standing for earth." Grimm adds that he is inconclusive regarding Sif and that, "we ought to have fuller details about Sif, and these are wholly wanting in our mythology. Nowhere amongst us is the mystic relation of the seed-corn of Demeter, whose poignant grief for her daughter threatens to bring famine on mankind (Hymn to Cer. 305–306), nor anything like it, recorded."^[21]

Citing the etymology of her name, 19th century scholar Guðbrandur Vigfússon theorizes that Sif "betokens mother earth with her golden sheaves of grain; she was the goddess of the sanctity of the family and wedlock".^[1]

Scholar Rudolf Simek theorizes that Sif likely originated as a compliment to Thor through his fertility associations, and that the name *Sif* (Simek provides the etymology "relation by marriage") may have originally simply meant "the wife (of Thor)". Simek rejects notions of a "vegetation cult" venerating Sif, says that Sif does not appear to have a function, dismisses theories proposing connections between Sif's hair and grain as "over-zealous interpretation[s]", and theorizes that Snorri invented the story of Sif's shorn locks in attempt to explain the attributes of various gods.^[22]



Sif (1909) by John Charles Dollman

Scholar H. R. Ellis Davidson states that Sif may have been an ancient fertility goddess, agreeing with a link between her lustrous hair and fields of golden wheat.^[23] Regarding Sif, Thor, and fertility, Davidson says:

The cult of Thor was linked up with men's habitation and possessions, and with well-being of the family and community. This included the fruitfulness of the fields, and Thor, although pictured primarily as a storm god in the myths, was also concerned with the fertility and preservation of the seasonal round. In our own times, little stone axes from the distance past have been used as fertility symbols and placed by the farmer in the holes made by the drill to receive the first seed of spring. Thor's marriage with Sif of the golden hair, about which we hear little in the myths, seems to be a memory of the ancient symbol of divine marriage between sky god and earth goddess, when he comes to earth in the thunderstorm and the storm brings the rain which makes the fields fertile. In this way Thor, as well as Odin, may be seen to continue the cult of the sky god which was known in the Bronze Age.^[24]

Scholar John Lindow proposes that a potentially understated mythological importance of Sif's role in the story of her sheared hair exists; her headpiece is created along with the most important and powerful items in Norse mythology. Lindow further states that it may be easy to lose sight of the central role Sif plays in the creation of these objects.^[25]

Rowan

Sif has been linked with Ravdna, the consort of the Sami thunder-god Horagalles. Red berries of rowan were holy to Ravdna, and the name *Ravdna* resembles the North-Germanic words for the tree (for example, Old Norse *reynir*). According to *Skáldskaparmál* the rowan is called "the salvation of Thor" because Thor once saved himself by clinging to it. It has been theorized that Sif was once conceived in the form of a rowan to which Thor clung.^[26]

Lokasenna accusations

Regarding the accusations that Loki makes to Sif in *Lokasenna*, Carolyne Larrington says that Sif is not elsewhere attested as unfaithful, though notes that Odin makes a similar accusation in *Hárbarðsljóð*, and theorizes a potential connection between the story of Loki cutting off Sif's hair with these references. Larrington says "how he got close enough to carry this out might be explained by this verse."^[27]



Sif sleeps while Loki lurks behind in an illustration (1894) by A. Chase

Modern influence

Sif has inspired the name of volcano on the planet Venus (Sif Mons). The Marvel Comics character, Sif, is based on the Sif of Norse myth and is portrayed by Jaimie Alexander in the Marvel Studios film *Thor* and its sequel.^[28]

Notes

- [1] Vigfusson (1874:526).
- [2] Lindow (2001:266), Orchard (1997:138), and Simek (2007:283).
- [3] Larrington (1999:75–76).
- [4] Larrington (1999:93).
- [5] Larrington (1999:94).
- [6] Larrington (1999:78, 80, and 82.).
- [7] Larrington (1999:100).
- [8] Byock (2006:6).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:3).
- [10] Byock (2006:38).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:77–79).

- [12] Faulkes (1995:96–97).
- [13] Faulkes (1995:163).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:115).
- [15] Faulkes (1995:123).
- [16] Faulkes (1995:86).
- [17] Grimm (1888:1364).
- [18] Baker (1994:153, n. 72)
- [19] Enright (1996:15).
- [20] North (1998:235–236, n. 126).
- [21] Grimm (1882:309).
- [22] Simek (2007:283).
- [23] Davidson (1965:84).
- [24] Davidson (1975:72).
- [25] Lindow (2001:266).
- [26] Turville-Petre (1964:98).
- [27] Larrington (1999:276).
- [28] For the volcano, see Lang (2003:221). For the Marvel Comics character, see Mansour (2005:485).

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Sigyn

In Norse mythology, **Sigyn** (Old Norse "victorious girl-friend"^[1]) is a goddess and is the wife of Loki. Sigyn is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In the *Poetic Edda*, little information is provided about Sigyn other than her role in assisting Loki during his captivity. In the *Prose Edda*, her role in helping her husband through his time spent in bondage is stated again, she appears in various kennings, and her status as a goddess is twice stated. Sigyn may appear on the Gosforth Cross and has been the subject of an amount of theory and cultural references.



"Loki and Sigyn" (1863) by Mårten Eskil Winge.

Attestations

Sigyn is attested in the following works:

Poetic Edda

In stanza 35 of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, a *Völva* tells Odin that, amongst many other things, she sees Sigyn sitting very unhappily with her bound husband, Loki, under a "grove of hot springs".^[2] Sigyn is mentioned a second (and final) time in the ending prose section of the poem *Lokasenna*. In the prose, Loki has been bound by the gods with the guts of his son Nari, his son *Váli* is described as having been turned into a wolf, and the goddess *Skaði* fastens a venomous snake over Loki's face, from which venom drips. Sigyn, stated again as Loki's wife, holds a basin under the dripping venom. The basin grows full, and she pulls it away, during which time venom drops on Loki, causing him to writhe so violently that earthquakes occur that shake the entire earth.^[3]



"Loki and Sigyn" (1892) by Karl Franz Eduard von Gebhardt.

Prose Edda

Sigyn appears in the books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* in the *Prose Edda*. In *Gylfaginning*, Sigyn is introduced in chapter 31. There, she is introduced as the wife of Loki, and that they have a son by the name of "Nari or Narfi".^[4] Sigyn is mentioned again in *Gylfaginning* in chapter 50, where events are described differently than in *Lokasenna*. Here, the gods have captured Loki and his two sons, who are stated as *Váli*, described as a son of Loki, and "Nari or Narfi", the latter earlier described as also a son of Sigyn.^[5] *Váli* is changed into a wolf by the gods, and rips apart his brother "Nari or Narfi". The guts of "Nari or Narfi" are then used to tie Loki to three stones, after which the guts turn to iron, and *Skaði* places a snake above Loki. Sigyn places herself beside him, where she holds out a bowl to catch the dripping venom. However, when the bowl becomes full, she leaves to pour out the venom. As a result, Loki is again described as shaking so violently that the planet shakes, and this process repeats until he breaks free, setting Ragnarök into motion.^[5]



"Loki Bound (motive from the Gosforth Cross)" (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

Sigyn is introduced as a goddess, an *ásynja*, in the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, where the gods are holding a grand feast for the visiting *Ægir*,^[6] and in kennings for Loki: "husband of Sigyn",^[7] "cargo [Loki] of incantation-fetter's [Sigyn's] arms",^[8] and in a passage quoted from the 9th-century *Haustlög*, "the burden of Sigyn's arms".^[9] The final mention of Sigyn in *Skáldskaparmál* is in the list of *ásynjur* in the appended *Nafnaþulur* section, chapter 75.^[10]

Archaeological record

The mid-11th century Gosforth Cross located in Cumbria, England, has been interpreted as featuring various figures from Norse mythology. The bottom portion of the west side of the cross features a depiction of a long-haired female, kneeling figure holding an object above another prostrate, bound figure. Above and to their left is a knotted serpent. This has been interpreted as Sigyn soothing the bound Loki.^[11]

Theories

While the name *Sigyn* is found as a female personal name in Old Norse sources (Old Norse *sigr* meaning "victory" and *vina* meaning "girl-friend"), and though in surviving sources she is largely restricted to a single role, she appears in the 9th century *Haustlög* from pagan times, written by the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir. Due to this early connection with Loki, Sigyn has been theorized as being a goddess dating back to an older form of Germanic paganism.^[12]

Modern influence

The scene of Sigyn assisting Loki has been depicted on a number of paintings, including "Loke och Sigyn" (1850) by Nils Blommér, "Loke och Sigyn" (1863) by Mårten Eskil Winge, "Loki och Sigyn" (1879) by Oscar Wergeland, and the illustration "Loki und Sigyn; Hel mit dem Hunde Garm" (1883) by K. Ehrenberg.^[12] Various objects and places have been named after Sigyn in modern times, including the Norwegian stiff-straw winter wheat varieties *Sigyn I* and *Sigyn II*,^[13] a Marvel Comics character (1978) of the same name^[14] the Swedish vessel MS Sigyn, which transports spent nuclear fuel in an allusion to Sigyn holding a bowl beneath the venom to spare Loki,^[15] and the arctic Sigyn Glacier.^[16]



The bottom portion of the west side of the Gosforth Cross.

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:146).
- [2] Larrington (1998:8).
- [3] Larrington (1998:95-96).
- [4] Byock (2006:31).
- [5] Byock (2006:70).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:59).
- [7] Faulkes (1995:76).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:83).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:87).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [11] Orchard (1997:13).
- [12] Simek (2007:284).
- [13] Belderok (2000:95).

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Sjöfn

In Norse mythology, **Sjöfn** is a goddess associated with love. Sjöfn is attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; and in three kennings employed in skaldic poetry. Scholars have proposed theories about the implications of the goddess.

Attestations

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, High provides brief descriptions of 16 ásynjur. High lists Sjöfn seventh, and says that Sjöfn is "concerned to direct people's minds to love, both women and men." In addition, High states that from Sjöfn's name comes the Old Norse word *sjafni*.^[1] In the Nafnaþulur section appended to the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, chapter 75, Sjöfn is included in a list of 27 names of ásynjur.^[2] Otherwise, the name *Sjöfn* is thrice employed as a base word in skaldic kennings for "woman".^[3]

Theories

Regarding the information given about Sjöfn in *Gylfaginning*, John Lindow says that the word *sjafni* does indeed appear listed in the þulur as a word for "love", yet that outside of this description no information about the goddess is known. Lindow states that some scholars theorize that Sjöfn may be the goddess Frigg under another name.^[3] Rudolf Simek says that Snorri may have derived his etymology of *Sjöfn* from the Old Norse words *sefi* ("sense") or from *sefi* (possibly "relation"), but that the scant references to Sjöfn do not allow for much more of an elaborate explanation for the goddess. Simek says that, accordingly, Sjöfn is viewed as a goddess of "marriage and love, or else one of relationships" and that Sjöfn is among several goddesses mentioned in the *Prose Edda* "who are matron-like guardian-goddesses."^[4]

Modern culture

'Sjöfn' is the name of an album by the Finnish band Gjallarhorn, released in 2000.^[5]

Sjöfn appears as a regular character in the New Zealand television series *The Almighty Johnsons*, played by Michelle Langstone. In the series, the Goddess has been reincarnated as a Human.

Sjöfn is the name of a folk singer based in Alaska.^[6]

References

- [1] Faulkes (1995:30).
- [2] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [3] Lindow (1995:268).
- [4] Simek (2007:286).
- [5] AllMusic Review, Sjöfn [Enhanced], by Steven McDonald, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/r505545>
- [6] Sjöfn (<http://sjofn.net/home.html>)'s debut album came out in 2010. Retrieved 22 November 2012.

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Skaði

In Norse mythology, **Skaði** (sometimes anglicized as **Skadi**, **Skade**, or **Skathi**) is a jötunn and goddess associated with bowhunting, skiing, winter, and mountains. Skaði is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; the *Prose Edda* and in *Heimskringla*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and in the works of skalds.

In all sources, Skaði is the daughter of the deceased Þjazi, and Skaði married the god Njörðr as part of the compensation provided by the gods for killing her father Þjazi. In *Heimskringla*, Skaði is described as having split up with Njörðr and as later having married the god Odin, and that the two produced many children together. In both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, Skaði is responsible for placing the serpent that drips venom onto the bound Loki. Skaði is alternately referred to as **Öndurguð** (Old Norse "ski god") and **Öndurdís** (Old Norse "ski lady").

The etymology of the name *Skaði* is uncertain, but may be connected with the original form of *Scandinavia*. Some place names in Scandinavia, particularly in Sweden, refer to Skaði. Scholars have theorized a potential connection between Skaði and the god Ullr (who



Skadi Hunting in the Mountains (1901) by H. L. M.

is also associated with skiing and appears most frequently in place names in Sweden), a particular relationship with the jötunn Loki, and that *Scandinavia* may be related to the name Skaði (potentially meaning "Skaði's island") or the name may be connected to an Old Norse noun meaning "harm". Skaði has inspired various works of art.

Etymology

The Old Norse name *Skaði*, along with *Sca(n)dinavia* and *Skáney*, may be related to Gothic *skadus*, Old English *sceadu*, Old Saxon *scado*, and Old High German *scato* (meaning "shadow"). Scholar John McKinnell comments that this etymology suggests Skaði may have once been a personification of the geographical region of Scandinavia or associated with the underworld.^[1]

Georges Dumézil disagrees with the notion of *Scadin-avia* as etymologically "the island of the goddess Skaði." Dumézil comments that the first element *Scadin* must have had—or once had—a connection to "darkness" "or something else we cannot be sure of". Dumézil says that, rather, the name *Skaði* derives from the name of the geographical region, which was at the time no longer completely understood. In connection, Dumézil points to a parallel in *Ériu*, a goddess personifying Ireland that appears in some Irish texts, whose name he says comes from *Ireland* rather than the other way around.^[2]

Alternatively, *Skaði* may be connected with the Old Norse noun *skaði* ("harm"),^[3] whence the Icelandic and Faroese *skaði* ("harm, damage").

Attestations

Skaði is attested in poems found in the *Poetic Edda*, in two books of the *Prose Edda* and in one *Heimskringla* book.

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál*, the god Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) reveals to the young Agnarr the existence of twelve locations. Odin mentions the location *Þrymheimr* sixth in a single stanza. In the stanza, Odin details that the jötunn *Þjazi* once lived there, and that now his daughter Skaði does. Odin describes *Þrymheimr* as consisting of "ancient courts" and refers to Skaði as "the shining bride of the gods".^[4] In the prose introduction to the poem *Skírnismál*, the god Freyr has become heartsick for a fair girl (the jötunn *Gerðr*) he has spotted in *Jötunheimr*. The god *Njörðr* asks Freyr's servant *Skírnir* to talk to Freyr, and in the first stanza of the poem, Skaði also tells *Skírnir* to ask Freyr why he is so upset. *Skírnir* responds that he expects harsh words from their son Freyr.^[5]



Njörðr, Skaði, and Freyr as depicted in *The Lovesickness of Frey* (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

In the prose introduction to the poem *Lokasenna*, Skaði is referred to as the wife of *Njörðr* and is cited as one of the goddesses attending *Ægir*'s feast.^[6] After Loki has an exchange with the god *Heimdallr*, Skaði interjects. Skaði tells Loki that he is "light-hearted" and that Loki will not be "playing [...] with [his] tail wagging free" for much longer, for soon the gods will bind Loki to a sharp rock with the ice-cold entrails of his son. Loki responds that, even if this is so, he was "first and foremost" at the killing of *Þjazi*. Skaði responds that, if this is so, "baneful advice" will always flow from her "sanctuaries and plains". Loki responds that Skaði was more friendly in speech when Skaði was in his bed—an accusation he makes to most of the goddesses in the poem and is not attested elsewhere. Loki's flying then turns to the goddess *Sif*.^[7]

In the prose section at the end of *Lokasenna*, the gods catch Loki and bind him with the innards of his son *Nari*, while they turn his son *Narfǫ* into a wolf. Skaði places a venomous snake above Loki's face. Venom drips from the

snake and Loki's wife Sigyn sits and holds a basin beneath the serpent, catching the venom. When the basin is full, Sigyn must empty it, and during that time the snake venom falls on to Loki's face, causing him to writhe in a tremendous fury, so much so that all earthquakes stem from Loki's writhings.^[8]

In the poem *Hyndluljóð*, the female jötunn Hyndla tells the goddess Freyja various mythological genealogies. In one stanza, Hyndla notes that Þjazi "loved to shoot" and that Skaði was his daughter.^[9]

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda*, Skaði is attested in two books: *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*.

Gylfaginning

In chapter 23 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High details that Njörðr's wife is Skaði, that she is the daughter of the jötunn Þjazi, and recounts a tale involving the two. High recalls that Skaði wanted to live in the home once owned by her father called Þrymheimr. However, Njörðr wanted to live nearer to the sea. Subsequently, the two made an agreement that they would spend nine nights in Þrymheimr and then the next three nights in Njörðr's sea-side home Nóatún (or nine winters in Þrymheimr and another nine in Nóatún according to the *Codex Regius* manuscript^[10]). However, when Njörðr returned from the mountains to Nóatún, he said:

"Hateful for me are the mountains,
I was not long there,
only nine nights.
The howling of the wolves
sounded ugly to me
after the song of the swans."^[11]

Skaði responded:

"Sleep I could not
on the sea beds
for the screeching of the bird.
That gull wakes me
when from the wide sea
he comes each morning."^[11]

The sources for these stanzas are not provided in the *Prose Edda* or elsewhere. High says that afterward Skaði went back up to the mountains and lived in Þrymheimr, and there Skaði often travels on skis, wields a bow, and shoots wild animals. High notes that Skaði is also referred to as "ski god" (Old Norse *Öndurgud*) or Öndurdís and the "ski lady" (*Öndurdís*). In support, the above mentioned stanza from the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál* is cited.^[10] In the next chapter (24), High says that "after this", Njörðr "had two children": Freyr and Freyja. The name of the mother of the two children is not provided here.^[12]

At the end of chapter 51 of *Gylfaginning*, High describes how the gods caught and bound Loki. Skaði is described as having taken a venomous snake and fastening it above the bound Loki, so that the venom may dip on to Loki's face. Loki's wife Sigyn sat by his side and held a bowl out. The bowl catches the venom, but when the bowl becomes full



Njörðr's desire of the Sea (1908) by W. G. Collingwood



Skadi's longing for the Mountains (1908) by W. G. Collingwood

Loki writhes in extreme pain, causing the earth the shake and resulting in what we know as an earthquake.^[13]

Skáldskaparmál

In chapter 56 of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Bragi recounts to Ægir how the gods killed Þjazi. Þjazi's daughter, Skaði, took a helmet, a coat of mail, and "all weapons of war" and traveled to Asgard, the home of the gods. Upon Skaði's arrival, the gods wished to atone for her loss and offered compensation. Skaði provides them with her terms of settlement, and the gods agree that Skaði may choose a husband from among themselves. However, Skaði must choose this husband by looking solely at their feet. Skaði saw a pair of feet that she found particularly attractive and said "I choose that one; there can be little that is ugly about Baldr." However, the owner of the feet turned out to be Njörðr.^[14]

Skaði also included in her terms of settlement that the gods must do something she thought impossible for them to do: make her laugh. To do so, Loki tied one end of a cord around the beard of a nanny goat and the other end around his testicles. The goat and Loki drew one another back and forth, both squealing loudly. Loki dropped into Skaði's lap, and Skaði laughed, completing this part of her atonement. Finally, in compensation to Skaði, Odin took Þjazi's eyes, lunged them into the sky, and from the eyes made two stars.^[14]

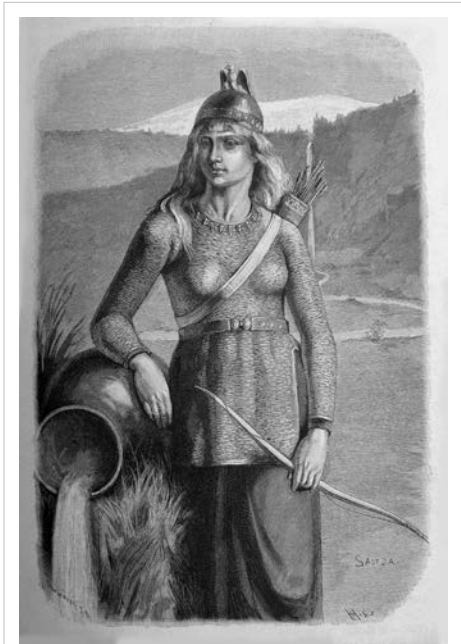
Further in *Skáldskaparmál*, a work by the skald Þórðr Sjáreksson is quoted. The poem refers to Skaði as "the wise god-bride" and notes that she "could not love the Van". Prose below the quote clarifies that this is a reference to Skaði's leaving of Njörðr.^[15] In chapter 16, names for Loki are given, including "wrangler of Heimdall and Skadi".^[16] In chapter 22, Skaði is referenced in the 10th century poem *Haustlög* where the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir refers to an ox as "bow-string-Var's [Skaði's] whale".^[17] In chapter 23, the skald Bragi Boddason refers to Þjazi as the "father of the ski-dis".^[18] In chapter 32, Skaði is listed among six goddesses who attend a party held by Ægir.^[19] In chapter 75, Skaði is included among a list of 27 ásynjur names.^[20]

Heimskringla

In chapter 8 of the *Heimskringla* book *Ynglinga saga*, Skaði appears in an euhumerized account. This account details that Skaði had once married Njörðr but that she would not have sex with him, and that later Skaði married Odin. Skaði and Odin had "many sons". Only one of the names of these sons is provided: Sæmingr, a king of Norway. Two stanzas are presented by the skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir in reference. In the first stanza, Skaði is described as a jötunn and a "fair maiden". A portion of the second stanza is missing. The second stanza reads:

...
 Of sea-bones,
 and sons many
 the ski-goddess
 gat with Óthin^[21]

Lee Hollander explains that "bones-of-the-sea" is a kenning for "rocks", and believes that this defective stanza undoubtedly referred to Skaði as a "dweller of the rocks" in connection with her association with mountains and skiing.^[21]



Skade (1893) by Carl Fredrik von Saltza

Theories

Völsunga saga

Another figure by the name of Skaði who appears in the first chapter of *Völsunga saga*. In the chapter, this Skaði—who is male—is the owner of a thrall by the name of Breði. Another man, Sigi—a son of Odin—went hunting one winter with the thrall. Sigi and the thrall Breði hunted throughout the day until evening, when they compared their kills. Sigi saw that the thrall's kills outdid his own, and so Sigi killed Breði and buried Breði's corpse in a snowdrift.^[12]

That night, Sigi returned home and claimed that Breði had ridden out into the forest, that he had lost sight of Breði, and that he furthermore did not know what became of the thrall. Skaði doubted Sigi's explanation, suspected that Sigi was lying, and that Sigi had instead killed Breði. Skaði gathered men together to look for Breði and the group eventually found the corpse of Breði in a snowdrift. Skaði declared that henceforth the snowdrift should be called "Breði's drift," and ever since then people have referred to large snow drifts by that name. The fact that Sigi murdered Breði was evident, and so Sigi was considered an outlaw. Led by Odin, Sigi leaves the land, and Skaði is not mentioned again in the saga.^[12]



A light snowdrift in the mountains of Norway

Scholar Jesse Byock notes that the goddess Skaði is also associated with winter and hunting, and that the episode in *Völsunga saga* involving the male Skaði, Sigi, and Breði has been theorized as stemming from an otherwise lost myth.^[22]

Other

Scholar John Lindow comments that the episode in *Gylfaginning* detailing Loki's antics with a goat may have associations with castration and a ritual involving making a goddess laugh. Lindow notes that Loki and Skaði appear to have had a special relationship, an example being Skaði's placement of the snake over Loki's face in *Lokasenna* and *Gylfaginning*.^[23]

Due to their shared association with skiing and the fact that both place names referring to Ullr and Skaði appear most frequently in Sweden, some scholars have proposed a particular connection between the two gods.^[23] On the other hand, *Skaði* may potentially be a masculine form and, as a result, some scholars have theorized that Skaði may have originally been a male deity.^[24]

Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson proposes that Skaði's cult may have thrived in Hålogaland, a province in northern Norway, because "she shows characteristics of the Sami people, who were renowned for skiing, shooting with the bow and hunting; her separation from Njord might point to a split between her cult and that of the Vanir in this region, where Scandinavians and the Sami were in close contact."^[24]

Modern influence

Modern works of art depicting Skaði include *Skadi und Niurd* (illustration, 1883) by K. Ehrenberg and *Skadi* (1901) by E. Doepler d. J. Skaði also appears in A. Oehlenschläger's poem (1819) *Skades Giftermaal*.^[25] Art deco depictions of both the god Ullr (1928) and Skaði (1929) appear on covers of the Swedish ski annual *På Skidor*, both skiing and wielding bows. E. John B. Allen notes that the deities are portrayed in a manner that "give[s] historical authority to this most important of Swedish ski journals, which began publication in 1893".^[26] A moon of the planet Saturn (Skathi) takes its name from that of the goddess.

Taking her name from that of the goddess, *Skadi* is the main character in a web comic by Katie Rice and Luke Cormican on the weekly webcomic site Dumm Comics.^[27]

Ruta Skadi is also the name of a witch in the Philip Pullman trilogy *His Dark Materials* characterised as a queen of an area of Svalbard and archer using a pine spray as a broomstick.



Njörðr and Skaði on the way to Nóatún (1882) by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine

Notes

- [1] McKinnell (2005:63).
- [2] Dumézil (1973:35).
- [3] Davidson (1993:62).
- [4] Larrington (1999:53).
- [5] Larrington (1999:61).
- [6] Larrington (1999:84).
- [7] Larrington (1999:93 and 276).
- [8] Larrington (1999:95-96).
- [9] Larrington (1999:257).
- [10] Byock (2006:141).
- [11] Byock (2006:33-34).
- [12] Byock (2006:35).
- [13] Byock (2006:70).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:61).
- [15] Faulkes (1995:75).
- [16] Faulkes (1995:77).
- [17] Faulkes (1995:87).
- [18] Faulkes (1995:89).
- [19] Faulkes (1995:95).
- [20] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [21] Hollander (2007:12).
- [22] Byock (1990:111).
- [23] Lindow (2001:268—270).
- [24] Davidson (1993:61).
- [25] Simek (2007:287).
- [26] Allen (2007:16).
- [27] <http://dummcomics.com/category/comics/daily/skadi/>

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Snotra

In Norse mythology, **Snotra** (Old Norse "clever"^[1]) is a goddess associated with wisdom. Snotra is solely attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Scholars have proposed theories about the implications of the goddess.

Attestations

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, High provides brief descriptions of 16 ásynjur. High lists Snotra thirteenth, and says that Snotra "is wise and courteous." In addition, High adds that, after Snotra's name, a wise man or woman can be called *snotr*.^[2] In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Snotra is included among a list of 27 ásynjur names.^[3] Outside of these two sources, Snotra is otherwise unattested.^[4]

Theories

Andy Orchard and Rudolf Simek state that, as Snotra is otherwise unattested outside of the *Prose Edda*, that Snotra may be an invention of Snorri's.^[5] Orchard theorizes that, otherwise, Snorri may have had access to a lost source, and that the little information Snorri presents may be derived from the meaning of her name.^[1]

Simek says that Snorri may have invented Snotra from the Old Norse word *snotr* ("clever") and "placed [her] next to other insignificant goddesses."^[4] However, Simek also writes that the goddesses Snotra, Sága, Hlín, Sjöfn, Vár, and Vör should be considered vaguely defined figures who "should be seen as female protective goddesses" that are all responsible for "specific areas of the private sphere, and yet clear differences were made between them so that they are in many ways similar to matrons."^[6]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:152).
- [2] Faulkes (1995:30).
- [3] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [4] Simek (2007:296).
- [5] Orchard (1997:152) and Simek (2007:296).
- [6] Simek (2007:274).

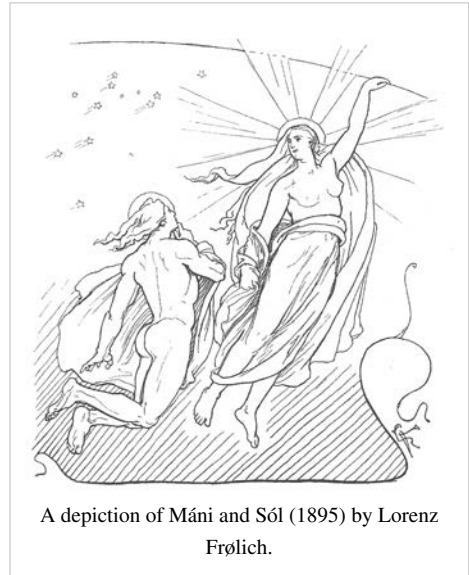
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Sól (sun)

Sól (Old Norse "Sun")^[1] or **Sunna** (Old High German, and existing as an Old Norse and Icelandic synonym: see Wiktionary sunna, "Sun") is the Sun personified in Germanic mythology. One of the two Old High German Merseburg Incantations, written in the 9th or 10th century CE, attests that Sunna is the sister of Sinthgunt. In Norse mythology, Sól is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson.

In both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda* she is described as the sister of the personified moon, Máni, is the daughter of Mundilfari, is at times referred to as *Álfröðull*, and is foretold to be killed by a monstrous wolf during the events of Ragnarök, though beforehand she will have given birth to a daughter who continues her mother's course through the heavens. In the *Prose Edda*, she is additionally described as the wife of Glenr. As a proper noun, Sól appears throughout Old Norse literature. Scholars have produced theories about the development of the goddess from potential Nordic Bronze Age and Proto-Indo-European roots.



A depiction of Máni and Sól (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

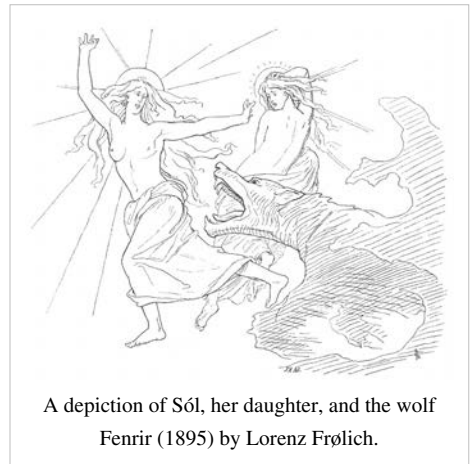
"Horse cure" Merseburg Incantation

One of the two Merseburg Incantations (the "horse cure"), recorded in Old High German, mentions Sunna, who is described as having a sister, Sinthgunt. The incantation describes how *Phol* and Wodan rode to a wood, and there Balder's foal sprained its foot. Sinthgunt sang charms, her sister Sunna sang charms, *Friia* sang charms, her sister *Volla* sang charms, and finally Wodan sang charms, followed by a verse describing the healing of the foal's bone.^[2]

Norse attestations

Poetic Edda

In the poem *Völuspá*, a dead völva recounts the history of the universe and foretells the future to the disguised god Odin. In doing so, the völva recounts the early days of the universe, in which:



A depiction of Sól, her daughter, and the wolf Fenrir (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

The sun from the south, the moon's companion,
her right hand cast about the heavenly horses.
The sun knew not where she a dwelling had,
the moon know not what power he possessed,
the stars knew not where they had a station.^[3]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

The sun, the sister of the moon, from the south
Her right hand cast over heaven's rim;
No knowledge she had where her home should be,
The moon knew not what might was his,
The stars knew not where their stations were.^[4]

In the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*, the god Odin tasks the jötunn Vafþrúðnir with a question about the origins of the sun and the moon. Vafþrúðnir responds that Mundilfari is the father of both Sól and Máni, and that they must pass through the heavens every day to count the years for man:

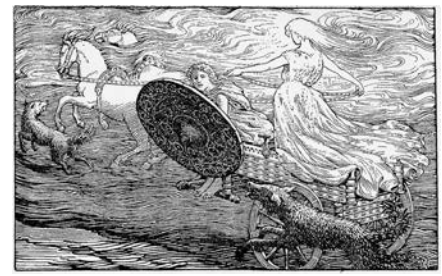
Mundilfæri hight he, who the moon's father is,
and eke the sun's;
round heaven journey each day they must,
to count years for men.^[5]

"Mundilferi is he who began the moon,
And fathered the flaming sun;
The round of heaven each day they run,
To tell the time for men."^[6]

In a stanza *Vafþrúðnismál*, Odin asks Vafþrúðnir from where another sun will come from once Fenrir has assailed the current sun. Vafþrúðnir responds in a further stanza, stating that before Álfröðull (Sól) is assailed by Fenrir, she will bear a daughter who will ride on her mother's paths after the events of Ragnarök.^[7]

In a stanza of the poem *Grímnismál*, Odin says that before the sun (referred to as "the shining god") is a shield named Svalinn, and if the shield were to fall from its frontal position, mountain and sea "would burn up". In stanza 39 Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) says that both the sun and the moon are pursued through the heavens by wolves; the sun, referred to as the "bright bride" of the heavens, is pursued by Sköll, while the moon is pursued by Hati Hróðvitnisson.^[8]

In the poem *Alvíssmál*, the god Thor questions the dwarf Alvíss about the sun, asking him what the sun is called in each of the worlds. Alvíss responds that it is called "sun" by mankind, "sunshine" by the gods, "Dvalinn's deluder" by the dwarves, "everglow" by the jötnar, "the lovely wheel" by the elves, and "all-shining" by the "sons of the Æsir".^[9]



The Chariot of the Sun by W. G. Collingwood

Prose Edda

Sól is referenced in the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, where she is introduced in chapter 8 in a quote from stanza 5 of *Völuspá*. In chapter 11 of *Gylfaginning*, Gangleri (described as King Gylfi in disguise) asks the enthroned figure of High how the sun and moon are steered. High describes that Sól is one of the two children of Mundilfari, and states that the children were so beautiful they were named after the sun (Sól) and the moon (Máni). Mundilfari has Sól married to a man named Glenr.^[10]

High says that the gods were "angered by this arrogance" and that the gods had the two placed in the heavens. There, the children were made to drive the horses Árvakr and Alsviðr that drew the chariot of the sun. High says that the gods had created the chariot to illuminate the worlds from burning embers flying from the fiery world of Muspelheim. In order to cool the horses, the gods placed two bellows beneath their shoulders, and that "according to the same lore" these bellows are called Ísarnkol.^[11]

In chapter 12 of *Gylfaginning*, Gangleri tells High that the sun moves quickly, almost as if she were moving so quickly that she fears something, that she could not go faster even if she were afraid of her own death. High responds that "It is not surprising that she moves with such speed. The one chasing her comes close, and there is no escape for her except to run." Gangleri asks who chases her, to which High responds that two wolves give chase to Sól and Máni. The first wolf, Sköll, chases Sól, and despite her fear, Sköll will eventually catch her. Hati Hróðvitnisson, the second wolf, runs ahead of Sól to chase after Máni, whom Hati Hróðvitnisson will also catch.^[11] In chapter 35, Sól's status as a goddess is stated by High, along with Bil.^[12]

In chapter 53, High says that after the events of Ragnarök, Sól's legacy will be continued by a daughter that is no less beautiful than she, who will follow the path she once rode, and, in support, *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 47 is then quoted.^[13]

In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Sól is first presented in chapter 93, where the kennings "daughter of Mundilfæri", "sister of Máni", "wife of Glen", "fire of sky and air" are given for her, followed by an excerpt of a work by the 11th century skald Skúli Þórsteinsson:

God-blithe bedfellow of Glen



"The Wolves Pursuing Sol and Mani" (1909) by J. C. Dollman.



"Far away and long ago" (1920) by Willy Pogany.

steps to her divine sanctuary
 with brightness; then descends the good
 light of grey-clad moon.^[14]

In chapter 56, additional names for Sól are given; "day-star", "disc", "ever-glow", "all-bright seen", "fair-wheel", "grace-shine", "Dvalinn's toy", "elf-disc", "doubt-disc", and "ruddy".^[15] In chapter 58, following a list of horses, the horses Arvakr and Alsviðr are listed as drawing the sun,^[16] and, in chapter 75, Sól is again included in a list of goddesses.^[17]

Theories

Scholars have proposed that Sól, as a goddess, may represent an extension of an earlier Proto-Indo-European deity due to Indo-European linguistic connections between Norse *Sól*, Sanskrit *Surya*, Gaulish *Sulis*, Lithuanian *Saulė*, and Slavic *Tsar Solnitse*.^[18]

Regarding Sól's attested personifications in Norse mythology, John Lindow states that "even kennings like 'hall of the sun' for sky may not suggest personification, given the rules of kenning formation"; that in poetry only stanzas associated with Sól in the poem *Vafþrúðnismál* are certain in their personification of the goddess; and "that Sól is female and Máni male probably has to do with the grammatical gender of the nouns: Sól is feminine and Máni is masculine." Lindow states that, while the sun seems to have been a focus of older Scandinavian religious practices, it is difficult to make a case for the placement of the sun in a central role in surviving sources for Norse mythology.^[10]



The Trundholm sun chariot from the Nordic Bronze Age, discovered in Denmark.

Rudolf Simek states that Nordic Bronze Age archaeological finds, such as rock carvings and the Trundholm sun chariot, provide ample evidence of the sun having been viewed as a life-giving heavenly body to the Bronze Age Scandinavians, and that the sun likely always received an amount of veneration. Simek states that the only evidence of the sun assuming a personification stems from the Old High German Incantation reference and from *Poetic Edda* poems, and that both of these references do not provide enough information to assume a Germanic sun cult. "On the other hand", Simek posits, the "great age of the concept is evident" by the Trundholm sun chariot, which specifically supports the notion of the sun being drawn across the sky by horses. Simek further theorizes that the combination of sun symbols with ships in religious practices, which occur with frequency from the Bronze Age into Middle Ages, seem to derive from religious practices surrounding a fertility god (such as the Vanir gods Njörðr or Freyr), and not to a personified sun.^[19]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:152).
- [2] Lindow (2001:227).
- [3] Thorpe (1907:1).
- [4] Bellows (1923:4).
- [5] Thorpe (1907:12).
- [6] Bellows (1923:7).
- [7] Larrington (1999:47).
- [8] Larrington (1999:57).
- [9] Larrington (1999:111).
- [10] Lindow (2001:198–199).
- [11] Byock (2005:19–20).
- [12] Byock (2005:35).
- [13] Byock (2005:78).

- [14] Faulkes (1995:93). Divided into four lines.
- [15] Faulkes (1995:133). Here *Álfröðull* is translated as "elf-disc".
- [16] Faulkes (1995:137)
- [17] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [18] Mallory (1989:129).
- [19] Simek (2007:297).

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Syn (goddess)

In Norse mythology, **Syn** (Old Norse "refusal"^[1]) is a goddess associated with defensive refusal. Syn is attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; and in kennings employed in skaldic poetry. Scholars have proposed theories about the implications of the goddess.

Attestations

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, High provides brief descriptions of 16 ásynjur. High lists Syn eleventh, and details that she "guards the doors of the hall and shuts them against those who are not to enter". High additionally states that Syn is "appointed in defense" at things "in legal matters in which she wishes to refute" and that her name is connected to a saying where "a denial (*syn*) is made when one says no."^[2]

In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Syn is included among a list of 27 ásynjur names.^[3] Syn also appears in two kennings used in works recorded in *Skáldskaparmál*; once for "jötunn" ("hearth-stone-Syn") in *Pórsdrápa* by Eilífr Goðrúnarson, and for "woman" ("Syn [woman] of soft necklace-stand [neck]") in a work attributed to Steinar.^[4]

Theories

Rudolf Simek says that Syn ranks among the female goddesses whose names are recorded from the "late heathen period", but that prior to this these goddesses were considered among the collective *dísir*, and were, in turn, related to the Germanic *Matronae*.^[5]

Notes

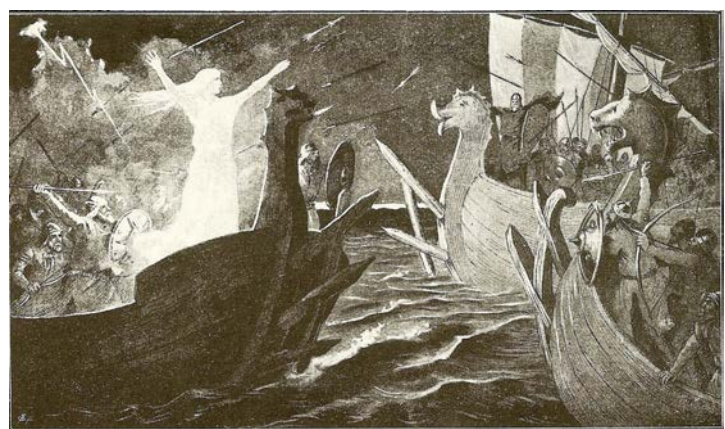
- [1] Orchard (1997:157).
- [2] Faulkes (1995:30).
- [3] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [4] Faulkes (1995:115).
- [5] Simek (2007:309).

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Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr and Irpa

In Norse mythology, **Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr** and **Irpa** (['irpa]) are goddesses. Þorgerðr and Irpa appear together in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, *Njáls saga*, and *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*. Irpa does not appear outside of these four attestations, but Þorgerðr also appears in the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, *Færeyinga Saga*, and *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*, and is mentioned in *Ketils saga hængs*. Þorgerðr is particularly associated with Haakon Sigurdsson, and, in *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, she and Irpa are described as sisters. The roles of the goddesses in these sources, and the implications of their names, has resulted in an amount of scholarly discourse and theory.



An illustration depicting Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr facing the fleet of the Jomvikings (1895) by Jenny Nyström.

Etymology

The name *Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr* is Old Norse and literally means "Þorgerðr, Hölgi's bride."^[1] According to *Skáldskaparmál* chapter 42, Hölgi (a traditional eponym of the northernmost Norwegian province Hålogaland) is also Þorgerðr's father.^[1] The first name *Þorgerðr* is a compound of two names, the god name *Þor* (*Thor*), and *gerðr*—the latter name meaning "fenced in."^[2]

The figure's second name sometimes appears in sources featuring *-brúðr* replaced with *-troll*, and, in place of *Hölg-*, the prefixes *Hörða-*, *Hörga-*, and *Hölda-* also appear.^[1] It has been suggested that name *Þorgerðr* derives from the name of the jötunn Gerðr, as Þorgerðr is also described at times as a troll or giantess.^[1] Alternatively, *Gerðr* may simply be an abbreviated version of the name, *Þorgerðr*.^[3] Þorgerðr is referred to as *Gerðr* in Tindr Hallkelsson's 10th-century drápa on Haakon, quoted in chapter 43 of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, found in *Heimskringla*.

John McKinnell states that the name of Þorgerðr's father is probably a later addition used to explain the origins of the name of Hålogaland, and that "Hölgabrúðr" probably means "bride of the (rulers of) Hålogaland" and that Hörðabrúðr, similarly, may mean "bride of the (rulers of) Hörðaland."^[4] *Hörðabrúðr* as "bride of the heathen shrines," and *höldabrúðr* as either "bride of the people of Holde" or "bride of noblemen."^[4] McKinnell says that the variety of stories and names suggest that the tradition of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr was wide spread, and that she was venerated in more than one area.^[4]

The name *Irpa* may derive from the Old Norse term *jarpr* (meaning "dark brown"), which has led to a number of theories about the goddess.^[5] *Jarpr* is thought to derive from the earlier Proto-Germanic word **erpa-*.^[6]

Attestations

Þorgerðr and/or Irpa are attested in the following works:

Jómsvíkinga saga

Irpa appears in chapter 21 of the *Jómsvíkinga saga*, which focuses on the late 10th century Battle of Hjörungavágr between the fleet of the Jomvikings under Sigvaldi Strut-Haraldsson and the fleet of Haakon Sigurdsson and Sveinn Hákonarson. Haakon calls a meeting during a lull in the fighting, and says that he feels that the tide of the battle is going against his allies and he. Haakon then goes to an island called Primsigned, north of Hjörung Bay.^[7] On the island, Haakon falls to his knees, and, while looking northward, prays to what is described as his patron goddess, Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr. According to the saga, Þorgerðr repeatedly refuses his offers, but finally accepts the sacrifice of his 7 year old son. Haakon's slave, Skopti, slaughters the boy.^[8]

Haakon returns to his fleet and presses his men to engage in an attack, and commends his men to ("Þorgerðr" is here anglicized as "Thorgerd"):

"Press the attack all the more vigorously, because I have invoked for victory both the sisters, Thorgerd and Irpa."^[9]

Haakon enters his ship, the fleet rows forward for the attack, and battle ensues. The weather becomes thick in the north, the clouds cover the sky, daylight becomes sparse, thunder and lightning ring out, and it begins to rain. The Jomviking fleet fights facing the storm and cold, and they have trouble standing due to the heavy wind. The Jomvikings throw weapons, missiles, and stones at Haakon's fleet but the winds turn their projectiles back at them.^[9]

Hávard the Hewing, in the fleet of Haakon, first spots Þorgerðr there and then many others see her. The wind wanes and the men witness arrows flying from the fingertips of Þorgerðr, each arrow killing a man of the Jomsviking fleet.



Clouds cover the sky, daylight becomes sparse, thunder and lightning ring out, and it begins to rain in an illustration of *Jómsvíkinga saga* (1897) by Halfdan Egedius.

The Jomsvikings tell Sigvaldi that, although they're no longer fighting men alone, they'll still do their best.^[9]

The storm lessens again and once again Haakon invokes Þorgerðr. The saga describes this attack:

And then it grew dark again with a squall, this time even stronger and worse than before. And right at the beginning of the squall Hávard the Hewing saw that two women were standing on the earl's ship, and both were doing the same thing that Thorgerd had done before.^[10]

Sigvaldi tells his men to retreat, and reasons that this is not what he vowed to fight, especially since there are now two women, whom he refers to as "ogresses" and "trolls." After the Jomviking fleet has been defeated, Haakon's men weigh the hailstones that had fallen during the storm, to detect "what power" Þorgerðr and Irpa had, and they find that the hailstones weigh an ounce each.^[11]

Njáls saga

Þorgerðr and Irpa are again mentioned together in chapter 88 of *Njáls saga*, set in the 10th and 11th centuries. Here, Hrapp breaks into the temple owned by Haakon and Gudbrand while Haakon is at a feast at Gudbrand's home. Hrapp is plundering a seated depiction of Þorgerðr; he takes a large gold ring from her plus the linen hood she is wearing. Next, Hrapp spots a depiction of Thor and Thor's wain. He takes a gold ring from the depiction of Thor too, and, thirdly, he takes a ring from a depiction of Irpa there. Hrapp takes all of the images from the temple, strips them of their items, and then burns the temple until leaving at dawn.^[12]

Skáldskaparmál

Þorgerðr is mentioned in the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*. Here, Hålogaland is described as named after king Holgi, and that he was Þorgerðr's father. According to *Skáldskaparmál*, sacrifices were made to them both that included money, and a mound was made for Holgi that was built with layers of gold and silver, then covered by a layer of earth and stone.^[13] Later in *Skáldskaparmál*, a list of "troll-wives" is given that includes Hölgabrúðr.^[14]

Færeyinga Saga

In chapter 23 of *Færeyinga Saga*, Haakon asks Sigmund where he puts his trust. Sigmund responds that he puts his trust nowhere but with himself. Haakon responds:

"That must not be," the Earl [Haakon] answered, "but thou shalt put thy trust where I have put all my trust, namely, in Thorgerd Shinebright," said he. "And we will go and see her now and seek luck for thee at her hands."^[15]

The two then follow a small path through the woods until they come to a house with a stake fence around it. The house is described as beautiful, featuring carvings filled with gold and silver. They enter the house with a few men, and find that it is lit from glass windows in the ceiling, so that the daylight illuminates the room and there are no shadows to be seen due to this. There were depictions of many gods there and a woman who is described as well dressed near the door.^[15]

The saga relates that Haakon throws himself to the ground before the woman for some time. When he gets up, he tells Sigmund that they should give her an offering, that they ought to lay silver on the stool before her. Haakon says:

"And we shall have it as a mark of what she thinks of this, if she will do as I wish and let the ring loose which holds in her hand. For thou, Sigmund, shalt get luck by that ring."^[15]



"Offering" by J. L. Lund, depicting a sacrifice to an image of Thor.

Haakon takes hold of the ring, and, seemingly to Sigmund, she clasps her hand around it. Haakon does not receive the ring. Haakon casts himself down before her a second time, and Sigmund notices that Haakon is weeping. He stands up again, takes hold of the ring, and finds that it has become loose. Haakon gives the ring to Sigmund, and tells him that he must never part with it. Sigmund gives him his word on it and the men part, each returning to their ships. A storm appears and the two ships are swept apart, and many days are described as passing afterwards.^[15]

Harðar saga ok Hólmverja

In chapter 19 of the saga *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*, Grímkell Bjarnarson, a goði closely related to Haakon, goes to the temple (Old Norse *hof*) of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr to ask for a successful marriage for his daughter. When he arrives, the gods are preparing to leave. After an angry exchange with Þorgerðr, who tells him he does not have long to live, Grímkell burns down the *hof* with all the gods in it. Later that evening, Grímkell suddenly falls dead at dinner.^[16]

Ketils saga hængs

In chapter 5 of *Ketils saga hængs*, Ketill encounters a troll-woman in the forest. The troll-woman tells him she is traveling to a *trolla-þing*—an assembly of trolls. Among the major figures who will be present, she continues, are Skelkingr, the king of the trolls, and Þorgerðr Hörgatröll.^[17]



"King Olaf in Thor's hof" (1897), illustration from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Halfdan Egedius.

Þorleifs þátr jarlsskálds

In *Þorleifs þátr jarlsskálds*, Þorleifr Ásgeirsson, known as *jarlsskáld* ("the Jarl's skald"), recites an abusive and magically aggressive poem in Earl Haakon's hall. In chapter 7 (chapter 173 of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*), Haakon recovers from his injuries and offers gifts to Þorgerðr Hördabrúðr and her sister Irpa, seeking their counsel on how best to take vengeance on Þorleifr. Following their advice, Haakon has a wooden man (Old Norse *trémaðr*) built out of driftwood and endows it with a human heart. Haakon and the two sisters then bring the *trémaðr* to life, arm him with a halberd, and send him to Iceland to kill Þorleifr, which he does.^[18]

Theories

A number of theories surround the figures of Þorgerðr and Irpa.^[19]

Guardian goddesses

Hilda Ellis Davidson counts Þorgerðr and Irpa as examples of guardian goddesses in Germanic paganism, and compares their roles to that of the *dísir* and valkyries.^[20] Davidson says that if Helgi is the mythical founder of Hålogaland, it would explain Þorgerðr's last name ("bride of Helgi") and that, subsequently, she would be the wife of each ruler of the kingdom in turn.^[20] Substantially the same argument has been advanced by McKinnell.^[21] Davidson compares this role to accounts of kings or leaders being granted entry into Valhalla in the Viking Age, that the idea of a guardian goddess welcoming kings was essentially an aristocratic concept, and that a tradition such as this could explain noble valkyries welcoming dead kings into the after life, using the poem *Hákonarmál* as an example.^[20]



The Stenbro picture stone on Gotland is one of several image stones that depict a dead man being received by a valkyrie in the afterlife.

Þorgerðr and Freyja

Davidson further theorizes that Þorgerðr's name may have originally have been Gerðr, reasons that this form is what is found in early skaldic verse, and, further, that this is one of the names given for the goddess Freyja.^[20] Davidson points out that Haakon may have later turned to the same goddess soon before he met his death, when he hid in the earth beneath a swine in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (collected in *Heimskringla*) chapter 48, and that this could symbolize a mound of Freyja, one of whose names means "sow" (Old Norse *sýr*).^[20] Davidson theorizes that the account of Olaf I of Norway dragging out Þorgerðr's image out of its temple after Haakon's death, and burning it next to a depiction of Freyr (Freyja's male twin) further supports this view.^[20]

Irpa

Irpa has been proposed as an earth goddess due to the derivation of her name to a word for "dark brown",^[22] but F.R. Schröder has expressed criticism at the notion of concluding that Irpa is an earth goddess based on this evidence.^[5] John McKinnell proposes that the Irpa may represent a "dark" aspect of Þorgerðr, in that her name may mean "swarthy," and that the two were probably of contrasting appearance; Irpa being unlucky to name and seen as a troll.^[4] McKinnell further proposes a connection between Irpa and Hel, stating that the two may have been seen as synonymous.^[4]

Miscellaneous theories

Nora Chadwick (1950) suggested that mythical legends of Þorgerðr and Irpa have become confused and intertwined with historical accounts of Haakon's wife Þóra and her sister, Guðrún.^[23] and that the figure of the shieldmaiden Lagertha in the *Gesta* may also be an aspect of Þorgerðr.^[24] Lotte Motz (1993) proposed that Þorgerðr was a rare instance of a giantess who was the recipient of cultic worship in her own right in heathen Scandinavia.^[25]

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:326-327).
- [2] Orchard (1997:54).
- [3] Chadwick (1950:400-401).
- [4] McKinnell (2005:84-85).
- [5] Simek (2007:176).
- [6] Hellquist (1922:286). (<http://runeberg.org/svetyim/0374.html>)
- [7] Hollander (1955:94). The location of the island is described as being north of a skerry in the center of Hjörung Bay. South of the skerry lies the island of Horund.
- [8] Hollander (1955:100).
- [9] Hollander (1955:101).
- [10] Hollander (1955:102).
- [11] Hollander (1955:104).
- [12] Hollander (1997:171).
- [13] Faulkes (1995:112).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:75).
- [15] Powell (1896:31).
- [16] Kellogg (1997:214-15).
- [17] Chadwick (1950:397).
- [18] Jesch (1997:365-68).
- [19] For a useful summary of existing scholarship and theories concerning Þorgerðr, see Røthe (2006).
- [20] Davidson (1998:177-178).
- [21] McKinnell (2002:268) "All the variants of Þorgerðr's name make sense if we take it that she was regarded as the jarl's sexual partner, and that the separate name *Hölgir* applied to him or to any of his dead predecessors."
- [22] Simek (2007:327).
- [23] Chadwick (1950:408).
- [24] Chadwick (1950:414).
- [25] Motz (1993:78): "From a local daimon she has turned into a national deity."

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Þrúðr

Þrúðr (Old Norse "strength"^[1]), sometimes anglicized as **Thrúd** or **Thrud**, is a daughter of the major god Thor in Norse mythology. Þrúðr is also the name of one of the valkyries who serve ale to the einherjar in Valhalla (*Grímnismál*, stanza 36). The two may or may not be the same figure.^[2]

Attestations

Þrúðr is attested in the following sources:



Alvíss and Þrúðr, illustration by Lorenz Frølich

Poetic Edda

Even if her name is not given, the *Poetic Edda* poem *Alvíssmál*, in which Thor's daughter is engaged to a dwarf, Alvis, may also be about Þrúðr.



The valkyries Hildr, Þrúðr and Hlökk bearing ale in Valhalla (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Prose Edda

The *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál* (4) tells that Thor can be referred to by the *kenning* "father of Þrúðr" ("*faðir Þrúðar*"). Eysteinn Valdason uses it in his poem about Thor (2). The *Skáldskaparmál* (21) adds that her mother is Sif.

In Bragi Boddason's *Ragnarsdrápa*, the Jötunn Hrungrnir is called "thief of Þrúðr" (*Þrúðar þjófr*). But there is no direct reference to this myth in any other source. The *Skáldskaparmál* (17), in which Snorri relates the fight between Thor and Hrungrnir, mentions a very different cause, and Þjóðólfr of Hvinir's *Haustlög* only describes the fight without giving the reason for it. This poem depicts two mythological scenes painted on a shield, the first being Iðunn's abduction by the giant Þjazi. Margaret Clunies Ross suggested that the two episodes might be complementary, both dealing with the abduction of a goddess by a giant, its failure and the death of the abductor.^[3] Another *kenning* may allude to this myth: in Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa* (18), Thor is called "he who longs fiercely for Þrúðr" (*þrámóðnir Þrúðar*).^[3]

Karlevi Runestone

Þrúðr is mentioned on 10th century Karlevi runestone on the island of Öland, Sweden where a chieftain is referred to as the "tree of Þrúðr".^[4]

Kennings

The name Þrúðr could be used in *kennings* for chieftains as exemplified on the Karlevi Runestone. The name is also used in *kennings* for women. Ormr Steinþórsson, for instance, uses in his poem about a woman (4) the *kenning* "*hrosta lúðrs gæi-Þrúðr*", which, according to Anthony Faulkes, can be rendered into "keeper of the malt-box (mash-tub) or ale-vessel".^[5]

Modern references

Thrud appears as a major character in the Danish young adult fantasy novel *Erik Menneskesøn* by Lars-Henrik Olsen.

Notes

[1] Lindow (2001:291).

[2] Simek 1987

[3] Clunies Ross 1994, p. 114.

[4] Entry Öl 1 in Rundata 2.0 for Windows.

[5] Faulkes 1998, p. 297.

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Vár

In Norse mythology, **Vár** or **Vör** (Old Norse, meaning either "pledge"^[1] or "beloved"^[2]) is a goddess associated with oaths and agreements. Vár is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; and kennings found in skaldic poetry and a runic inscription. Scholars have proposed theories about the implications of the goddess.

Attestations

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Þrymskviða*, the blessed of Vár is invoked by the jötunn Þrymr after his "bride" (who is actually the god Thor disguised as the goddess Freyja) is hallowed with the stolen hammer of Thor, Mjöllnir, at their wedding:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:	Henry Adams Bellows translation:
Then said Thrym,	Then loud spake Thrym,
the Thursars's lord:	the giants' leader:
Bring the hammer in,	"Bring in the hammer
the bride to consecrate;	to hallow the bride;
lay Miöllnir	On the maiden's knees
on the maiden's knee;	let Mjöllnir lie,
unite us each with other	That us both the hand
by the hand of Vör. ^[3]	of Vor may bless." ^[4]

In the chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, High tells Gangleri (described as king Gylfi in disguise) about the ásynjur. High lists Vár ninth among the sixteen ásynjur he presents in the chapter and provides some information about her:

Ninth Var: she listens to people's oaths and private agreements that women and men make between each other. Thus these contracts are called *varar*. She also punishes those who break them.^[5]

In addition, Vár appears twice more in the *Prose Edda*. In chapter 75 of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál* Vár appears within a list of 27 ásynjur names.^[6] In chapter 87 the name *Vár* is employed in a kenning referring to the goddess Skaði ("bow-string-Vár") in the poem *Haustlög* by the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir.^[7] A runic inscription inscribed on a stick from Bergen, Norway around the year 1300 records a common mercantile transaction followed by a verse from a displeased scribe that mentions Vár (edits applied per the translator's notes):

'Wise Var of wire ["woman of filigree," meaning "wise bejeweled woman"] makes (me) sit unhappy.

Eir [woman] of mackerels' ground [likely gold] takes often and much sleep from me.^[8]

Mindy Macleod and Bernard Mees posit that the first line of the inscription essentially means "women make me miserable" or potentially "marriage makes me miserable," whereas the second line means "women often take a lot of sleep from me."^[8]

Theories

Regarding the ceremonial marital reference to Vár in *Þrymskviða*, Andy Orchard opines that "the antiquity of such a ritual is far from clear."^[1] Britt-Mari Näsström argues that, like many other minor goddesses, Vár was originally one of Freyja's names, "later apprehended as independent goddesses."^[9]

Rudolf Simek says that the goddesses Sága, Hlín, Sjöfn, Snotra, Vár, and Vör should be considered vaguely defined figures who "should be seen as female protective goddesses" that are all responsible for "specific areas of the private sphere, and yet clear differences were made between them so that they are in many ways similar to matrons."^[10]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:173).
- [2] Byock (2005:178) and Simek (2007:353).
- [3] Thorpe (1866:66).
- [4] Bellows (1923).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:30).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [7] Faulkes (1995:87).
- [8] MacLeod. Mees (2006:59).
- [9] Näsström (2003:83).
- [10] Simek (2007:274).

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Vör

In Norse mythology, **Vör** (Old Norse, possibly "the careful one,"^[1] or "aware, careful"^[2]) is a goddess associated with wisdom. Vör is attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; and twice in kennings employed in skaldic poetry. Scholars have proposed theories about the implications of the goddess.

Attestations

In chapter 35 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, High provides brief descriptions of 16 ásynjur. High lists Vör tenth, and says that Vör is "wise and inquiring, so that nothing can be concealed from her." High adds that a saying exists where "a woman becomes aware (*vor*) of something when she finds it out."^[3] In chapter 75 of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál* Vör appears within a list of 27 ásynjur names.^[4]

Theories

Rudolf Simek says that it is uncertain whether or not Vör was a goddess as attested in the *Prose Edda* and if the etymological connection presented there (between *Vör* and Old Norse *vörr*, meaning "careful") is correct.^[1] In the same work, Simek writes that the goddesses Sága, Hlín, Sjöfn, Snotra, Vár, and Vör should be considered vaguely defined figures who "should be seen as female protective goddesses" that are all responsible for "specific areas of the private sphere, and yet clear differences were made between them so that they are in many ways similar to matrons."^[5] Simek notes that the second part of the valkyrie name *Geiravör* may be identical with the name of the goddess *Vör* (and would therefore mean "spear-goddess"), or simple be identical with a frequently found suffix appearing in personal names.^[6]

Andy Orchard comments "Snorri's etymologizing interpretation is scarcely profound, and may imply that he had no access to further material" and notes that references to Vör are otherwise rare.^[2]

Notes

[1] Simek (2007:368).

[2] Orchard (1997:181).

[3] Faulkes (1995:30).

[4] Faulkes (1995:157).

[5] Simek (2007:274).

[6] Simek (2007:102).

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Locations

Álfheimr

Álfheim (Old Norse: *Álfheimr*, "elf home") is one of the Nine Worlds and home of the Light Elves in Norse mythology and appears also in Anglo-Scottish ballads under the form **Elfhame** (*Elphame*, *Elfame*) as a fairyland, sometimes modernized as **Elfland** (*Elfinland*, *Elvenland*).

In Old Norse texts

Álfheim as an abode of the Elves is mentioned only twice in Old Norse texts.

The eddic poem *Grímnismál* describes twelve divine dwellings beginning in stanza 5 with:

Ýdalir call they the place where Ull
 A hall for himself hath set;
 And Álfheim the gods to Frey once gave
 As a tooth-gift in ancient times.

A tooth-gift was a gift given to an infant on the cutting of the first tooth.

In the 12th century eddic prose *Gylfaginning*, Snorri Sturluson relates it as the first of a series of abodes in heaven:

That which is called Álfheim is one, where dwell the peoples called *ljósálfar* [Light Elves]; but the *dökkálfar* [Dark Elves] dwell down in the earth, and they are unlike in appearance, but by far more unlike in nature. The Light-elves are fairer to look upon than the sun, but the Dark-elves are blacker than pitch.

The account later, in speaking of a hall called Gimlé and the southernmost end of heaven that shall survive when heaven and earth have died, explains:

It is said that another heaven is to the southward and upward of this one, and it is called Andlang [*Andlangr* 'Endlong'] but the third heaven is yet above that, and it is called Víðbláin [*Víðbláinn* 'Wide-blue'] and in that heaven we think this abode is. But we believe that none but Light-Elves inhabit these mansions now.

It is not indicated whether these heavens are identical to Álfheim or distinct. Some texts read Vindbláin (*Vindbláinn* 'Wind-blue') instead of Víðbláin.

Modern commentators speculate (or sometimes state as fact) that Álfheim was one of the nine worlds (*heima*) mentioned in stanza 2 of the eddic poem *Völuspá*.

In Icelandic books called *Kjalnesingasaga* (Kjalnesing stories), Búi, 13 year old enters Álfheimr in order to find a token, property of Dofri, king of the elves. There he meets daughter of the Dofri, Fríður was her name which means beautiful, and when night falls they would go to her room, and "Have fun all night long". Later she helps Búi find the token and at the same time she tells Búi that she is carrying his baby. Búi must then return with the token to king of Norway and when they say goodbye, she tells him that if the baby was a girl, she would raise it, but if it was a boy,



Meadow Elves, by Nils Blommér, 1850

she would send it to Búi at 12 years of age. If Búi would not welcome him, he would suffer. 12 years later a boy named Jökull sails from Norway to meet Búi. Jökull claims that he is Son of Búi and Fríður but Búi denies, "My son is not small and lousy, he is strong and mighty!" he said. Búi insisted on a battle to prove his words but Fríður was with him.

In English and Scots texts

In several Scots and in Northern Middle English folkloric ballads, Álfheim was known in as *Elphame* or *Elfhome*. In later English publications it has been called Alfheim, *Elfland* or *'Elfenland*. The fairy queen is often called the "Queen of Elphame" in ballads such as that of Thomas the Rhymer:

'I'm not the Queen of Heaven, Thomas,
That name does not belong to me;
I am but the Queen of fair Elphame
Come out to hunt in my follie.'

Allison Peirson was burned as a witch in 1588 for conversing with the 'Queen of Elfame' and for prescribing magic charms and potions. (Byre Hills, Fife, Scotland)

On 8 November 1576, midwife Bessie Dunlop, resident in Dalry, Scotland, was accused of sorcery and witchcraft. She answered her accusers that she received tuition from Thomas Reid, a former barony officer who had died at the Battle of Pinkie some 30 years before and also from the Queen of the Elfhome which lay nearby.^[1] It resulted in a conviction and she was burnt at the stake^[2] in 1576.

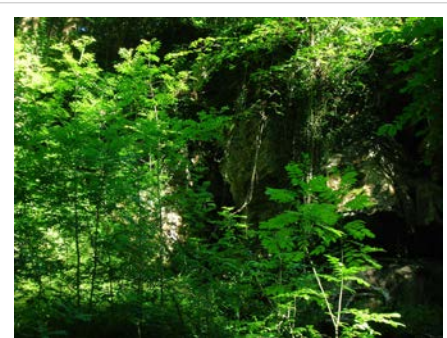
Elfhome or Elfland, is portrayed in a variety of ways in these ballads and stories, most commonly as mystical and benevolent, but also at times as sinister and wicked. The mysteriousness of the land, and its otherworldly powers are a source of scepticism and distrust in many tales. Examples of journeys to the realm include "Thomas the Rhymer" and the fairy tale "Childe Rowland", the latter being a particularly negative view of the land.

Use by J. R. R. Tolkien

The 20th-century fantasy writer J. R. R. Tolkien anglicized *Álfheim* as *Elvenhome*, or *Eldamar* in the speech of the Elves. In his stories, Eldamar lies in a coastal region of the Undying Lands in the Uttermost West. The High King of the Elves in the West was Ingwë, an echo of the name Yngvi often found as a name for Frey, whose abode was in *Álfheim* according to the *Grímnismál*.

Trivia

The setting for the second arc of the anime and light novel, *Sword Art Online*, is based off of Álfheimr, referred to as Alfheim.



One of the entrances to the Cleeves Cove cave system; the 'Elf Home' of the Bessie Dunlop story.

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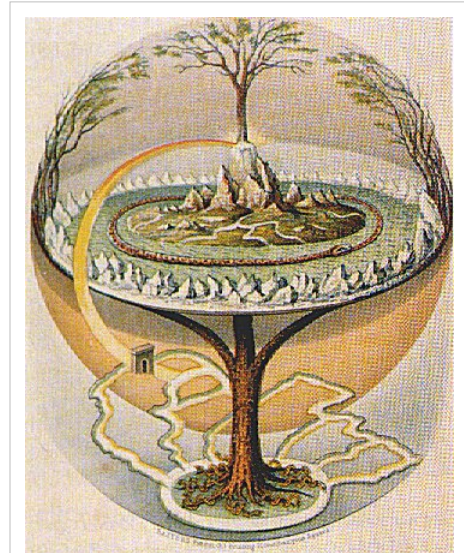
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Asgard

In Norse religion, **Asgard** (Old Norse: "*Ásgarðr*"; "Enclosure of the Æsir"^[10]) is one of the Nine Worlds and home to the gods of the Æsir. It is surrounded by an incomplete wall attributed to a Hrimthurs riding the stallion Svaðilfari, according to *Gylfaginning*. Odin and his wife, Frigg, are the rulers of Asgard.

One of Asgard's well known locations is Valhalla, in which Odin rules.



Yggdrasil

Attestations

The primary sources regarding Asgard come from the Prose Edda, written in the 13th century by Icelandic Snorri Sturluson, and the Poetic Edda, compiled in the 13th century from a basis of much older Skaldic poetry.

Poetic Edda

Völuspá, the first poem of the work, mentions many of the features and characters of Asgard portrayed by Snorri, such as Yggdrasil and Iðavöllr.

Prose Edda

The Prose Edda presents two views regarding Asgard.

Prologue

In the *Prologue* Snorri offers an euhemerized and Christian-influenced interpretation of the myths and tales of his forefathers. As-gard, he conjectures, is the home of the Æsir (singular Ás) in As-ia, making a folk etymological connection between the three "As-"; that is, the Æsir were "men of Asia", not gods, who moved from Asia to the north and some of which intermarried with the peoples already there. Snorri's interpretation of the 13th century foreshadows 20th century views of Indo-European migration from the east.

Snorri further writes that Asgard is a land more fertile than any other, blessed also with a great abundance of gold and jewels. Correspondingly, the Æsir excelled beyond all other people in strength, beauty and talent.

Snorri proposes the location of Asgard as Troy, the center of the earth. About it were 12 kingdoms and 12 chiefs. One of them, Múnón, married Priam's daughter, Tróán, and had by her a son, Trór, to be pronounced Thor in Old Norse. The latter was raised in Thrace. At age 12 he was whiter than ivory, had hair lighter than gold, and could lift 10 bear skins at once. He explored far and wide. His son, Odin, led a migration to the northern lands, where they took wives and had many children, populating the entire north with Aesir. One of the sons of Odin was Yngvi, founder of the Ynglingar, an early royal family of Sweden.



In the *Prose Edda*, Gylfi, King of Sweden before the arrival of the Æsir under Odin, travels to Asgard, questions the three officials shown in the illumination concerning the Æsir, and is beguiled. Note that the officials have one eye, a sign of Odin. One of his attributes is that he can make the false seem true. 18th century Icelandic manuscript.

Gylfaginning

In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri presents the mythological version taken no doubt from his sources. Icelanders were still being converted at that time. He could not present the myths as part of any current belief. Instead he resorts to a debunking device: Gylfi, king of Sweden before the Æsir, travels to Asgard and finds there a large hall (Valhalla) in Section 2.

Within are three officials, whom Gylfi in the guise of Gangleri is allowed to question about the Asgard and the Æsir. A revelation of the ancient myths follows, but at the end the palace and the people disappear in a clap of thunder and Gylfi finds himself alone on the plain, having been deluded (Section 59).

In Gylfi's delusion, ancient Asgard was ruled by the senior god, the all-father, who had twelve names. He was the ruler of everything and the creator of heaven and earth (Section 3). During a complex creation myth in which the cosmic cow licked Buri free from the ice, the sons of Buri's son, Bor, who were Odin, Vili and Vé, constructed the universe and put Midgard in it as a residence for the first human couple, Ask and Embla, whom they created from driftwood trees in Section 9.

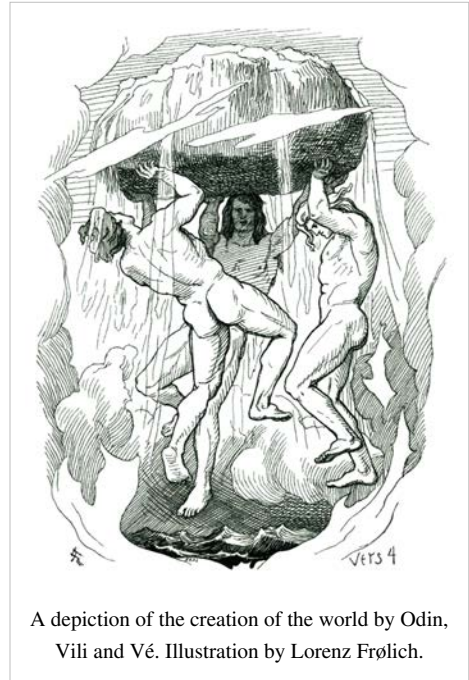
The sons of Bor then constructed Asgard (to be identified with Troy, Snorri insists in section 9) as a home for the Æsir, who were divinities. Odin is identified as the all-father. Asgard is conceived as being on the earth. A rainbow bridge, Bifröst, connects it to heaven (Section 13). In Asgard also is a temple for the 12 gods, Gladsheim, and another for the 12 goddesses, Vingólf. The plain of Idavoll is the centre of Asgard (Section 14).

The gods hold court there every day at the Well of Urd, beneath an ash tree, Yggdrasil, debating the fates of men and gods. The more immediate destinies of men are assigned by the Norns (Section 15).

Long descriptions of the gods follow. Among the more memorable details are the Valkyries, the battle maidens whom Odin sends to allot death or victory to soldiers. Section 37 names 13 Valkyries and states that the source as the Poetic Edda poem *Grímnismál*. Odin's residence is Valhalla, to which he takes those slain in battle, the Einherjar (Section 20). Snorri quips: "There is a huge crowd there, and there will be many more still" (Section 39). They amuse themselves every day by fighting each other and then going to drink in the big hall.

Toward the end of the chapter Snorri becomes prophetic, describing Ragnarök, the twilight of the gods. Much of it sounds like the Apocalypse, by which Snorri, a Christian, can hardly fail to have been influenced. It will begin with three winters of snow, with no summers in between. Wars will follow, then earthquakes and tidal waves. The sky will split open and out will ride the sons of Muspell intent on universal destruction. They will try to enter heaven but Bifröst will break (Section 55). Heimdall will blow his mighty horn Gjöll and the Æsir and Einherjar will ride out to battle. Most of the Æsir will die and Asgard be destroyed. Snorri quotes his own source saying: "The sun will go black, earth sink in the sea, heaven be stripped of its bright stars;...." (Section 56).

Afterwards, the earth rises again from the sea, is fairer than before, and where Asgard used to be a remnant of the Æsir gather, some coming up from Hel, and talk and play chess all day with the golden chessmen of the ancient Æsir, which they find in the grass (Section 58).



A depiction of the creation of the world by Odin, Vili and Vé. Illustration by Lorenz Frølich.

Skáldskaparmál

The 10th century Skald Þorbjörn díarskáld is quoted in *Skáldskaparmál* as stating:

"Thor has defended Asgard and Ygg's [Odin's] people [the gods] with strength."^[10]

Heimskringla

Ynglinga Saga

By the time of the *Ynglinga Saga*, Snorri had developed his concept of Asgard further, although the differences might be accounted for by his sources. In the initial stanzas of the poem Asgarth is the capital of Asaland, a section of Asia to the east of the Tana-kvísl or Vana-Kvísl river (kvísl is "fork"), which Snorri explains is the Tanais, or Don River, flowing into the Black Sea. The river divides "Sweden the Great", a concession to the Viking point of view. It is never called that prior to the Vikings (Section 1).

The river lands are occupied by the Vanir and are called Vanaland or Vanaheim. It is unclear what people Snorri thinks the Vanes are, whether the proto-Slavic Venedi or the east Germanic Vandals, who had been in that region at that time for well over 1000 years. He does not say; however, the Germanic names of the characters, such as Njord, Frey and Vanlandi, indicate he had the Vandals in mind.

Odin is the chief of Asgarth. From there he conducts and dispatches military expeditions to all parts of the world. He has the virtue of never losing a battle (Section 2). When he is away, his two brothers, Vili and Vé, rule Asaland from Asgarth.

On the border of Sweden is a mountain range running from northeast to southwest. South of it are the lands of the Turks, where Odin had possessions; thus, the mountains must be the Caucasus Mountains. On the north are the uninhabitable fells, which must be the tundra/taiga country. Apparently the Vikings did not encounter the Urals or the Uralics of the region. Snorri evidences no knowledge of them.

There also is no mention of Troy, which was not far from Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine empire and militarily beyond the reach of the Vikings. Troy cannot have been Asgarth, Snorri realizes, the reason being that the Æsir in Asaland were unsettled by the military activities of the Romans; that is, of the Byzantine Empire.

As a result, Odin led a section of the Æsir to the north looking for new lands in which to settle. They used the Viking route up the Don and the Volga through Garðaríki, Viking Russia. From there they went to Saxland (Germany) and to the lands of Gylfi in Scandinavia (Section 5). The historical view, of course, is mainly fantastical. The Germanics were in Germany and Scandinavia during earliest mention of them in Roman literature, long before the Romans had even conquered Italy. To what extent Snorri's presentation is poetic creation only remains unclear.

Demoted from his position as all-father, or king of the gods, Odin becomes a great sorcerer in the *Ynglinga Saga*. He can shape-shift, speaks only in verse, and lies so well that everything he says seems true. He strikes enemies blind and deaf but when his own men fight they go berserk and cannot be harmed. He has a ship that can be rolled up like a tablecloth when not used, he relies on two talking ravens to gather intelligence, and he consults the talking head of a dwarf for prophecy (he carries it around long since detached from its body) (Section 7).

As a man, however, Odin is faced with the necessity to die. He is cremated and his possessions are burned with him so that he can ascend to - where? If Asgard is an earthly place, not there. Snorri says at first it is Valhalla and then adds: "The Swedes now believed that he had gone to the old Asgarth and would live there forever" (Section 9). Finally Snorri resorts to Heaven, even though nothing in Christianity advocates cremation and certainly the burning of possessions avails the Christian nothing.

Etymology

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, *Asgard* is derived from Old Norse *āss*, god + *garðr*, enclosure; from Indo-European roots *ansu-* spirit, demon (see cognate *ahura*) + *gher-* grasp, enclose (see cognates *garden* and *yard*).^[1]

Other spellings

- Alternatives Anglicisations: Ásgard, Ásegard, Ásgardr, Asgardr, Ásgarthr, Ásgarþ, Asgarth, Esageard, Ásgardhr, Asgaard
- Common Swedish and Danish form: Asgård
- Norwegian: Åsgard (also Åsgård)
- Icelandic, Faroese: Ásgarður

References

[1] ; See also **ansu-** and **gher-**¹ in "Appendix I: Indo-European Roots" in the same work.

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Bifröst

In Norse mythology, **Bifröst** pronunciation Wikipedia:Media helpFile:Bifrost.ogg (**Bifrost** in Scandinavia) or sometimes **Bilröst**, is a burning rainbow bridge that reaches between Midgard (the world) and Asgard, the realm of the gods. The bridge is attested as *Bilröst* in the *Poetic Edda*; compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and as *Bifröst* in the *Prose Edda*; written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and in the poetry of skalds. Both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda* alternately refer to the bridge as **Asbrú** (Old Norse "Æsir's bridge").^[1]

According to the *Prose Edda*, the bridge ends in heaven at Himinbjörg, the residence of the god Heimdallr, who guards it from the jötnar. The bridge's destruction at Ragnarök by the forces of Muspell is foretold. Scholars have proposed that the bridge may have originally represented the Milky Way and have noted parallels between the bridge and another bridge in Norse mythology, Gjallarbrú.



The god Heimdallr stands before the rainbow bridge while blowing a horn (1905) by Emil Doepler.

Etymology

Scholar Andy Orchard posits that *Bifröst* may mean "shimmering path." He notes that the first element of *Bilröst*—*bil* (meaning "a moment")—"suggests the fleeting nature of the rainbow," which he connects to the first element of *Bifröst*—the Old Norse verb *bifa* (meaning "to shimmer" or "to shake")—noting that the element provokes notions of the "lustrous sheen" of the bridge.^[2] Austrian Germanist Rudolf Simek says that *Bifröst* either means "the swaying road to heaven" (also citing *bifa*) or, if *Bilröst* is the original form of the two (which Simek says is likely), "the fleetingly glimpsed rainbow" (possibly connected to *bil*, perhaps meaning "moment, weak point").^[3]

Attestations

Two poems in the *Poetic Edda* and two books in the *Prose Edda* provide information about the bridge:

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, the bridge is mentioned in the poems *Grímnismál* and *Fáfnismál*, where it is referred to as *Bilröst*. In one of two stanzas in the poem *Grímnismál* that mentions the bridge, Grímnir (the god Odin in disguise) provides the young Agnarr with cosmological knowledge, including that *Bilröst* is the best of bridges.^[4] Later in *Grímnismál*, Grímnir notes that *Asbrú* "burns all with flames" and that, every day, the god Thor wades through the waters of *Körmt* and *Örmt* and the two *Kerlaugar*:



Thor wades through rivers while the rest of the Æsir ride across Bifröst (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Körmt and Ormt, and the Kerlaugs twain:
these Thor must wade
each day, when he to council goes
at Yggdrasil's ash;
for as the As-bridge is all on fire,
the holy waters boil.^[5]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Körmt and Ormt and the Kerlaugs twain
Shall Thor each day wade through,
(When dooms to give he forth shall go
To the ash-tree Yggdrasil:)
For heaven's bridge burns all in flame,
And the sacred waters seethe.^[6]

In *Fáfnismál*, the dying wyrm *Fafnir* tells the hero *Sigurd* that, during the events of *Ragnarok*, bearing spears, gods will meet at *Óskópnir*. From there, the gods will cross *Bilröst*, which will break apart as they cross over it, causing their horses to dredge through an immense river.^[7]

Prose Edda

The bridge is mentioned in the *Prose Edda* books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*, where it is referred to as *Bifröst*. In chapter 13 of *Gylfaginning*, Gangleri (King Gylfi in disguise) asks the enthroned figure of High what way exists between heaven and earth. Laughing, High replies that the question isn't an intelligent one, and goes on to explain that the gods built a bridge from heaven and earth. He incredulously asks Gangleri if he has not heard the story before. High says that Gangleri must have seen it, and notes that Gangleri may call it a rainbow. High says that the bridge consists of three colors, has great strength, "and is built with art and skill to a greater extent than other constructions."^[8]

High notes that, although the bridge is strong, it will break when "Muspell's lads" attempt to cross it, and their horses will have to make do with swimming over "great rivers." Gangleri says that it doesn't seem that the gods "built the bridge in good faith if it is liable to break, considering that they can do as they please." High responds that the gods do not deserve blame for the breaking of the bridge, for "there is nothing in this world that will be secure when Muspell's sons attack."^[8]

In chapter 15 of *Gylfaginning*, Just-As-High says that Bifröst is also called *Asbrú*, and that every day the gods ride their horses across it (with the exception of Thor, who instead wades through the boiling waters of the rivers *Körmt* and *Örmt*) to reach *Urðarbrunnr*, a holy well where the gods have their court. As a reference, Just-As-High quotes the second of the two stanzas in *Grímnismál* that mention the bridge (see above). Gangleri asks if fire burns over Bifröst. High says that the red in the bridge is burning fire, and, without it, the frost jotnar and mountain jotnar would "go up into heaven" if anyone who wanted could cross Bifröst. High adds that, in heaven, "there are many beautiful places" and that "everywhere there has divine protection around it."^[9]

In chapter 17, High tells Gangleri that the location of *Himinbjörg* "stands at the edge of heaven where Bifrost reaches heaven."^[10] While describing the god *Heimdallr* in chapter 27, High says that *Heimdallr* lives in *Himinbjörg* by Bifröst, and guards the bridge from mountain jotnar while sitting at the edge of heaven.^[11] In chapter 34, High quotes the first of the two *Grímnismál* stanzas that mention the bridge.^[12] In chapter 51, High foretells the events of *Ragnarök*. High says that, during *Ragnarök*, the sky will split open, and from the split will ride forth the "sons of Muspell". When the "sons of Muspell" ride over Bifröst it will break, "as was said above."^[13]

In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, the bridge receives a single mention. In chapter 16, a work by the 10th century skald *Úlfr Uggason* is provided, where Bifröst is referred to as "the powers' way."^[14]



Bifröst appears in the background as the gods do battle in *Battle of the Doomed Gods* (1882) by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine.

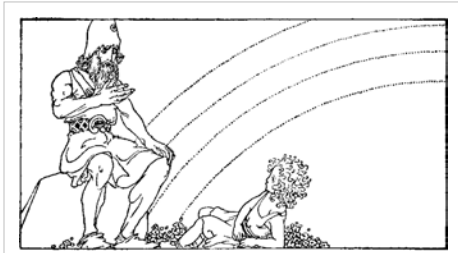


Bifröst is shattered in *The twilight of the gods* (1920) by Willy Pogany.

Theories

In his translation of the *Prose Edda*, Henry Adams Bellows comments that the *Grímnismál* stanza mentioning Thor and the bridge stanza may mean that "Thor has to go on foot in the last days of the destruction, when the bridge is burning. Another interpretation, however, is that when Thor leaves the heavens (i.e., when a thunder-storm is over) the rainbow-bridge becomes hot in the sun."^[6]

John Lindow points to a parallel between Bifröst, which he notes is "a bridge between earth and heaven, or earth and the world of the gods", and the bridge Gjallarbrú, "a bridge between earth and the underworld, or earth and the world of the dead."^[15] Several scholars have proposed that Bifröst may represent the Milky Way.^[16]



Bifröst in the background, Heimdallr explains to a young Hnoss how all things came to be (1920) by Willy Pogany.

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:19).
- [2] Orchard (1997:19).
- [3] Simek (2007:36-37).
- [4] Larrington (1999:44).
- [5] Thorpe (1907:22).
- [6] Bellows (1923:96).
- [7] Larrington (1999:160).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:15).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:17—18).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:20).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:25).
- [12] Faulkes (1995:34).
- [13] Faulkes (1995:53).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:77).
- [15] Lindow (2002:81).
- [16] Lindow (2002:81) and Simek (2007:36).

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Bilskirnir

Bilskirnir (Old Norse "lightning-crack"^[1]) is the hall of the god Thor in Norse mythology. Here he lives with his wife Sif and their children. According to *Grímnismál*, the hall is the greatest of buildings and contains 540 rooms, located in Asgard, as are all the dwellings of the gods, in the kingdom of Þrúðheimr (or Þrúðvangar according to *Gylfaginning* and *Ynglinga saga*).

Modern influence

- The hall inspired the name of an Asgard starship commanded by Supreme Commander Thor, in the television series *Stargate SG-1* named Beliskner.
- There is a NSBM band from Hesse, Germany named Bilskirnir.

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:20).

References

- Orchard, Andy (1997). *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*. Cassell. ISBN 0-304-34520-2

Breidablik

In Norse mythology, **Breiðablik**^[1] (*Broad-gleaming*) is the home of Baldr. It is briefly described in Snorri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning* as one of the halls of Asgard:

"Then there is also in that place the abode called Breidablik, and there is not in heaven a fairer dwelling."^[2]

Later in the work, when Snorri describes Baldr, he gives a longer description, citing *Grímnismál*, though he does not name the poem:

"He dwells in the place called Breidablik, which is in heaven; in that place may nothing unclean be, even as is said here:

Breidablik 't is called, I where Baldr has

A hall made for himself:

In that land I where I know lie

Fewest baneful runes."^[3]

Breiðablik is not otherwise mentioned in the Eddic sources.

Notes

[1] The name can be Anglicized as **Breidablik**, **Breithablik** or **Breidhablik**.

[2] *Gylfaginning* XVII, Brodeur's translation.

[3] *Gylfaginning* XXII, Brodeur's translation. The strophe is *Grímnismál* 12.

References

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Élivágar

In Norse mythology, **Élivágar** (*Ice Waves*) are rivers that existed in Ginnungagap at the beginning of the world. The Prose Edda relates:

The streams called Ice-waves, those which were so long come from the fountain-heads that the yeasty venom upon them had hardened like the slag that runs out of the fire,-these then became ice; and when the ice halted and ceased to run, then it froze over above. But the drizzling rain that rose from the venom congealed to rime, and the rime increased, frost over frost, each over the other, even into Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void. *Gylfaginning* 5, Brodeur's translation ^[1]

The eleven rivers traditionally associated with the Élivágar include the Svöl, Gunnthrá, Fjörm, Fimbulthul, Slidr, Hríd, Sylgr, Ylgr, Víd, Leiptr and Gjöll (which flows closest to the gate of Hel and is spanned by the bridge Gjallarbrú), although many other additional rivers are mentioned by name in both Eddas.

The Élivágar also figure in the origin of Ymir, the first giant. According to *Vafthrúdnismál*, Ymir was formed from the poison that dripped from the rivers.

In *Gylfaginning*, Sturluson expands upon this notion considerably. As quoted above, when the venomous yeast from the Élivágar froze to ice and overspread its banks it fell as rain through the mild air of Ginnungagap. The rime, infused with the cold of Niflheim from which the Élivágar find their source in the wellspring Hvergelmir, began to fill the void. It then combined with the life-giving fire and heat of Muspelheim, melting and dripping and giving form to Ymir, progenitor of the rime giants or frost giants.

Elsewhere in *Gylfaginning* it is stated that "so many serpents are in Hvergelmir with Nídhögg that no tongue can tell them". These serpents are presumably the source of the venom or poison referred to in the myth.

A reference to the river Leiptr appears in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, where the Valkyrie Sigrún puts a curse on her brother Dagr for having murdered her husband Helgi Hundingsbane despite his having sworn a holy oath of allegiance to Helgi on the "bright water of Leiptr" (*ljósa Leiftrar vatni*):

"Þik skyli allir	"Now may every
eiðar bíta,	oath thee bite
þeir er Helga	That with Helgi
hafðir unna	sworn thou hast,
at inu ljósa	By the water
Leiftrar vatni	bright of Leipt,
ok at úrsvöllum	And the ice-cold
Unnarsteini." ^[2]	stone of Uth." ^[3]

Notes and references

- [1] <http://northvegr.org/lore/prose/017020.php>
 [2] Völsungakviða in forna (Helgakviða Hundingsbana II) at «Norrøne Tekster og Kvad», Norway. (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/helgakvidahundingsbanab.php>)
 [3] Translation by Bellows. (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe20.htm>)

Fólkvangr

In Norse mythology, **Fólkvangr** ("field of the host"^[1] or "people-field" or "army-field"^[2]) is a meadow or field ruled over by the goddess Freyja where half of those that die in combat go upon death, while the other half go to the god Odin in Valhalla. Fólkvangr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. According to the *Prose Edda*, within Fólkvangr is Freyja's hall Sessrúmnir. Scholarly theories have been proposed about the implications of the location.



"Freyja" (1882) by Carl Emil Doepler.

Attestations

In the poem *Grímnismál* collected in the *Poetic Edda*, Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) tells the young Agnar that Freyja allots seats to half of those that die in her hall Fólkvangr, while Odin receives the other half (*Fólkvangr* is here anglicized to *Fôlkvang* and *Folkvang*):

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Fôlkvang is the ninth, there Freyja directs
 the sittings in the hall.
 She half the fallen chooses each day,
 but Odin th' other half.^[3]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

The ninth is Folkvang, where Freyja decrees
 Who shall have seats in the hall;
 The half of the dead each day does she choose,
 And half does Othin have.^[4]

In chapter 24 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, High tells Gangleri (described as king Gylfi in disguise) that Freyja is "the most glorious of the ásynjur", that Freyja has a dwelling in the heavens called Fólkvangr, and that "whenever she rides to battle she gets half of the slain, and the other half Odin, as it says here: [the stanza above from *Grímnismál* is then quoted]". High then continues with a description of Freyja's hall Sessrúmnir.^[5]

Theories

Egils saga

In *Egils saga*, when Egill Skallagrímsson refuses to eat, his daughter Þorgerðr (here anglicized as "Thorgerd") says she will go without food and thus starve to death, and in doing so will meet the goddess Freyja:

Thorgerd replied in a loud voice, 'I have had no evening meal, nor will I do so until I join Freyja. I know no better course of action than my father's. I do not want to live after my father and brother are dead.'^[6]

Britt-Mari Näsström says that "as a receiver of the dead her [Freyja's] abode is also open for women who have suffered a noble death." Näsström cites the above passage from *Egils saga* as an example, and points to a potential additional connection in the saga *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, where the queen hangs herself in the dísarsalr (Old Norse "the Hall of the Dís") after discovering that her husband has betrayed both her father and brother. Näsström

comments that "this Dís could hardly be anyone but Freyja herself, the natural leader of the collective female deities called dísir, and the place of the queen's suicide seems thus to be connected with Freyja."^[7]

Implications

John Lindow says that if the *Fólk*- element of *Fólkvangr* is to be understood as "army", then *Fólkvangr* appears as an alternative to Valhalla. Lindow adds that, like Odin, Freyja has an association with warriors in that she presides over the eternal combat of Hjaðningavíg.^[2]

Rudolf Simek theorizes that the name *Fólkvangr* is "surely not much older than *Grímnismál* itself", and adds that the *Gylfaginning* description keeps close to the *Grímnismál* description, yet that the *Gylfaginning* descriptions adds that Sessrúmnir is located within *Fólkvangr*.^[8] According to Hilda Ellis Davidson, Valhalla "is well known because it plays so large a part in images of warfare and death," yet the significance of other halls in Norse mythology such as Ýdalir, where the god Ullr dwells, and Freyja's *Fólkvangr* have been lost.^[9]

Britt-Mari Näsström places emphasis on that *Gylfaginning* relates that "whenever she rides into battle she takes half of the slain," and interprets *Fólkvangr* as "the field of the Warriors." Näsström comments that:

Freyja receives the slain heroes of the battlefield quite respectfully as Óðinn does. Her house is called Sessrúmnir, 'filled with many seats', and it probably fills the same function as Valhöll, 'the hall of the slain', where the warriors eat and drink beer after the fighting. Still, we must ask why there are two heroic paradises in the Old Norse View of afterlife. It might possibly be a consequence of different forms of initiation of warriors, where one part seemed to have belonged to Óðinn and the other to Freyja. These examples indicate that Freyja was a war-goddess, and she even appears as a valkyrie, literally 'the one who chooses the slain'.^[7]

Siegfried Andres Dobat comments that "in her mythological role as the chooser of half the fallen warriors for her death realm *Fólkvangr*, the goddess Freyja, however, emerges as the mythological role model for the Valkyrjar and the dísir."^[10]

Modern influence

Early in the 20th century, Karl Ernst Osthaus developed the "Folkwang-Gedanke" or "Folkwang-Konzept", that art and life can be reconciled. Several cultural institutions bearing the name *Folkwang* (the German spelling of *Fólkvangr*) were founded on this concept. These institutions include the Museum Folkwang in Essen (opened 1902), the publishing house Folkwang-Verlag (founded 1919), Folkwang Kammerorchester Essen (founded 1958), Folkwang-Musikschule in Essen (founded 1974), and Folkwang University of the Arts, focusing on music, theater, dance, design and academic studies.

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:45).
- [2] Lindow (2001:118).
- [3] Thorpe (1907:21).
- [4] Bellows (1923:90–91).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:24).
- [6] Scudder (2001:151).
- [7] Näsström (1999:61).
- [8] Simek (2007:87).
- [9] Davidson (1993:67).
- [10] Dobat (2006:186).

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Gandvik

In Norse mythology, **Gandvik** is a dangerous sea, known as 'Bay of Serpents' because of its tortuous shape. Saxo Grammaticus stated that **Gandvik** was an old name for the Baltic Sea (a name misspelt *Grandvik* in some translations). The legend presumably refers to Gulf of Bothnia. However, there are two opposite theories about where Gandvik was situated, based on the peace treaty in Nöteborg 1323: in the Arctic Ocean or the Gulf of Bothnia. Starting from 1850s, the former received more support in that Sweden had extended far out to the Arctic Ocean, but since the 1920s the latter have gained more support. However, Hversu Noregr byggdist, dating from the former part of the 13th century, is by most opinions referring to the White Sea when it uses the term Gandvik. (LUNDKVIST 1985)

Source: "*Northern Scandinavia during the Middle Ages*", part of "In honorem Evert Baudou" (1985), Sven Lundkvist

Ginnungagap

In Norse mythology, **Ginnungagap** ("mighty gap") was the vast, primordial void that existed prior to the creation of the manifest universe. In alternative etymology, linking the *ginn*- prefix in *Ginnungagap* with that found in terms with a sacral meaning, such as *ginn-heilagr*, *ginn-regin* (both referring to the gods) and *ginn-runa* (referring to the runes), interprets *Ginnungagap* as signifying a "magical (and creative) power-filled space".^[1]

Creation Myth

Ginnungagap appears as the primordial void in the Norse creation account, the *Gylfaginning* states:

Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void ... which faced toward the northern quarter, became filled with heaviness, and masses of ice and rime, and from within, drizzling rain and gusts; but the southern part of the Yawning Void was lighted by those sparks and glowing masses which flew out of *Múspellheim*.^[2]

In the northern part of Ginnungagap lay the intense cold of Niflheim, and to the southern part lay the equally intense heat of Muspelheim. The cosmogonic process began when the effulgence of the two met in the middle of Ginnungagap.

Geographic Rationalization

Scandinavian cartographers from the early 15th century attempted to localise or identify Ginnungagap as a real geographic location from which the creation myth derived. A fragment from a 15th century (pre-Columbus) Old Norse encyclopedic text entitled *Gripla* ("Little Compendium") places Ginnungagap between Greenland and Vinland:

Now is to be told what lies opposite Greenland, out from the bay, which was before named: Furdustrandir hight a land; there are so strong frosts that it is not habitable, so far as one knows; south from thence is Helluland, which is called Skrellingsland; from thence it is not far to Vinland the Good, which some think goes out from Africa; between Vinland and Greenland is Ginnungagap, which flows from the sea called Mare oceanum, and surrounds the whole earth.^[3]

Later the 17th century Icelandic bishop Guðbrandur Thorlaksson, also used the name *Ginnungegap* to refer to a narrow body of water, possibly the Davis Strait, separating the southern tip of Greenland from *Estotelandia, pars America extrema*, probably Baffin Island.^[4]

External links

- Guðbrandur Thorlaksson's 1606 map of the North Atlantic [5]

Notes

[1] De Vries (1977:167); cf. also Dillmann (1998:118-123).

[2] *The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson*, translated by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, 1916, p. 17 (http://books.google.com/books?id=_T1cAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA268&dq=Brodeur,+Prose+Edda&hl=en&sa=X&ei=tGVGT96yEonZiAKK6bDbDQ&ved=0CEkQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=which+faced+toward+the+northern+quarter,+became+filled+with+heaviness,+and+masses+of+ice+and+rime&f=false).

[3] *Gripla*, Codex No. 115 translated in *The Norse Discovery of America*, A.M Reeves, N.L. Beamish and R.B. Anderson, 1906, p. 238.

[4] Seaver, Kirsten "Maps, Myths and Men" Stanford University Press (2004) pp. 247-253.

[5] <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/678/eng/9+verso/?var=>

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Hel (location)

In Norse mythology, **Hel**, the location, shares a name with Hel, a female figure associated with the location. To avoid confusion between the two, a number of literary texts often called this underworld **Helheim** (from Norse *heima* or *heimr*, "home" "region" "abode"). In late Icelandic sources, varying descriptions of Hel are given and various figures are described as being buried with items that will facilitate their journey to Hel after their death. In the *Poetic Edda*, Brynhildr's trip to Hel after her death is described and Odin, while alive, also visits Hel upon his horse Sleipnir. In Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, Baldr goes to Hel upon death and subsequently Hermóðr uses Sleipnir to attempt to retrieve him. "Hel-shoes" are described in *Gísla saga*.



"Odin Rides to Hel" (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

Etymology

The old Old Norse word *Hel* derives from Proto-Germanic **khalija*, which means "one who covers up or hides something", which itself derives from Proto-Indo-European **kel-*, meaning "conceal". The cognate in English is the word *Hell* which is from the Old English forms *hel* and *helle*.^[1] Related terms are Old Frisian *helle*, German *Hölle* and Gothic *halja*. Other words more distantly related include *hole*, *hollow*, *hall*, *helmet*^[2] and *cell*, all from the aforementioned Indo-European root **kel-*.^[3]

The word *Hel* is found in Norse words and phrases related to death such as *Helför* ("Hel-journey," a funeral) and *Helsótt* ("Hel-sickness," a fatal illness).

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In reference to Hel, in the poem *Völuspá*, a völva states that Hel will play an important role in Ragnarök. The Völva states that a crowing "sooty-red cock from the halls of Hel" is one of three cocks that will signal one of the beginning events of Ragnarök. The other two are Fjalar in Jotunheim and Gullunkambi in Valhalla.^[4]

In *Grímnismál* stanza 31, Hel is listed as existing beneath one of three roots of the world tree Yggdrasil. One of the other two leads to the frost jötnar and the third to Mankind. In *Guðrúnarkviða I* as Herborg tells of her grief in having prepared funeral arrangements for various members of her family, her children and her husbands, described it as "arranging their journey to Hel."^[5]

In the short poem *Helreið Brynhildar*, Hel is directly referenced as a location in the title, translating to "Brynhild's Hel-Ride." While riding along a road on the border of Hel in a lavish cart (the cart her corpse was burnt within), Brynhildr encounters a dead giantess at a burial mound belonging to her. This results in a heated exchange, during

which Brynhildr tells of her life.

In *Baldrs draumar*, Odin rides to the edge of Hel to investigate nightmares Baldr has had. He brings to life the corpse of a Völva with a spell. Odin introduces himself under a false name and pretense and asks for information from the völva relating to Baldr's dreams. The völva proceeds to reluctantly produce prophecies regarding the events of Ragnarök.

The poem gives some information regarding the geographic location of Hel in parallel to the description in the Prose Edda, which may be related to the fact that it was not included in the Codex Regius but is instead a later addition.^[5] Niflhel is mentioned as being just outside of Hel. The bloody Garmr makes an appearance, encountering Odin on Odin's ride to Hel. Odin continues down the road and approaches Hel, which is described as the "high hall of Hel."^[5] There he proceeds to the grave of the Völva near the eastern doors where the descriptions of Hel end.

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda* more detailed information is given about the location, including a detailed account of a venture to the region after the death of the god Baldr. Snorri's descriptions of Hel in the *Prose Edda* are not corroborated outside of *Baldrs draumar*, which does not appear in the original Codex Regius but is a later addition often included with modern editions of the *Poetic Edda*.

Gylfaginning

In the book *Gylfaginning*, Hel is introduced in chapter 3 as a location where "evil men" go upon death, and into Niflhel. The chapter further details that Hel is in the ninth of the Nine Worlds.^[6]

In chapter 34, Hel, the being is introduced. Snorri writes that Hel was cast down into Hel by Odin who "made her ruler over Nine Worlds." Snorri further writes that there Hel is located in Niflheim. Here it is related that she could give out lodging and items to those sent to her that have died of disease or old age. A very large dwelling is described as existing in Niflheim owned by Hel with huge walls and gates. The hall is called - or inside of this huge hall there is a hall belonging to Hel called - Éljúðnir. Within this hall Hel is described as having a servant, a slave and various possessions.^[7]

At the end of chapter 49, the death of Baldr and Nanna is described. Hermóðr, described as Baldr's brother in this source, sets out to Hel on horseback to retrieve the deceased Baldr.^[8] To enter Hel, Hermóðr rides for nine nights through "valleys so deep and dark that he saw nothing" until he arrives at the river Gjöll ("Noisy") and the Gjöll bridge. The bridge is described as having a roof made of shining gold. Hermóðr then proceeds to cross it. Hermóðr encounters Móðguð, who is the guard of the bridge ("Furious Battler").^[8]

Móðguð speaks to Hermóðr and comments that the bridge echoes beneath him more than the entire party of five people who had just passed. This is a reference to Baldr, Nanna and those that were burnt in their funeral pyre passing over the bridge upon death. Móðguð also says that the dead in Hel appear as a different color than the living and tells him that to get to Hel he must go "down and to the North" where he would find the Road to Hel.^[8]

Continuing along the Road to Hel, Hermóðr encounters the Gates of Hel. Hermóðr remounts, spurs Sleipnir, and the two bound far over it. Hermóðr proceeds further beyond the gates for some distance before arriving at the hall, dismounting and entering. There Hermóðr sees Baldr sitting in a "seat of honor" and Hermóðr spends a night in Hel. The following day, Hermóðr presses Hel, the being, to allow Baldr to leave. Hel gives him an offer and then Baldr leads him out of the hall. Baldr then gives Hermóðr various gifts from Nanna and himself to bring from Hel to the living Æsir. Hermóðr then retraces his path back to the land of the living. Hel's offer fails and in chapter 50, Loki is blamed for Baldr remaining in Hel.^[8]

In chapter 53, Hel is mentioned a final time in the *Prose Edda*.^[9] Here, Höðr and Baldr are mentioned as returning from Hel in a post-Ragnarök world:

Því næst koma þar Baldr ok Höðr frá Heljar, setjask þá allir samt ok talask við ok minnask á rúnar sínar ok ræða of tíðindi þau er fyrrum höfðu verit, of Miðgarðsorm ok um Fenrisúlfr. - Eysteinn Björnsson's edition ^[6]

"After that Baldr shall come thither, and Höðr, from Hel; then all shall sit down together and hold speech with one another, and call to mind their secret wisdom, and speak of those happenings which have been before: of the Midgard Serpent and of Fenris-Wolf." - Brodeur's translation ^[10]

Gesta Danorum

Book I of *Gesta Danorum* contains an account of what has often been interpreted as a trip to Hel. While having dinner, King Hadingus is visited by a woman bearing stalks of hemlock who asks him if he knows where such fresh herbs grow in winter. Hadingus wants to know; so the woman muffles him with her cloak, pulls him into the ground, and they vanish. Saxo reasons that the gods wished for Hadingus to visit in the flesh where he will go when he dies. ^[11]

The two penetrate a dark and misty cloud, and then continue along a path worn from heavy use over the ages. The two see men wearing rich-looking robes, and nobles wearing purple. Passing them, they finally reach sunny regions where the herbs the woman presented Hadingus grow. ^[11]

Hadingus and the woman continue until they arrived at a river of blue-black water that is fast-moving, full of rapids, and filled with various weapons. They cross the bridge, and see two "strongly-matched" armies meeting. Hadingus asks the woman about their identity, and she responds that they are men that have met their death by sword, and that they present an everlasting display of their destruction while attempting to equal the activity of their past lives. ^[11]

Moving forward, the two encounter a wall that they cannot find a way over. The woman attempts to leap over it, but despite her slender and wrinkled body, cannot. The woman removes the head of a cock that she was carrying and throws it over the wall. The bird immediately crows; it has returned to life. Hadingus returns to his wife, and foils a threat by pirates. ^[11]

Theories

Hilda Ellis Davidson, writing on Snorri's unique description of Hel in his Prose Edda, states that "it seems likely that Snorri's account of the underworld is chiefly his own work" and that the idea that the dead entering Hel who have died of sickness and old age may have been an attempt on Snorri's part to reconcile the tradition with his description of Valhalla, citing that "the one detailed account of Hel" that Snorri gives is that of Baldr entering Hel without dying of old age or sickness.

Davidson writes that Snorri was potentially using a "rich source" unknown to us for his description of Hel, though it may not have told him very much about the location outside of that it was a hall and that Snorri's description of Hel may at times be influenced by Christian teachings about the after-life. ^[12]

Notes

[1] <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=hell>

[2] <http://www.bartleby.com/61/32/H0133200.html>

[3] <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=cell>

[4] The name of this rooster is nowhere stated. In *Völuspá* it is only referred to as a "sooty-red cock in the halls of Hel" that "crows down below the earth" (Larrington translation).

[5] Larrington (1996).

[6] Byock (2006:12).

[7] Byock (2006:39).

[8] Byock (2006:67-69).

[9] Byock (2006:77).

[10] <http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose/081085.php>

[11] Davidson (1998:30-31).

[12] Davidson (1968).

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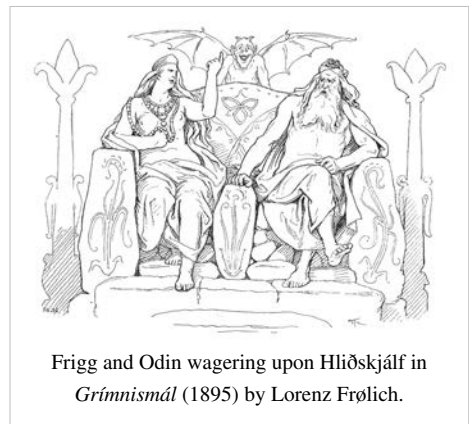
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Hliðskjálf

In Norse mythology, **Hliðskjálf** [ˈhlið skjɑːʰf, -sçɑːʰf] is the high seat of Odin allowing him to see into all realms.

Poetic Edda

In *Grímnismál*, Odin and Frigg are both sitting in Hliðskjálf when they see their foster sons Agnarr and Geirröðr, one living in a cave with a giantess and the other a king. Frigg then made the accusation to her husband that Geirröðr was miserly and inhospitable toward guests, so after wagering with one another over the veracity of the statement Odin set out to visit Geirröðr in order to settle the matter.



Frigg and Odin wagering upon Hliðskjálf in *Grímnismál* (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

In *Skírnismál*, it is Freyr who sits in Hliðskjálf when he looks into Jötunheimr and sees the beautiful giant maiden Gerðr, with whom he instantly falls in love.

Prose Edda

In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri mentions the high seat on four occasions. In the first instance he seems to refer to it rather as a dwelling place: "There is one abode called Hliðskjálf, and when Allfather sat in the high seat there, he looked out over the whole world and saw every man's acts, and knew all things which he saw."

However, later he explicitly refers to it as the high seat itself: "Another great abode is there, which is named Valaskjálf. Odin possesses that dwelling. The gods made it and thatched it with sheer silver, and in this hall is the Hliðskjálf, the high seat so called. Whenever Allfather sits in that seat, he surveys all lands."

The third mention made of Hliðskjálf is during Snorri's recounting of the wooing of Gerd, quoted by him from *Skírnismál*. Lastly, Snorri relates how Odin used the high seat to find Loki after he fled from the scene of his murder of Baldr.

References

Jötunheimr

Jötunheimr (or Jötunheimr; often anglicized *Jotunheim*) is one of the Nine Worlds and the homeland (*heim* 'home') of the Giants of Norse Mythology — Rock Giants and Frost Giants.

Legend

From Jötunheimr, the giants menace the humans in Midgard and the gods in Asgard. The river Ifing (Old Norse, *Ífingr*) separates Asgard, the realm of the gods, from Jötunheimr, the land of giants. Gastropnir, home of Menglad, and Þrymheimr, home of Þjazi, were both located in Jötunheimr, which was ruled by King Thrym. Glæsisvellir was a location in Jötunheimr, where lived the giant Gudmund, father of Höfund. Utgard was a stronghold surrounding the land of the giants.^[1]

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- [1] *Jotunhem* (Nordisk familjebok / Uggleupplagan. 13. Johan - Kikare /193-194) (<http://runeberg.org/nfbm/0113.html>)

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- Keary, Annie (1891) *The Heroes of Asgard: Tales from Scandinavian Mythology* (London: MacMillan & Co)

External links

- Sigurdi Stephanii Terrarum Hyperborearum Delineatio Anno 1570 (<http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/>)



Körmt and Örmt

In Norse mythology, **Körmt** and **Örmt** are two rivers which Thor wades through every day when he goes to judgment by Yggdrasill. The source for this is a strophe in *Grímnismál* which is also quoted in the *Prose Edda*.



Thor wades through a river while the Æsir ride across the bridge Bifröst (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Midgard

Midgard (an anglicised form of Old Norse *Miðgarðr*; Old English *Middangeard*, Old Saxon *Middilgard*, Old High German *Mittilagart*, Gothic *Midjun-gards*; literally "middle enclosure") is the name for the world (in the sense of oikoumene) inhabited by and known to humans in early Germanic cosmology, and specifically one of the Nine Worlds in Norse mythology.



The runes **a:mipkarþi** for Old Norse *à Miðgarði* meaning "in Midgard" - "in Middle Earth", on the Fyrby Runestone (Sö 56) in Södermanland, Sweden.

Etymology

This name occurs in Old Norse literature as *Miðgarðr*. In Old Saxon *Heliand* it appears as *Middilgard* and in Old High German poem *Muspilli* it appears as *Mittilagart*. The Gothic form *Midjungards* is attested in the Gospel of Luke as a translation of the Greek word οἰκουμένη. The word is present in Old English epic and poetry as *Middangeard*; later transformed to *Middellærd* or *Mittelerde* ("Middle-earth") in Middle English literature.^[1]

All these forms are from a Common Germanic **midja-gardaz* (**meddila-*, **medjan-*), a compound of **midja-* "middle" and **gardaz* "yard, enclosure". In early Germanic cosmology, the term stands alongside *world* (Old English *weorold*, Old Saxon *werold*, Old High German *weralt*, Old Frisian *warld* and Old Norse *veröld*), from a Common Germanic compound **wira-aldiz* literally the "age of men".^[2]

Old Norse

Midgard is a realm in Norse mythology. Pictured as placed somewhere in the middle of Yggdrasil, Midgard is surrounded by a world of water, or ocean, that is impassable. The ocean is inhabited by the great sea serpent Jörmungandr (Miðgarðsormr), who is so huge that he encircles the world entirely, grasping his own tail. The concept is similar to that of the Ouroboros.

In Norse mythology, *Miðgarðr* became applied to the wall around the world that the gods constructed from the eyebrows of the giant Ymir as a defence against the Jotuns who lived in Jotunheim, east of **Mannheim**, "the home of men," a word used to refer to the entire world.

The realm was said to have been formed from the flesh and blood of Ymir, his flesh constituting the land and his blood the oceans, and was connected to Asgard by the Bifröst, guarded by Heimdallr.

According to the Eddas, Midgard will be destroyed at Ragnarök, the battle at the end of the world. Jörmungandr will arise from the ocean, poisoning the land and sea with his venom and causing the sea to rear up and lash against the land. The final battle will take place on the plain of Vígríðr, following which Midgard and almost all life on it will be destroyed, with the earth sinking into the sea, only to rise again, fertile and green.

Although most surviving instances of the word refer to spiritual matters, it was also used in more mundane situations, as in the Viking Age runestone poem from the inscription Sö 56 from Fyrby:



The Fyrby Runestone.

Iak væit Hastæin
þa Holmstæin brøðr,
mænnr rynnasta
a Miðgarði,
sattu stæin
ok stafa marga
æftiR Frøystæin,
faður sinn.^[3]

I know Hásteinn
Holmsteinn's brother,
the most rune-skilled
men in Middle Earth,
placed a stone
and many letters
in memory of Freysteinn,
their father.

The Danish and Swedish form *Midgård* or *Midgaard*, the Norwegian *Midgard* or *Midgård*, as well as the Icelandic form *Miðgarður*, all derive from the Old Norse term.

Old and Middle English

The name *middangeard* occurs half a dozen times in the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, and is the same word as *Midgard* in Old Norse. The term is equivalent in meaning to the Greek term *Oikoumene*, as referring to the known and inhabited world.

The concept of *Midgard* occurs many times in Middle English. The association with *earth* (OE *eorðe*) in Middle English *middellærd*, *middelerde* is by popular etymology; the continuation of *geard* "enclosure" is *yard*. An early example of this transformation is from the *Ormulum*:

þatt ure Drihhtin wollde / ben borenn i þiss middellærd

that our Lord wanted / be born in this middle-earth.

The usage of "Middle-earth" as a name for a setting was popularized by Old English scholar J. R. R. Tolkien in his *The Lord of the Rings* and other fantasy works; he was originally inspired by the references to *middangeard* and *Éarendel* in the Old English poem *Crist*.

Old High German

Mittilagart is mentioned in the 9th century Old High German *Muspilli* (v. 54) meaning "the world" as opposed to the sea and the heavens:

muor varsuuilhit sih, suilizot lougiu der himil,

mano uallit, prinnit mittilagart

Sea is swallowed, flaming burn the heavens,

Moon falls, *Midgard* burns

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- [1] Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Midgard>)
- [2] Orel, Vladimir E. (2003). *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology*. Leiden: Brill. p. 462. ISBN 90-04-12875-1
- [3] See also *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (<http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php?table=verses&id=10055>) for a version in normalized Old Norse orthography.

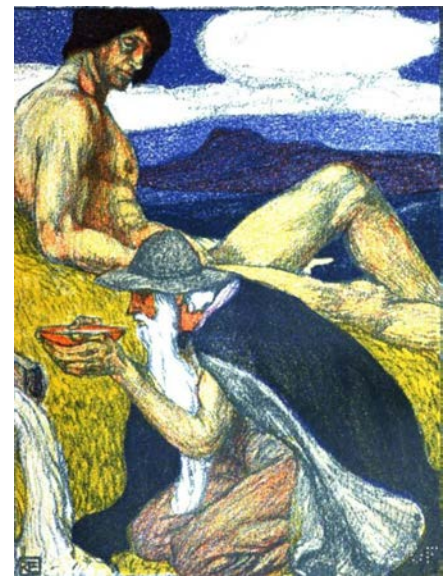
Mímisbrunnr

In Norse mythology, **Mímisbrunnr** (Old Norse "Mímir's well"^[1]) is a well associated with the being Mímir, located beneath the world tree Yggdrasil. Mímisbrunnr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Both sources relate that the god Odin once placed one of his eyes within the well. The *Prose Edda* details that well is located beneath one of three roots of the world tree Yggdrasil, a root that passes into the land of the frost jötnar where the primordial plane of Ginnungagap once existed. In addition, the *Prose Edda* relates that the water of the well contains much wisdom, and that Odin's eye sacrifice to the well was in exchange for a drink from it.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, a völvu recounts to Odin that she knows that Odin once placed one of his eyes in Mímisbrunnr as a pledge, and that Mímir drinks from the well every morning:



Odin drinks from Mímisbrunnr as Mímir looks on (1903) in a work by Robert Engels



"Odin at the Brook Mimir" (1893) by John Angell James Brindley

Benjamin Thorpe translation:
 "Of what wouldst thou ask me?
 Why temptest thou me?
 Odin! I know all,
 where thou thine eye didst sink
 in the pure well of Mim."
 Mim drinks from mead each morn
 from Valfather's pledge.^[2]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:
 I know where Othin's eye is hidden,
 Deep in the wide-famed well of Mimir;
 Mead from the pledge of Othin each morn
 Does Mimir drink: would you know yet more?^[3]

The above stanza is absent from the *Hauksbók* manuscript version of the poem.^[3] Elsewhere in the poem, the *völva* mentions a scenario involving the hearing or horn (depending on translation of the Old Norse noun *hljóð*—bolded for the purpose of illustration) of the god Heimdallr:

Benjamin Thorpe
 translation:
 She knows that **Heimdall's
 horn** is hidden
 under the heaven-bright holy
 tree.
 A river she sees flow, with
 foamy fall,
 from Valfather's pledge.
 Understand ye yet, or
 what?^[4]

Henry Adams Bellows
 translation:
 I know of the **horn of
 Heimdall**, hidden
 Under the high-reaching holy
 tree;
 On it there pours from
 Valfather's pledge
 A mighty stream: would you
 know yet more?^[5]

Carolyne Larrington
 translation:
 She knows that **Heimdall's
 hearing** is hidden
 under the radiant, sacred
 tree;
 she sees, pouring down, the
 muddy torrent
 from the wager of Father of
 the Slain; do you
 understand yet, or what
 more?^[6]

Scholar Paul Schach comments that the stanzas in this section of *Voluspa* are "all very mysterious and obscure, as it was perhaps meant to be". Schach details that "*Heimdallar hljóð* has aroused much speculation. Snorri seems to have confused this word with *gjallarhorn*, but there is otherwise no attestation of the use of *hljóð* in the sense of 'horn' in Icelandic. Various scholars have read this as "hearing" rather than "horn".^[7]

Scholar Carolyne Larrington comments that if "hearing" rather than "horn" is understood to appear in this stanza, the stanza indicates that Heimdall, like Odin, has left a body part in the well; his ear. Larrington says that "Odin exchanged one of his eyes for wisdom from Mimir, guardian of the well, while Heimdall seems to have forfeited his ear."^[8]

Prose Edda

In chapter 15 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure High tells Gangleri (described as king Gylfi in disguise) about Yggdrasil. High details that Yggdrasil has three roots. One of these roots reaches to where the primordial space of Ginnungagap once existed and where now the frost jötnar live. High explains that, beneath this root is Mímisbrunnr and that the well contains "wisdom and intelligence" and "the master of the well is called Mimir. He is full of learning because he drinks of the well from the horn Gjallarhorn. All-father went there and asked for a single drink from the well, but he did not get one until he placed his eye as a pledge." After his explanation, High quotes the stanza involving Odin and the well from *Völuspá*.^[9]

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:216).
- [2] Thorpe (1866:6).
- [3] Bellows (1936:13).
- [4] Thorpe (1866:7).
- [5] Bellows (1932:12).
- [6] Larrington (1999:7).
- [7] Schach (1985:93).
- [8] Larrington (1999:265).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:17).

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Muspelheim

In Norse mythology, **Muspelheim** (Old Norse: *Múspellsheimr*), also called **Muspell** (Old Norse: *Múspell*), is a realm of fire. This realm is one of the Nine Worlds and it is home to the fire jötunn or the "sons of Muspell", and Surtr, their ruler. It is fire; and the land to the North, Niflheim, is ice. The two mixed and created water from the melting ice in Ginnungagap.

According to the Ragnarök prophecies in Snorri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning*, the first part of his *Prose Edda*, the sons of Muspell will break the Bifröst bridge, signaling the end of times:

In the midst of this clash and din the heavens are rent in twain, and the sons of Muspell come riding through the opening. Surtr rides first, and before him and after him flames burning fire. He has a very good sword, which shines brighter than the sun. As they ride over Bifrost it breaks to pieces, as has before been stated. The sons of Muspel direct their course to the plain which is called Vigrid.... The sons of Muspel have there effulgent bands alone by themselves.

The etymology of "Muspelheim" is uncertain, but may come from *Mund-spilli*, "world-destroyers," "wreck of the world."^{[1][2]}

In popular culture

The realm of Muspelheim appears as 'Muspel' in Gene Wolfe's book series, *The Wizard Knight*. It is inhabited by the dragon 'Setr', as a close parallel to Surtr.

Muspelheim is the name of a reoccurring boss ship in the Naval Ops: Warship Gunner series.

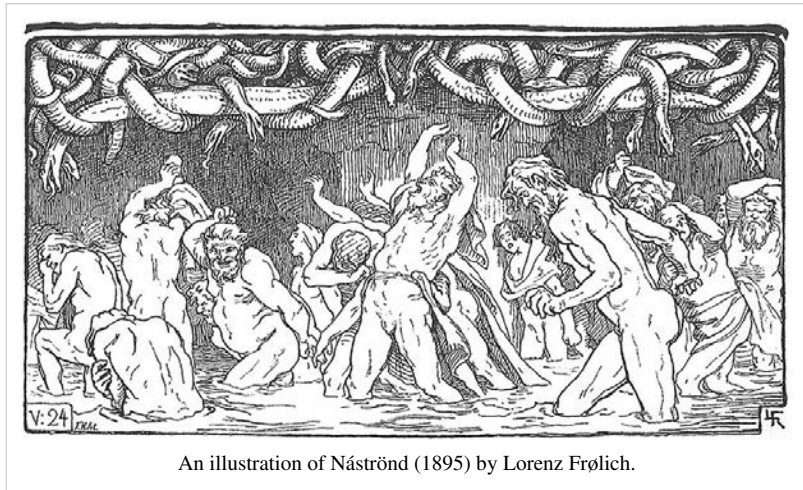
Notes

Náströnd

In Norse mythology, **Náströnd** (*Corpse Shore*) is a place in Hel where Níðhöggr lives and sucks corpses.

Poetic Edda

The *Völuspá* says:



An illustration of Náströnd (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Sal sá hön standa
 sólo fiarri,
 Náströndu á,
 norðr horfa dyrr.
 Fello eitrdropar
 inn um líóra.
 Sá er undinn salr
 orma hryggjom.
 Sá hön þar vaða
 þunga strauma
 menn meinsvara
 ok morðvarga
 ok þannz annars glepr
 eyrarúno.
 Þar saug Níðhöggr
 nái framgengna,
 sleit vargr vera.
 Vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?

Völuspá 38-39, Dronke's edition

A hall she saw standing
 remote from the sun
 on Dead Body Shore.
 Its door looks north.
 There fell drops of venom
 in through the roof vent.
 That hall is woven
 of serpents' spines.
 She saw there wading
 onerous streams
 men perjured
 and wolfish murderers
 and the one who seduces
 another's close-trusted wife.
 There Malice Striker sucked
 corpses of the dead,
 the wolf tore men.
 Do you still seek to know? And what?

Völuspá 38-39, Dronke's translation

Prose Edda

Snorri Sturluson quotes this part of Völuspá in the *Gylfaginning* section of his Prose Edda. He uses the plural of the word: **Nástrandir** (*Corpse Shores*).

Á Náströndum er mikill salr ok illr, ok horfa í norðr dyrr,
hann er ok ofinn allr ormahryggjum sem vandahús, en
ormahöfuð öll vitu inn í húsit ok blása eitri, svá at eptir
salnum renna eitrár, ok vaða þær ár eiðrofar ok
morðvargar, svá sem hér segir:

Sal veit ek standa
sólu fjarri
Náströndu á,
norðr horfa dyrr.
Falla eitrdropar
inn of ljóra.
Sá er undinn salr
orma hryggjum.
Skulu þar vaða
þunga strauma
menn meinsvara
ok morðvargar.

En í Hvergelmi er verst:

Þar kveir Níðhöggr
nái framgengna. *Gylfaginning* 52, EB's edition

On Nástrand [Strand of the Dead] is a great hall and evil, and its doors
face to the north: it is all woven of serpent-backs like a wattle-house;
and all the snake-heads turn into the house and blow venom, so that
along the hall run rivers of venom; and they who have broken oaths, and
murderers, wade those rivers, even as it says here:

I know a hall standing
far from the sun,
In Nástrand:
the doors to northward are turned;
Venom-drops falls
down from the roof-holes;
That hall is bordered
with backs of serpents.
There are doomed to wade
the weltering streams
Men that are mansworn,
and they that murderers are.

But it is worst in Hvergelmir:

There the cursed snake tears
dead men's corpses. *Gylfaginning* 52, Brodeur's translation

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[2] <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/gg/>

Niðavellir

In Norse mythology, **Niðavellir** (*Dark fields*) is one of the Nine Worlds and home of the Dwarves. Hreidmar is the king of Niðavellir.

Völuspá

It is mentioned in the Völuspá:

Stóð fyr norðan, / á Niðavöllum / salr úr gulli / Sindra ættar

("North, on the *Niðavellir*, stands the dwelling place of Sindri's kin, Covered with gold").

Sindri was a famous dwarf. It might be related to the later-mentioned *Niðafjöll* (the Dark Fells), a mountain chain in the underworld. Niðavellir has often been interpreted as one of the nine worlds of Norse cosmology. As such it might be identical to the *Svartálfheim* mentioned in the *Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson; as svartálfar (black-elves) are generally thought by scholars to be a synonym used only by Snorri for *dvergar* (dwarves).

Niflheim

Niflheim (or **Niflheimr**) ("Mist Home", the "Abode of Mist" or "Mist World") is one of the Nine Worlds and is a location in Norse mythology which overlaps with the notions of Niflhel and Hel. The name *Niflheimr* only appears in two extant sources, *Gylfaginning* and the much debated *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*.

Niflheim was primarily a realm of primordial ice and cold, with nine frozen rivers. According to *Gylfaginning*, it was one of the two primordial realms, the other one being Muspelheim, the realm of fire. Between these two realms of cold and heat, creation began when its waters mixed with the heat of Muspelheim to create a "creating steam". Later, it became the abode of Hel, a goddess daughter of Loki, and the afterlife for her subjects, those who did not die a heroic or notable death.

Etymology

Nifl^[1] (whence the Icelandic *nifl*) being cognate with the Anglo-Saxon *Nifol* ("dark"),^[2] Dutch *nevel* and German *Nebel* (*fog*).

Gylfaginning

In *Gylfaginning* by Snorri Sturluson, Gylfi, the king of ancient Scandinavia, receives an education in Norse mythology from Odin in the guise of three men. Gylfi learns from Odin (as *Jafnhárr*) that Niflheimr was the first world to be created after Muspelheim:

It was many ages before the earth was shaped that the Mist-World [Niflheimr] was made; and midmost within it lies the well that is called Hvergelmir, from which spring the rivers called Svöl, Gunnthrá, Fjörm, Fimbulthul, Slídr and Hríd, Sylgr and Ylgr, Víd, Leiptr; Gjöll is hard by Hel-gates.^[3]

Odin (as *Priði*) further tells Gylfi that it was when the ice from Niflheimr met the flames from Muspelheimr that creation began and Ymir was formed:

Just as cold arose out of Niflheim, and all terrible things, so also all that looked toward Múspellheim became hot and glowing; but Ginnungagap was as mild as windless air, and when the breath of heat met the rime, so that it melted and dripped, life was quickened from the yeast-drops, by the power of that which sent the heat, and became a man's form. And that man is named Ymir, but the Rime-Giants call him Aurgelmir; [...]^[4]

In relation to the world tree Yggdrasill, *Jafnhárr* (Odin) tells Gylfi that Jötunheimr is located under the second root, where Ginnungagap (*Yawning Void*) once was:

The Ash is greatest of all trees and best: its limbs spread out over all the world and stand above heaven. Three roots of the tree uphold it and stand exceeding broad: one is among the Æsir; another among the Rime-Giants, in that place where aforetime was the Yawning Void; the third stands over Niflheim, and under that root is Hvergelmir, and Nídhöggr gnaws the root from below.^[5]

Gylfi is furthermore informed that when Loki had engendered Hel, she was cast into Niflheimr by Odin:

Hel he cast into Niflheim, and gave to her power over nine worlds, to apportion all abodes among those that were sent to her: that is, men dead of sickness or of old age. She has great possessions there; her walls are exceeding high and her gates great.^[6]

Hel thus became the mistress of the world of those dead in disease and old age. One last mention of Niflheimr appears where it is the last destination of the *jötunn* who was killed by Thor after he had built Asgard:

Now that the Æsir saw surely that the hill-giant was come thither, they did not regard their oaths reverently, but called on Thor, who came as quickly. And straightway the hammer Mjöllnir was raised aloft; he paid the wright's wage, and not with the sun and the moon. Nay, he even denied him dwelling in Jötunheim, and struck but the one first blow, so that his skull was burst into small crumbs, and sent him down below under Niflhel [Niflheim].^[7]

Hrafnagaldr Óðins

In *Hrafnagaldr Óðins*, there is a brief mention of Niflheimr as a location in the North, towards which the sun (Alfr's illuminator) chased the night as it rose:

Riso raknar,	The powers rose,
rann álfraudull,	the Alfs' illuminator
nordr at niflheim	northwards before Niflheim
nióla sótti;	chased the night.
upp nam ár Giöll	Up Argjöll ran
Úlfrúnar nidr,	Ulfrun's son,
hornþytvalldr	the mighty hornblower,
Himinbiarga. ^[8]	of heaven's heights. ^[9]

Notes and references

- [1] Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=hell>)
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- [4] Section VII of *Gylfaginning*, in translation by Brodeur (1916), p. 17 (http://books.google.com/books?id=_T1cAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA17&dq=Ginnungagap+was+as+mild+as+windless+air&hl=en&sa=X&ei=vDpGT5jIB-3YiQKqnv3aDQ&ved=0CD0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Ginnungagap+was+as+mild+as+windless+air&f=false).
- [5] Section XV of *Gylfaginning*, in translation by Brodeur (1916), p. 27 (http://books.google.com/books?id=_T1cAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA16&dq=midmost+within+it+lies+the+well+that+is+called+Hvergelmir&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KDxGT__qIZP8iQL2v-naDQ&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=midmost+within+it+lies+the+well+that+is+called+Hvergelmir&f=false).
- [6] Section XLII of *Gylfaginning*, in translation by Brodeur (1916), p. 42 (http://books.google.com/books?id=_T1cAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA16&dq=midmost+within+it+lies+the+well+that+is+called+Hvergelmir&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KDxGT__qIZP8iQL2v-naDQ&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=midmost+within+it+lies+the+well+that+is+called+Hvergelmir&f=false).
- [7] Section XXXIV of *Gylfaginning*, in translation by Brodeur (1916), p. 55 (http://books.google.com/books?id=_T1cAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA16&dq=midmost+within+it+lies+the+well+that+is+called+Hvergelmir&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KDxGT__qIZP8iQL2v-naDQ&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=midmost+within+it+lies+the+well+that+is+called+Hvergelmir&f=false).

ved=0CDIQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=they did not regard their oaths reverently, but called on Thor&f=false).

[8] *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* (<http://etext.old.no/Bugge/forspjäl.html>) in Sophus Bugge's edition.

[9] *Odin's Ravens' Song* (<http://www.germanicmythology.com/works/ThorpeEdda/thorpe04.html>) in translation by Benjamin Thorpe (1866).

Reidgotaland

Reidgotaland, **Reidgothland**, **Reidgotland**, **Hreiðgotaland** or **Hreiðgotaland** was a land in Scandinavian sagas as well as in the pre-Viking English Widsith, which usually referred to the land of the Goths. Oddly, *hreiðr* can mean "bird's nest" and perhaps it was a kenning for the Goths tradition of moving and "nesting" in new territories, but *hreið-* is also a name-prefix meaning "beautiful", "eager", "great", "famous", "noble". Another possibility is that it was originally *reið* "ride, journey" (see *Raidô*). The use of the prefix is simple as the same tribal name was used for the Gotlanders, the *gutar* or *gotar*. The identification of the territory varies between the sources. This is the list of meanings given by *Nordisk familjebok*:



The oldest regions labelled Reidgotaland (in red and orange). The purple area is the Roman Empire and the pink area is Gotland

1. The Island of Gotland.
2. Götaland.
3. The land of the Goths, i.e. Gothiscandza and their later territories. In *Hervarar saga*, it was the same as Oium and bordered the land of the Huns from which it was separated by Myrkviðr.
4. The territories of the Goths in southern Europe, according to Anglo-Saxon sources.
5. Denmark and Sweden (according to Snorri's Edda it was the earthly kingdom of Odin).
6. Denmark.
7. Jutland.

The second edition of *Nordisk familjebok* explains that **Hreiðgoths** was originally applied to the Ostrogoths in south-eastern Europe. It appears as *hraiðgutum* on the Rök Stone in Östergötland. In *Hervarar saga*, the name *Hreiðgotaland* is applied to the territories of the Ostrogoths in south-eastern Europe. In *Widsith*, the traveller has been with the *Hreð-Gotum*. In Snorri's Edda, it is either applied to Jutland or to Scandinavia as a whole, while the islands are called *Eygotaland*.^[1] In the *Legendary sagas* however, *Eygotaland* is used only for the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea.

Footnotes

Slidr River

In Norse mythology, **Slidr** is a river in Hel, the land of the dead. Glaciers pour into it from the freezing well of Hvergelmir, and swords turn beneath its waters.

Valhalla

In Norse mythology, **Valhalla** (from Old Norse *Valhöll* "hall of the slain"^[1]) is a majestic, enormous hall located in Asgard, ruled over by the god Odin. Chosen by Odin, half of those who die in combat travel to Valhalla upon death, led by valkyries, while the other half go to the goddess Freyja's field Fólkvangr. In Valhalla, the dead join the masses of those who have died in combat known as Einherjar, as well as various legendary Germanic heroes and kings, as they prepare to aid Odin during the events of Ragnarök. Before the hall stands the golden tree Glasir, and the hall's ceiling is thatched with golden shields. Various creatures live around Valhalla, such as the stag Eikþyrnir and the goat Heiðrún, both described as standing atop Valhalla and consuming the foliage of the tree Læraðr.

Valhalla is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, also written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and in stanzas of an anonymous 10th century poem commemorating the death of Eric Bloodaxe known as *Eiríksmál* as compiled in *Fagrskinna*. Valhalla has inspired various works of art, publication titles, popular culture references, and has become a term synonymous with a martial (or otherwise) hall of the chosen dead.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

Valhalla is referenced at length in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál*, and *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, while Valhalla receives lesser direct references in stanza 33 of the *Völuspá*, where the god Baldr's death is referred to as the "woe of Valhalla",^[2] and in stanzas 1 to 3 of *Hyndluljóð*, where the goddess Freyja states her intention of riding to Valhalla with Hyndla, in an effort to help Óttar, as well as in stanzas 6 through 7, where Valhalla is mentioned again during a dispute between the two.^[3]



"Walhalla" (1896) by Max Brückner.



"Walhalla" (1905) by Emil Doepler.

Grímnismál

In stanzas 8 to 10 of *Grímnismál*, the god Odin (in the guise of *Grímnir*) states that Valhalla is located in the realm of Gláðsheimr. Odin describes Valhalla as appearing shining and golden, and that it "rises peacefully" when seen from afar. From Valhalla, every day Odin chooses from those who have died in combat. Valhalla has spear-shafts for rafters, a roof thatched with shields, coats of mail are strewn over its benches, a wolf hangs in front of its west doors, and an eagle hovers above it.^[4]

From stanzas 22 to 24, more details are given by Odin about Valhalla: the holy doors of the ancient gate Valgrind stand before Valhalla, Valhalla has five hundred and forty doors that eight hundred men can exit from at once (from which the einherjar will flow forth to engage the wolf Fenrir at Ragnarök). Within Valhalla exists Thor's hall Bilskirnir, and within it exist five hundred and forty rooms, and of all the halls within Valhalla, Odin states that he thinks his son's may be greatest.^[5] In stanzas 25 through 26, Odin states that the goat Heiðrún and the hart Eikþyrnir stand on top of Valhalla and graze on the branches of the tree Læraðr. Heiðrún produces vats of mead that liquor cannot be compared to, and from Eikþyrnir's antlers drip liquid into the spring Hvergelmir from which flows forth all waters.^[5]

Helgakviða Hundingsbana II

In stanza 38 of the poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, the hero Helgi Hundingsbane dies and goes to Valhalla. In stanza 38, Helgi's glory there is described:

So was Helgi beside the chieftains
like the bright-growing ash beside the thorn-bush
and the young stag, drenched in dew,
who surpasses all other animals
and whose horns glow against the sky itself.^[6]

Prose follows after this stanza, stating that a burial-mound was made for Helgi, and that when Helgi arrived in Valhalla, he was asked by Odin to manage things with him. In stanza 39, Helgi, now in Valhalla, has his former enemy Hunding—also in Valhalla—do menial tasks; fetching foot-baths for all of the men there, kindling fire, tying dogs, keeping watch of horses, and feeding the pigs before he can get any sleep. In stanzas 40 to 42, Helgi has returned to Midgard from Valhalla with a host of men. An unnamed maid of Sigrún, Helgi's valkyrie wife, sees Helgi and his large host of men riding into the mound. The maid asks if she is experiencing a delusion, if Ragnarök has begun, or if Helgi and his men have been allowed to return.^[6]

In the stanzas that follow, Helgi responds that none of these things have occurred, and so Sigrún's maid goes home to Sigrún. The maid tells Sigrún that the burial mound has opened up, and that Sigrún should go to Helgi there, as Helgi has asked her to come and tend his wounds, which have opened up and are bleeding. Sigrún goes into the mound, and finds that Helgi is drenched in gore, his hair is thick with frost. Filled with joy at the reunion, Sigrún kisses him before he can remove his coat of mail, and asks how she can heal him. Sigrún makes a bed there, and the two sleep together in the enclosed burial mound. Helgi awakens, stating that he must "ride along the blood-red roads, to set the pale horse to tread the path of the sky," and return before the rooster Salgófnir crows. Helgi and the host of men ride away, and Sigrún and her servant go back to their house. Sigrún has her maid wait for him by the mound the next night, but when she arrives at dawn, she finds that he has not returned. The prose narrative at the end of the poem relates that Sigrún dies of sadness, but that the two are thought to have been reborn as Helgi Haddingjaskati and the valkyrie Kára.^[6]



A Valkyrie, drinking horn in hands, awaits at the gates of Valhalla on the Tjängvide image stone from Gotland, housed at the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm, Sweden.



Three valkyries bearing ale in Valhalla (1895)
by Lorenz Frølich.



"Hundingbane's
Return to
Valhal" (1912)
by Ernest
Wallcousins.

Prose Edda

Valhalla is referenced in the *Prose Edda* books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*.

Gylfaginning

Valhalla is first mentioned in chapter 2 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, where it is described partially in euhemerized form. In the chapter, King Gylfi sets out to Asgard in the guise of an old man going by the name of *Gangleri* to find the source of the power of the gods. The narrative states that the *Æsir* foresaw his arrival and had prepared grand illusions for him, so that when Gangerli enters the fortress, he sees a hall of such a height that he has trouble seeing over it, and notices that the roof of the hall is covered in golden shields, as if they were shingles. Snorri then quotes a stanza by the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir (c. 900). As he continues, Gangleri sees a man in the doorway of the hall juggling short swords, and keeping seven in the air at once. Among other things, the man says that the hall belongs to his king, and adds that he can take Gangleri to the king. Gangleri follows him, and the door closes behind him. All around him he sees many living areas, and throngs of people, some of which are playing games, some are drinking, and others are fighting with weapons. Gangleri sees three thrones, and three figures sitting upon them: High sitting on the lowest throne, Just-As-High sitting on the next highest throne, and Third sitting on the highest. The man guiding Gangleri tells him that High is the king of the hall.^[7]

In chapter 20, Third states that Odin mans Valhalla with the *Einherjar*: the dead who fall in battle and become Odin's adopted sons.^[8] In chapter 36, High states that valkyries serve drinks and see to the tables in Valhalla, and *Grímnismál* stanzas 40 to 41 are then quoted in reference to this. High continues that the valkyries are sent by Odin to every battle, where they choose who is to die, and determine victory.^[9]

In chapter 38, Gangleri says: "You say that all men who have fallen in battle from the beginning of the world are now with Odin in Valhalla. With what does he feed them? I should think the crowd there is large." High responds that this is indeed true, that a huge amount are already in Valhalla, but yet this amount will seem to be too few when "the wolf comes." High describes that there are never too many to feed in Valhalla, for they feast from *Sæhrímnir* (here described as a boar), and that this beast is cooked every day and is again whole every night. *Grímnismál* stanza 18 is then recounted. Gangleri asks if Odin himself eats the same food as the *Einherjar*, and High responds that Odin needs nothing to eat—Odin only consumes wine—and he gives his food to his wolves Geri and Freki. *Grímnismál* stanza 19 is then recounted. High additionally states that at sunrise, Odin sends his ravens Huginn and Muninn from Valhalla to fly throughout the entire world, and they return in time for the first meal there.^[10]

In chapter 39, Gangleri asks about the food and drinks the *Einherjar* consume, and asks if only water is available there. High replies that, of course, Valhalla has food and drinks fit for kings and jarls, for the mead consumed in Valhalla is produced from the udders of the goat *Heiðrún*, who in turn feeds on the leaves of the "famous tree"

Læraðr. The goat produces so much mead in a day that it fills a massive vat so large that all of the Einherjar in Valhalla might satisfy their thirst from it. High further states that, more notably, the stag Eikþyrnir stands atop Valhalla and also chews on the branches of Læraðr. So much moisture drips from his horns that it falls down to the well Hvelgelmir, resulting in numerous rivers.^[11]

In chapter 40, Gangleri muses that Valhalla must be quite crowded, to which High responds by stating that Valhalla is massive and remains roomy despite the large amount of inhabitants, and then quotes *Grímnismál* stanza 23. In chapter 41, Gangleri says that Odin seems to be quite a powerful lord, as he controls quite a big army, but he yet wonders how the Einherjar keep themselves busy when they are not drinking. High replies that daily, after they've dressed and put on their war gear, they go out to the courtyard and battle one another in one-on-one combat for sport. Then, when mealtime comes, they ride home to Valhalla and drink. High then quotes *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 41. In chapter 42, High describes that, "right at the beginning, when the gods were settling" they had established Asgard and then built Valhalla.^[12] The death of the god Baldr is recounted in chapter 49, where the mistletoe that is used to kill Baldr is described as growing west of Valhalla.^[13]

Skáldskaparmál

At the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál*, a partially euhemerized account is given of Ægir visiting the gods in Asgard and shimmering swords are brought out and used as their sole source of light as they drink. There, numerous gods feast, they have plenty of strong mead, and the hall has wall-panels covered with attractive shields.^[14] This location is confirmed as Valhalla in chapter 33.^[15]

In chapter 2, a quote from the anonymous 10th century poem *Eiríksmál* is provided (see the *Fagrskinna* section below for more detail and another translation from another source):

What sort of dream is that, Odin? I dreamed I rose up before dawn to clear up Val-hall for slain people. I aroused the Einheriar, bade them get up to strew the benches, clean the beer-cups, the valkyries to serve wine for the arrival of a prince.^[16]

In chapter 17 of *Skáldskaparmál*, the jötunn Hrungrnir is in a rage and, while attempting to catch up and attack Odin on his steed Sleipnir, ends up at the doors to Valhalla. There, the Æsir invite him in for a drink. Hrungrnir goes in, demands a drink, and becomes drunk and belligerent, stating that he will remove Valhalla and take it to the land of the jötunn, Jötunheimr, among various other things. Eventually, the gods tire of his boasting and invoke Thor, who arrives. Hrungrnir states that Thor is under their protection, and subsequently he can't be harmed while in Valhalla. After an exchange of words, Hrungrnir challenges Thor to a duel at the location of Griotunagardar, resulting in Hrungrnir's death.^[17]

In chapter 34, the tree Glasir is stated as located in front of the doors of Valhalla. The tree is described as having foliage of red gold and being the most beautiful tree among both gods and men. A quote from a work by the 9th century skald Bragi Boddason is presented that confirms the description.^[18]

Heimskringla

Valhalla is mentioned in euhemerized form and as an element of remaining Norse pagan belief in *Heimskringla*. In chapter 8 of *Ynglinga saga*, the "historical" Odin is described as ordaining burial laws over his country. These laws include that all the dead are to be burned on a pyre on a burial mound with their possessions, and their ashes are to be brought out to sea or buried in the earth. The dead would then arrive in Valhalla with everything that one had on their pyre, and whatever one had hidden in the ground.^[19] Valhalla is additionally referenced in the phrase "visiting Odin" in a work by the 10th century skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir describing that, upon his death, King Vanlandi went to Valhalla.^[20]

In chapter 32 of *Hákonar saga Góða*, Haakon I of Norway is given a pagan burial, which is described as sending him on his way to Valhalla. Verses from *Hákonarmál* are then quoted in support, themselves containing references to Valhalla.^[21]

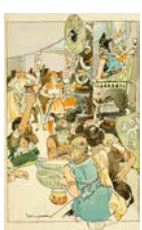
Fagrskinna

In chapter 8 of *Fagrskinna*, a prose narrative states that, after the death of her husband Eric Bloodaxe, Gunnhild Mother of Kings had a poem composed about him. The composition is by an anonymous author from the 10th century and is referred to as *Eiríksmál*, and describes Eric Bloodaxe and five other kings arriving in Valhalla after their death. The poem begins with comments by Odin (as Old Norse *Óðinn*):

'What kind of a dream is it,' said Óðinn,
 in which just before daybreak,
 I thought I cleared Valhöll,
 for coming of slain men?
 I waked the Einherjar,
 bade valkyries rise up,
 to strew the bench,
 and scour the beakers,
 wine to carry,
 as for a king's coming,
 here to me I expect
 heroes' coming from the world,
 certain great ones,
 so glad is my heart.^[22]

The god Bragi asks where a thundering sound is coming from, and says that the benches of Valhalla are creaking—as if the god Baldr had returned to Valhalla—and that it sounds like the movement of a thousand. Odin responds that Bragi knows well that the sounds are for Eric Bloodaxe, who will soon arrive in Valhalla. Odin tells the heroes Sigmund and Sinfjötli to rise to greet Eric and invite him into the hall, if it is indeed he.^[23]

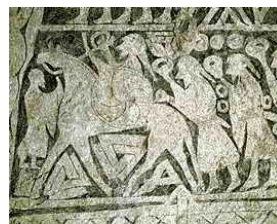
Sigmund asks Odin why he would expect Eric more than any other king, to which Odin responds that Eric has reddened his gore-drenched sword with many other lands. Eric arrives, and Sigmund greets him, tells him that he is welcome to come into the hall, and asks him what other lords he has brought with him to Valhalla. Eric says that with him are five kings, that he will tell them the name of them all, and that he, himself, is the sixth.^[23]



"Gylfe stood boldly before Odin" (1908) by Hamilton Wright Mabie.



In this illustration from a 17th century Icelandic manuscript, Heimdall is shown guarding the gate of Valhalla.



The 7th century Tängelgårdastone depicts a figure leading a troop of warriors all bearing rings. Valknut symbols are drawn beneath his horse.



The Stenbro picture stone on Gotland is one of several image stones that depict a dead man being received by a Valkyrie in the afterlife.



A depiction of valkyries encountering the god Heimdallr as they carry a dead man to Valhalla (1906) by Lorenz Frølich.

Modern influence

The term has had some influence in modern popular culture, either directly influenced by the concept of Norse mythology or referring simply to a gathering of the chosen dead or a hall in honor of them. Examples of the latter include the Walhalla temple built by Leo von Klenze for Ludwig I of Bavaria between 1830–1847 near Regensburg, Germany, and the Tresco Abbey Gardens Valhalla museum built by August Smith around 1830 to house ship figureheads from shipwrecks that occurred at the Isles of Scilly, England, where the museum is located.^[24] A crater, Valhalla, located on the planet Jupiter's moon Callisto, is named after the hall.

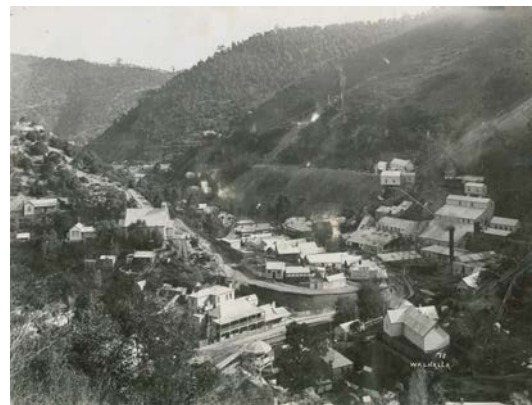
References to Valhalla appear in literature, art, and other forms of media. Examples include K. Ehrenberg's charcoal illustration *Gastmahl in Walhalla (mit einziehenden Einheriern)* (1880), Richard Wagner's depiction of Valhalla in his opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1848–1874), the Munich, Germany-based Germanic Neopagan magazine *Walhalla* (1905–1913), and the comic series *Valhalla* (1978, ongoing) by Peter Madsen, and its subsequent animated film of the same name (1986).^[25] Valhalla is prominently referenced—with the line "Valhalla, I am coming"—in the Led Zeppelin hit single "Immigrant Song" (1970).^[26] Bands like Blind Guardian or Bathory (band) have also made songs named Valhalla.

Valhalla is referenced in the video game titles *Valhalla* (1983), *Valhalla: Before the War* (1995), *Valkyrie Profile* (2000), *Max Payne* (2001), *Valhalla Knights* (2006), *Final Fantasy XI* (2002), *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* (2007), *Halo 3* (2007), *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011), *Final Fantasy XIII-2* (2011), and *Halo 4* (2012). Amusement park attractions named after Valhalla include *Valhalla Borgen* in Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, Denmark^[27] and *Valhalla* in Pleasure Beach Blackpool in Blackpool, England.

Locations named after Valhalla exist in North America (including Valhalla, New York, Valhalla Centre, Alberta, Walhalla, Michigan, Walhalla, North Dakota, Walhalla, South Carolina, and Walhalla, Texas), Australia (Walhalla, Victoria), and South Africa (Valhalla, Pretoria), as well as Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky.



The Walhalla temple above the Danube near Regensburg, Germany.



Walhalla, Victoria, Australia township in 1910

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:171–172).
- [2] Larrington (1999:8).
- [3] Larrington (1999:253–254).
- [4] Larrington (1999:53).
- [5] Larrington (1995:55).
- [6] Larrington (1999:139).
- [7] Byock (2005:10–11).
- [8] Byock (2005:31).
- [9] Byock (2005:44–45).
- [10] Byock (2005:46–47).
- [11] Byock (2005:48).
- [12] Byock (2005:49–50).
- [13] Byock (2005:66).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:59).
- [15] Faulkes (1995:95).
- [16] Faulkes (1995:69).
- [17] Faulkes (1995:77–78).
- [18] Faulkes (1995:96).
- [19] Hollander (2007:12).
- [20] Hollander (2007:17).
- [21] Hollander (2007:125).
- [22] Finlay (2004:58).
- [23] Finlay (2004:59).
- [24] Simek (2007:348), and from
- [25] Simek (2007:348).
- [26] Welch (2005:47).

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Vanaheimr

In Norse mythology, **Vanaheimr** (Old Norse "home of the Vanir"^[1]) is one of the Nine Worlds and home of the Vanir, a group of gods associated with fertility, wisdom, and the ability to see the future. Vanaheimr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*; compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda* and (in euhemerized form) *Heimskringla*; both written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, Vanaheimr is described as the location where the Van god Njörðr was raised. In Norse cosmology, Vanaheimr is considered one of the Nine Worlds.

Attestations

Vanaheimr is mentioned a single time in the *Poetic Edda*; in a stanza of the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*. In *Vafþrúðnismál*, Gagnráðr (the god Odin in disguise) engages in a game of wits with the jötunn Vafþrúðnir. Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir from whence the Van god Njörðr came, for though he rules over many hofs and hörgrs, Njörðr was not raised among the Æsir. Vafþrúðnir responds that Njörðr was created in Vanaheimr by "wise powers" and references that Njörðr was exchanged as a hostage during the Æsir-Vanir War. In addition, Vafþrúðnir comments that, when the world ends (Ragnarök), Njörðr will return to the "wise Vanir" (Bellows here anglicizes *Vanir* to *Wanes*):

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

In Vanaheim wise powers him created,
and to the gods a hostage gave.

At the world's dissolution,
he will return to the wise Vanir.^[2]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

In the home of the Wanes did the wise ones create him,
And gave him as a pledge to the gods;

At the fall of the world shall he far once more
Home to the Wanes so wise.^[3]

In chapter 23 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High says that Njörðr was raised in Vanaheimr, but was later sent as a hostage to the Æsir.^[4]

The *Heimskringla* book *Ynglinga saga* records an euhemerized account of the origins of Norse mythology. In chapter 1, "Van Home or the Home of the Vanir" is described as located around the Don River (which Snorri writes was once called "Tana Fork" or "Vana Fork").^[5] Chapter 4 describes the Æsir-Vanir War, noting that during a hostage exchange, the Æsir sent the god Hœnir to Vanaheim and there he was immediately made chieftain.^[6] In chapter 15, the king Sveigðir is recorded as having married a woman named Vana in "Vanaland", located in Sweden.

The two produced a child, who they named Vanlandi (meaning "Man from the Land of the Vanir"^[7]),^[8]

Theories

In a stanza of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, an unnamed völva mentions the existence of "nine worlds." These worlds are nowhere specifically listed in sequence, but are generally assumed to include Vanaheimr. The other eight are Asgard, Álfheimr, Midgard, Jötunheimr, Svartálfaheimr, Niflheim, Múspellsheimr, and possibly Niðavellir.^[9]

Hilda Ellis Davidson comments that exactly where Vanaheim is among the Nine Worlds isn't clear, since "the chief gods Freyr and Njord with a number of others, are represented along with the Æsir in Asgard, but it seems probable that it was in the underworld." Davidson notes a connection between the Vanir and "the land-spirits who dwelt in mounds and hills and in water [...]."^[10]

Rudolf Simek claims that Snorri "unquestionably" invented the name *Vanaheimr* as a Vanir counterpart to Asgard, but does not mention the *Vafþrúðnismál* reference.^[11]

Popular Media

These nine worlds have been mentioned in various works of fiction, including frequent use in Marvel Comics stories, even laid out in a detailed graphic and, and explicit explanation in the eleventh episode of *Ultimate Spider-Man*.

Notes

- [1] Byock (2005:158).
- [2] Thorpe (1866:16).
- [3] Bellows (1923:79).
- [4] Byock (2005:33).
- [5] Hollander (2007:6).
- [6] Hollander (2007:8).
- [7] McKinnell (2005:70)
- [8] Hollander (2007:15).
- [9] Bellows (1923:3).
- [10] Davidson (1993:70).
- [11] Simek (2007:350).

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Vígríðr

In Norse mythology, **Vígríðr** or **Óskópnir**, is a large field foretold to host a battle between the forces of the gods and the forces of Surtr as part of the events of Ragnarök. The field is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional material, and in the *Prose Edda*, written by Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century. The *Poetic Edda* briefly mentions the field as where the two forces will battle, whereas the *Prose Edda* features a fuller account, foretelling that it is the location of the future death of several deities (and their enemies) before the world is engulfed in flames and reborn. A huge expanse of land, Vigrid was said to stretch 120 leagues in every direction. Even so, it was predicted that the assembled hosts covered it completely.



The god Odin battles the wolf Fenrir while other deities and their combatants fight in the background on the field Vígríðr in an illustration (1905) by Emil Doepler.

Etymology

The Old Norse place name *Vígríðr* means "battle-surge" or "place on which battle surges".^[1] The name *Vígríðr* is sometimes modernly anglicized as **Vigrid**, **Vigrith**,^[2] or **Wigrid**.^[3] The etymology of the name *Óskópnir* is a matter of scholarly debate, but has been proposed as meaning "the (not yet) created", "not made" or "mismade".^[4]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Vafþrúðnismál*, the god Odin, disguised as "Gagnráðr" faces off with the wise jötunn Vafþrúðnir in a battle of wits. Among numerous other questions, Vafþrúðnir asks Odin to tell him what the name of the plain is where the gods and Surtr will meet. Odin responds that the name of the plain is Vígríðr, and that the size of the field is 100 leagues in every direction:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Vafþrúðnir.

Tell me, Gagnráð! since on the floor thou wilt
prove thy proficiency,
how that plan is called, where in fight shall meet
Surt and the gentle Gods?

Gagnráð.

Vigrid the plan is called,
where in fight shall meet Surt and the gentle Gods;
a hundred rasts it is on every side.
That plain is to them decreed.^[5]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Vafþrúðnir spake:

"Speak forth now, Gagnrath, if there from the floor
Thou wouldst thy wisdom make kown:
What name has the field where in fight shall meet
Surt and the gracious gods?"

Othin spake:

"Vigrith is the field where in fight shall meet
Surt and the gracious gods;
A hundred miles each way does it measure,
And so are its boundaries set."^[6]

In his translation notes for these stanzas, Henry Adams Bellows notes that "a hundred miles" is a "general phrase for a vast distance".^[6]

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Fáfnismál*, the dying wurm Fáfnir is asked by the hero Sigurd what the name of the island is where Surtr and the gods will battle is called. Fáfnir replies that the island is called *Óskópnir*.^[7]

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High foretells the events of Ragnarök. High says the Muspell's forces will gather at the field Vígríðr, a field which he adds is "a hundred leagues in each direction". Then the monstrous wolf Fenrir and the immense serpent Jörmungandr will arrive. By that time, the jötunn Hrym with all of the frost-jötnar and Loki with "all Hel's people" will have also arrived.^[8]

As these forces gather, the god Heimdallr will stand and blow into his horn, Gjallarhorn, which will awaken the gods. The gods will meet and hold a thing. Odin will ride to the well Mímisbrunnr and will consult Mímir on behalf of himself and his people. Yggdrasil, the cosmological tree, will shiver and all beings will be fearful. The gods and the einherjar will don their war gear and advance to Vígríðr. Odin, wearing a golden helmet, a coat of mail, and brandishing his spear Gungnir, will ride in the front.^[9]

Odin will make directly for Fenrir and the god Thor, by Odin's side, will be unable to help him because he will be fighting Jörmungandr. The god Freyr will engage the fiery being Surtr and, since Freyr lacks the sword he gave his servant Skírnir, Freyr will fall after a rough struggle. The god Tyr will fight the hound Garmr and the two will kill one another. Thor will kill the serpent Jörmungandr but after nine steps will collapse to the ground, dead from Jörmungandr's venom. Fenrir will eat Odin, but immediately after Odin's son Víðarr will come forward and jet his foot on to the wolf's lower jaw, and grasp its upper jaw, ripping its mouth apart, killing it. Loki and Heimdallr will kill one another and, after their death, Surtr will spray fire over the earth and burn the entire world before dying of the wounds given to him by Frey.^[9]

Later in the same chapter, High quotes Odin's response from the above mentioned chapter of *Vafþrúðnismál*.^[9]



The battle at Vígríðr raging behind them, the serpent Jörmungandr confronts the god Thor in an illustration (1905) by Emil Doepler.

Notes

- [1] For "battle-surge", see Orchard (1997:175). For "place on which battle surges", see Simek (2007:361).
- [2] For *Vigríð*, see Orchard (1997:175). For *Vigrith*, see Bellows (1923:73).
- [4] For "the (not yet) created" see Simek (2007:254). For "not made", see Bellows (1923:376). For "mismade", see Larrington (1999:160).
- [5] Thorpe (1866:14).
- [6] Bellows (1923:73).
- [7] Bellows (1923:376).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:54—55).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:54).

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Vimur River

In Norse mythology, the **Vimur** is the largest of the Elivagar rivers that were formed at the beginning of the world.

In Kevin Crossley-Holland's retelling of the Norse myths based on the writings of Snorri Sturluson, the Vimur river is mentioned in the tale of Thor and Geirrod. Thor needed to cross the Vimur on his way to Geirrod's abode. The river was at the time a mix of water and menstrual blood, the force of which threatened to sweep Thor away. The blood was issued by Geirrod's shamaness daughter, Gjalp, who stood astride the river. Thor stopped up the flow by hurling a rock into the source of the blood, effectively stopping the flow. This, with the help of a rowan tree, allows Thor to cross the river Vimur.^[1]

References

[1] Crossley-Holland, Kevin. *The Norse Myths*. London: Folio Society, 1989. pg. 130

Hvergelmir

In Norse mythology, **Hvergelmir** (Old Norse "bubbling boiling spring"^[1]) is a major spring. Hvergelmir is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In the *Poetic Edda*, Hvergelmir is mentioned in a single stanza, which details that it is the location where liquid from the antlers of the stag Eikþyrnir flow, and that the spring, "whence all waters rise", is the source of numerous rivers.^[2] The *Prose Edda* repeats this information and adds that the spring is located in Niflheim, that it is one of the three major springs at the primary roots of the cosmic tree Yggdrasil (the other two are Urðarbrunnr and Mímisbrunnr), and that within the spring are a vast amount of snakes and the dragon Níðhöggr.

Attestations

Hvergelmir is attested in the following works:

Poetic Edda

Hvergelmir receives a single mention in the *Prose Edda*, found in the poem *Grímnismál*:

Eikþyrnir the hart is called,
that stands o'er Odin's hall,
and bites from Lærad's branches;
from his horns fall drops into Hvergelmir,
whence all waters rise:^[2]

This stanza is followed three stanzas consisting mainly of the names of 42 rivers. Some of these rivers lead to the dwelling of the gods (such as Gömul and Geirvimul), while at least two (Gjöll and Leipt), reach to Hel.^[2]

Prose Edda

Hvergelmir is mentioned several times in the *Prose Edda*. In *Gylfaginning*, Just-as-High explains that the spring Hvergelmir is located in the foggy realm of Niflheim: "It was many ages before the earth was created that Niflheim was made, and in its midst lies a spring called Hvergelmir, and from it flows the rivers called Svól, Gunnthra, Fiorm, Fimbulthul, Slidr and Hrid, Sylg and Ylg, Vid, Leiptr; Gioll is next to Hell-gates."^[3]

Later in *Gylfaginning*, Just-as-High describes the central tree Yggdrasil. Just-as-High says that three roots of the tree support it and "extend very, very far" and that the third of these three roots extends over Niflheim. Beneath this root, says Just-as-High, is the spring Hvergelmir, and that the base of the root is gnawed on by the dragon Níðhöggr.^[4] Additionally, High says that Hvergelmir contains not only Níðhöggr but also so many snakes that "no tongue can enumerate them".^[5]

The spring is mentioned a third time in *Gylfaginning* where High recounts its source: the stag Eikþyrnir stands on top of the afterlife hall Valhalla feeding branches of Yggdrasil, and from the stag's antlers drips great amounts of liquid down into Hvergelmir. High tallies 26 rivers here.^[6]

Hvergelmir is mentioned a final time in the *Prose Edda* where Third discusses the unpleasanties of Náströnd. Third notes that Hvergelmir yet worse than the venom-filled Náströnd because—by way of quoting a portion of a stanza from the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*—"There Nidhogg torments the bodies of the dead".^[7]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:93)
- [2] Thorpe (1866:23).
- [3] Faulkes (1995:9-10).
- [4] Faulkes (1995:17).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:19).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:33).
- [7] Faulkes (1995:56).

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Urðarbrunnr

Urðarbrunnr (Old Norse "Well of Urðr"; either referring to a Germanic concept of fate—*urðr*—or the norn named Urðr^[1]) is a well in Norse mythology. Urðarbrunnr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In both sources, the well lies beneath the world tree Yggdrasil, and is associated with a trio of norns (Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld). In the *Prose Edda*, Urðarbrunnr is cited as one of three wells existing beneath three roots of Yggdrasil that reach into three distant, different lands; the other two wells being Hvergelmir, located beneath a root in Niflheim, and Mímisbrunnr, located beneath a root near the home of the frost jötnar. Scholarly theory and speculation surrounds the well.

Attestations

Urðarbrunnr is attested in the following works:

Poetic Edda

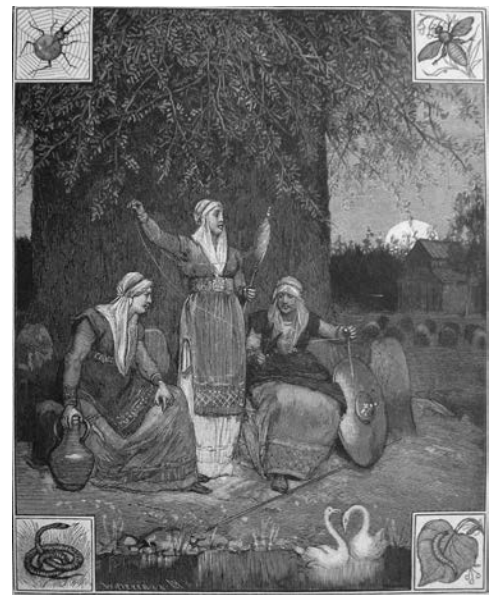
In the *Poetic Edda*, Urðarbrunnr is mentioned in stanzas 19 and 20 of the poem *Völuspá*, and stanza 111 of the poem *Hávamál*. In stanza 19 of *Völuspá*, Urðarbrunnr is described as being located beneath Yggdrasil, and that Yggdrasil, an ever-green ash-tree, is covered with white mud or loam. Stanza 20 describes that three norns (Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld) "come from" the well, here described as a "lake", and that this trio of norns then "set down laws, they chose lives, for the sons of men the fates of men."^[2]

Stanza 111 of *Hávamál* has been the matter of much debate and is considered unclear, having been referred to as "mysterious", "obscure and much-debated".^[3] Benjamin Thorpe translates the stanza as:

Time 'tis to discourse from the preacher's chair.
By the well of Urd I silent sat,
I saw and meditated, I listened to men's words.^[4]

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda*, Urðarbrunnr is attested in *Gylfaginning* (chapters 15, 16, and the beginning of chapter 17), and twice in *Skáldskaparmál*.



The trio of norns at the well Urðarbrunnr as depicted in Fredrik Sander's 1893 translation of the *Poetic Edda*.
Wood engraving by L. B. Hansen.



"The Norns" (1901) by Karl Ehrenberg.

Gylfaginning

In chapter 15 of *Gylfaginning*, a book of the *Prose Edda*, the throned figure of Just-As-High tells Gangleri (described as King Gylfi in disguise) about Yggdrasil and its roots. Just-As-High describes three roots that support Yggdrasil that stretch a great distance. The third root is located "among the Æsir", "extends to heaven" and, beneath it, is the "very holy" Urðarbrunnr. Just-As-High details that, every day, the gods ride over the bridge Bifröst to hold court at the well.^[5]

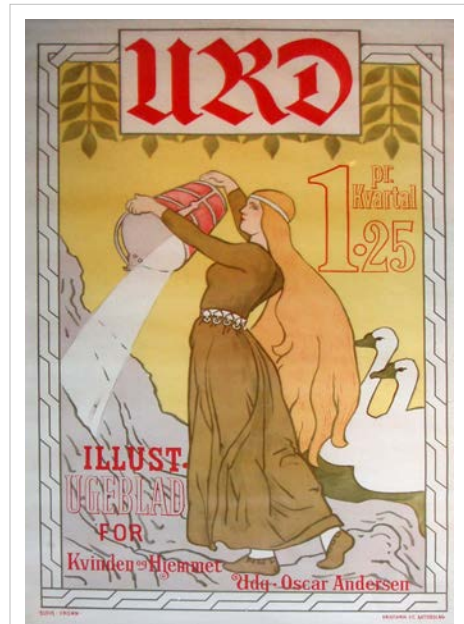
High provides more information regarding the well in chapter 16. High says that there are many beautiful places in heaven, and "everywhere there is divine protection around it." There, a beautiful hall stands under the ash (Yggdrasil) near the well (Urðarbrunnr), and from this hall come "three maidens" whose names are Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld. The maidens shape the lives of men, and "we call them norns". High goes on to describe that there are other norns, and their nature.^[6]

Further into chapter 16, High states that norns that dwell by Urðarbrunnr take water from the well and mud that lies around it, and pour it over the Yggdrasil so that its branches do not decay or rot. The water is described as so holy that anything that enters the well will become "as white as the membrane called the skin that lies round the inside of the eggshell." High then quotes stanza 19 of *Völuspá*, and states that two swans feed from the well, from which all other swans descend.^[7] Chapter 17 starts off with Gangleri asking what other "chief centres" exist outside of Urðarbrunnr.^[7]

Skáldskaparmál

Two sections of the book *Skáldskaparmál* reference Urðarbrunnr. The first reference is in section 49, where a fragment of a work by the 10th century skald Kormákr Ögmundarson is recited in explaining how "Odin's fire" is a kenning for a sword. The passage reads "A sword is Odin's fire, as Kormak said: Battle raged when the feeder of Grid's steed [wolf], he who waged war, advanced with ringing Gaut [Odin's] fire." and that Urðr "rose from the well."^[8]

Urðarbrunnr is mentioned a second time in section 52 of *Skáldskaparmál*, this time associated with Christ. The section states that early skalds once referred to Christ in relation to Urðarbrunnr and Rome, and quotes the late 10th century skald Eilífr Goðrúnarson, who states that "thus has the powerful king of Rome increased his realm with lands of heath-land divinities [giants; i.e. heathen lands]" and that Christ is said to have his throne south of Urðarbrunnr.^[9]



A poster for the Norwegian women's magazine *Urd* by Andreas Bloch and Olaf Krohn.

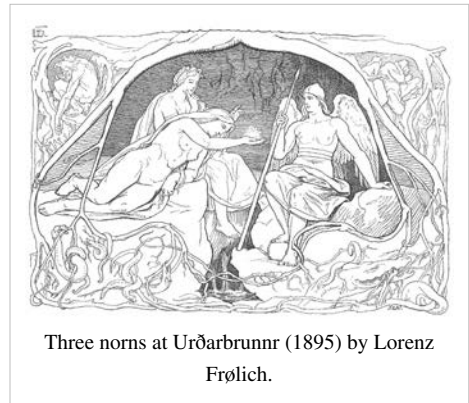
Theories

Temple at Uppsala

Parallels have been pointed out between the description of Urðarbrunnr at the base of the world tree Yggdrasil and Christian medieval chronicler Adam of Bremen's account of a well at the base of a sacred tree at the Temple at Uppsala, Sweden, found in his 11th century work *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*.^[1]

Eilífr Goðrúnarson

Eilífr Goðrúnarson's Christianity-influenced account of Urðarbrunnr (section 52 of *Skáldskaparmál*) associates the well with the south and Rome. Theories have been proposed that this description may have some relation to notions of the Jordan River due to phonetic and typological similarities perceived by Eilífr, though there may be no other causative connection.^[1] Eilífr is otherwise known as a pagan skald, and this selection has been theorized as describing that, due to directly associating Christ with the well, Christ had taken over responsibility of providence or fate.^[10]



Three norns at Urðarbrunnr (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:342).
- [2] Larrington (1999:6).
- [3] Evans (1986:26-27, and 124).
- [4] Thorpe 1907:41).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:17).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:18).
- [7] Faulkes (1995:19).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:121).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:126).
- [10] Faulkes (1998:201).

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Yggdrasil

In Norse mythology, **Yggdrasil** (/ˈɪɡdrəsɪl/; from Old Norse **Yggdrasill**, pronounced [ˈyɡːdrasilː]) is an immense tree that is central in Norse cosmology, in connection to which the nine worlds exist.

Yggdrasil is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In both sources, Yggdrasil is an immense ash tree that is central and considered very holy. The gods go to Yggdrasil daily to assemble at their things. The branches of Yggdrasil extend far into the heavens, and the tree is supported by three roots that extend far away into other locations; one to the well Urðarbrunnr in the heavens, one to the spring Hvergelmir, and another to the well Mímisbrunnr. Creatures live within Yggdrasil, including the wurm (dragon) Níðhöggr, an unnamed eagle, and the stags Dáinn, Dvalinn, Duneyrr and Duraprór.

Conflicting scholarly theories have been proposed about the etymology of the name *Yggdrasill*, the possibility that the tree is of another species than ash, the relation to tree lore and to Eurasian shamanic lore, the possible relation to the trees Mímameiðr and Læraðr, Hoddmímis holt, the sacred tree at Uppsala, and the fate of Yggdrasil during the events of Ragnarök.

Name

The generally accepted meaning of Old Norse *Yggdrasill* is 'Odin's horse', meaning 'gallows'. This interpretation comes about because *drasill* means "horse" and *Ygg(r)* is one of Odin's many names. The *Poetic Edda* poem *Hávamál* describes how Odin sacrificed himself by hanging from a tree, making this tree Odin's gallows. This tree may have been Yggdrasil. Gallows can be called "the horse of the hanged" and therefore Odin's gallows may have developed into the expression "Odin's horse", which then became the name of the tree.^[1]

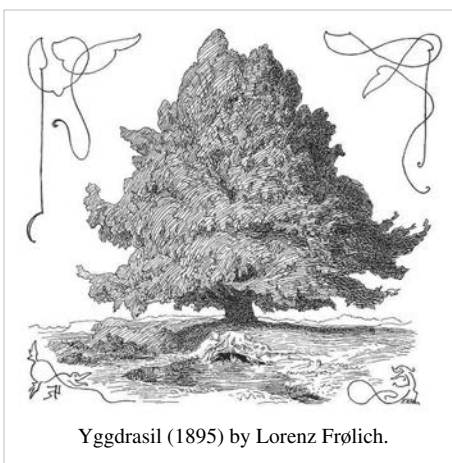
Nevertheless, scholarly opinions regarding the precise meaning of the name *Yggdrasill* vary, particularly on the issue of whether *Yggdrasill* is the name of the tree itself or if only the full term *askr Yggdrasil* (where Old Norse *askr* means 'ash tree') refers specifically to the tree.

According to this interpretation, *askr Yggdrasils* would mean the world tree upon which "the horse [Odin's horse] of the highest god [Odin] is bound". Both of these etymologies rely on a presumed but unattested **Yggsdrasill*.^[1]

A third interpretation, presented by F. Detter, is that the name *Yggdrasill* refers to the word *ygg* ('terror'), yet not in reference to the Odinic name, and so *Yggdrasill* would then mean "tree of terror, gallows". F. R. Schröder has proposed a fourth etymology according to which *yggdrasill* means "yew pillar", deriving *yggia* from **igwja* (meaning "yew-tree"), and *drasill* from **dher-* (meaning "support").^[1]



"The Ash Yggdrasil" (1886) by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine.



Yggdrasil (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, the tree is mentioned in the three poems *Völuspá*, *Hávamál*, and *Grímnismál*.

Völuspá

In the second stanza of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, the völvu (a shamanic seeress) reciting the poem to the god Odin says that she remembers far back to "early times", being raised by jötnar, recalls nine worlds and "nine wood-ogresses" (Old Norse *nío ídiðjur*), and when Yggdrasil was a seed ("glorious tree of good measure, under the ground").^[2] In stanza 19, the völvu says:

An ash I know there stands,
Yggdrasill is its name,
a tall tree, showered
with shining loam.
From there come the dews
that drop in the valleys.
It stands forever green over
Urðr's well.^[3]



"Norns" (1832) from *Die Helden und Götter des Nordens, oder das Buch der Sagen*.

In stanza 20, the völvu says that from the lake under the tree come three "maidens deep in knowledge" named Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld. The maidens "incised the slip of wood," "laid down laws" and "chose lives" for the children of mankind and the destinies (*ørlög*) of men.^[4] In stanza 27, the völvu details that she is aware that "Heimdallr's hearing is couched beneath the bright-nurtured holy tree."^[5] In stanza 45, Yggdrasil receives a final mention in the poem. The völvu describes, as a part of the onset of Ragnarök, that Heimdallr blows Gjallarhorn, that Odin speaks with Mímir's head, and then:

Yggdrasill shivers,
the ash, as it stands.
The old tree groans,
and the giant slips free.^[6]

Hávamál

In stanza 137 of the poem *Hávamál*, Odin describes how he once sacrificed himself to himself by hanging on a tree. The stanza reads:

I know that I hung on a windy tree
 nine long nights,
 wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,
 myself to myself,
 on that tree of which no man knows
 from where its roots run.^[7]

In the stanza that follows, Odin describes how he had no food nor drink there, that he peered downward, and that "I took up the runes, screaming I took them, then I fell back from there."^[7] While Yggdrasil is not mentioned by name in the poem and other trees exist in Norse mythology, the tree is near universally accepted as Yggdrasil, and if the tree is Yggdrasil, then the name *Yggdrasil* directly relates to this story.^[8]

Grímnismál

In the poem *Grímnismál*, Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) provides the young Agnar with cosmological lore. Yggdrasil is first mentioned in the poem in stanza 29, where Odin says that, because the "bridge of the Æsir burns" and the "sacred waters boil," Thor must wade through the rivers Körmt and Örmt and two rivers named Kerlaugar to go "sit as judge at the ash of Yggdrasil." In the stanza that follows, a list of names of horses are given that the Æsir ride to "sit as judges" at Yggdrasil.^[9]

In stanza 31, Odin says that the ash Yggdrasil has three roots that grow in three directions. He details that beneath the first lives Hel, under the second live frost jötnar, and beneath the third lives mankind. Stanza 32 details that a squirrel named Ratatoskr must run across Yggdrasil and bring "the eagle's word" from above to Níðhöggr below. Stanza 33 describes that four harts named Dáinn, Dvalinn, Duneyrr and Duraprór consume "the highest boughs" of Yggdrasil.^[9]

In stanza 34, Odin says that more serpents lie beneath Yggdrasil "than any fool can imagine" and lists them as Góinn and Móinn (possibly meaning Old Norse "land animal"^[10]), which he describes as sons of Grafvitnir (Old Norse, possibly "ditch wolf"^[11]), Grábakr (Old Norse "Greyback"^[10]), Grafvölluðr (Old Norse, possibly "the one digging under the plain" or possibly amended as "the one ruling in the ditch"^[11]), Ófnir (Old Norse "the winding one, the twisting one"^[12]), and Sváfnir (Old Norse, possibly "the one who puts to sleep = death"^[13]), who Odin adds that he thinks will forever gnaw on the tree's branches.^[9]

In stanza 35, Odin says that Yggdrasil "suffers agony more than men know", as a hart bites it from above, it decays on its sides, and Níðhöggr bites it from beneath.^[14] In stanza 44, Odin provides a list of things that are what he refers to as the "noblest" of their kind. Within the list, Odin mentions Yggdrasil first, and states that it is the "noblest of trees".^[15]



Odin sacrificing himself upon Yggdrasil (1895)
 by Lorenz Frølich.

Prose Edda

Yggdrasil is mentioned in two books in the *Prose Edda*; *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*. In *Gylfaginning*, Yggdrasil is introduced in chapter 15. In chapter 15, Gangleri (described as king Gylfi in disguise) asks where is the chief or holiest place of the gods. High replies "It is the ash Yggdrasil. There the gods must hold their courts each day". Gangleri asks what there is to tell about Yggdrasil. Just-As-High says that Yggdrasil is the biggest and best of all trees, that its branches extend out over all of the world and reach out over the sky. Three of the roots of the tree support it, and these three roots also extend extremely far: one "is among the Æsir, the second among the frost jötnar, and the third over Niflheim. The root over Niflheim is gnawed at by the wyrm Níðhöggr, and beneath this root is the spring Hvergelmir. Beneath the root that reaches the frost jötnar is the well Mímisbrunnr, "which has wisdom and intelligence contained in it, and the master of the well is called Mimir". Just-As-High provides details regarding Mímisbrunnr and then describes that the third root of the well "extends to heaven" and that beneath the root is the "very holy" well Urðarbrunnr. At Urðarbrunnr the gods hold their court, and every day the Æsir ride to Urðarbrunnr up over the bridge Bifröst. Later in the chapter, a stanza from *Grímnismál* mentioning Yggdrasil is quoted in support.^[16]

In chapter 16, Gangleri asks "what other particularly notable things are there to tell about the ash?" High says there is quite a lot to tell about. High continues that an eagle sits on the branches of Yggdrasil and that it has much knowledge. Between the eyes of the eagle sits a hawk called Veðrfölnir. A squirrel called Ratatoskr scurries up and down the ash Yggdrasil carrying "malicious messages" between the eagle and Níðhöggr. Four stags named Dáinn, Dvalinn, Duneyrr, and Duraprör run between the branches of Yggdrasil and consume its foliage. In the spring Hvergelmir are so many snakes along with Níðhöggr "that no tongue can enumerate them". Two stanzas from *Grímnismál* are then cited in support. High continues that the norns that live by the holy well Urðarbrunnr each day take water from the well and mud from around it and pour it over Yggdrasil so that the branches of the ash do not rot away or decay. High provides more information about Urðarbrunnr, cites a stanza from *Völuspá* in support, and adds that dew falls from Yggdrasil to the earth, explaining that "this is what people call honeydew, and from it bees feed".^[17]

In chapter 41, the stanza from *Grímnismál* is quoted that mentions that Yggdrasil is the foremost of trees.^[18] In chapter 54, as part of the events of Ragnarök, High describes that Odin will ride to the well Mímisbrunnr and consult Mímir on behalf of himself and his people. After this, "the ash Yggdrasil will shake and nothing will be unafraid in heaven or on earth", and then the Æsir and Einherjar will don their war gear and advance to the field of Vígríðr. Further into the chapter, the stanza in *Völuspá* that details this sequence is cited.^[19]

In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Yggdrasil receives a single mention, though not by name. In chapter 64, names for kings and dukes are given. "Illustrious one" is provided as an example, appearing in a



The title page of Olive Bray's 1908 translation of the *Poetic Edda* by W. G. Collingwood.



The norns Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld beneath the world tree Yggdrasil (1882) by Ludwig Burger.

Christianity-influenced work by the skald Hallvarðr Háreksblesi: "There is not under the pole of the earth [Yggdrasil] an illustrious one closer to the lord of monks [God] than you."^[20]

Theories

Shamanic origins

Hilda Ellis Davidson comments that the existence of nine worlds around Yggdrasil is mentioned more than once in Old Norse sources, but the identity of the worlds is never stated outright, though it can be deduced from various sources. Davidson comments that "no doubt the identity of the nine varied from time to time as the emphasis changed or new imagery arrived". Davidson says that it is unclear where the nine worlds are located in relation to the tree; they could either exist one above the other or perhaps be grouped around the tree, but there are references to worlds existing beneath the tree, while the gods are pictured as in the sky, a rainbow bridge (Bifröst) connecting the tree with other worlds. Davidson opines that "those who have tried to produce a convincing diagram of the Scandinavian cosmos from what we are told in the sources have only added to the confusion".^[22]

Davidson notes parallels between Yggdrasil and shamanic lore in northern Eurasia:

The conception of the tree rising through a number of worlds is found in northern Eurasia and forms part of the shamanic lore shared by many peoples of this region. This seems to be a very ancient conception, perhaps based on the Pole Star, the centre of the heavens, and the image of the central tree in Scandinavia may have been influenced by it.... Among Siberian shamans, a central tree may be used as a ladder to ascend the heavens.^[22]

Davidson says that the notion of an eagle atop a tree and the world serpent coiled around the roots of the tree has parallels in other cosmologies from Asia. She goes on to say that Norse cosmology may have been influenced by these Asiatic cosmologies from a northern location. Davidson adds, on the other hand, that it is attested that the Germanic peoples worshiped their deities in open forest clearings and that a sky god was particularly connected with the oak tree, and therefore "a central tree was a natural symbol for them also".^[22]



This large tree in the Viking Age Överhogdal tapestries may be Yggdrasil with Gullinkambi on top.^[21]

Mímameiðr, Hoddmímis holt and Ragnarök

Connections have been proposed between the wood Hoddmímis holt (Old Norse "Hoard-Mímir's"^[23] holt) and the tree Mímameiðr ("Mímir's tree"), generally thought to refer to the world tree Yggdrasil, and the spring Mímisbrunnr.^[23] John Lindow concurs that *Mímameiðr* may be another name for Yggdrasil and that if the Hoard-Mímir of the name *Hoddmímis holt* is the same figure as Mímir (associated with the spring named after him, Mímisbrunnr), then the Mímir's holt—Yggdrasil—and Mímir's spring may be within the same proximity.^[24]

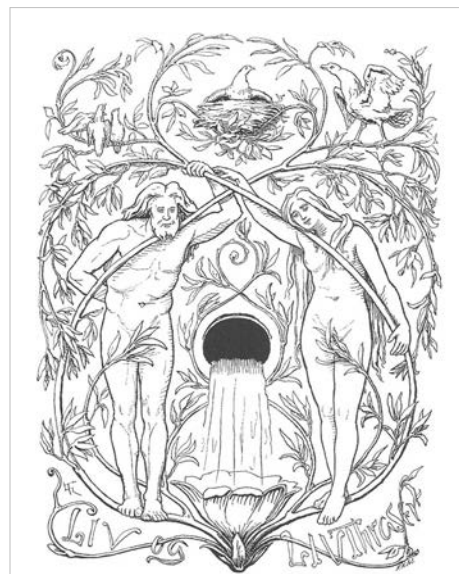
Carolyne Larrington notes that it is nowhere expressly stated what will happen to Yggdrasil during the events of Ragnarök. Larrington points to a connection between the primordial figure of Mímir and Yggdrasil in the poem *Völuspá*, and theorizes that "it is possible that Hoddmimir is another name for Mimir, and that the two survivors hide in Yggdrasil."^[25]

Rudolf Simek theorizes that the survival of Líf and Lífþrasir through Ragnarök by hiding in Hoddmímis holt is "a case of reduplication of the anthropogeny, understandable from the cyclic nature of the Eddic eschatology." Simek says that Hoddmímis holt "should not be understood literally as a wood or even a forest in which the two keep themselves hidden, but rather as an alternative name for the world-tree Yggdrasil. Thus, the creation of mankind from tree trunks (Askr, Embla) is repeated after the Ragnarök as well." Simek says that in Germanic regions, the concept of mankind originating from trees is ancient. Simek additionally points out legendary parallels in a Bavarian legend of a shepherd who lives inside a tree, whose descendants repopulate the land after life there has been wiped out by plague (citing a retelling by F. R. Schröder). In addition, Simek points to an Old Norse parallel in the figure of Örvar-Oddr, "who is rejuvenated after living as a tree-man (*Qrvar-Odds saga* 24–27)".^[26]

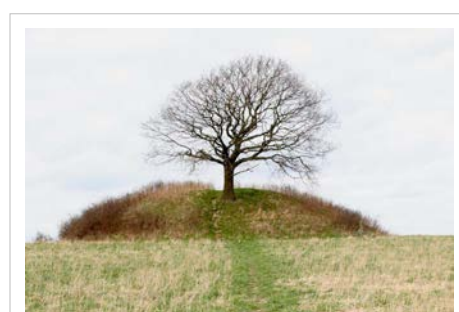
Warden trees, Irminsul, and sacred trees

Continuing as late as the 19th century, warden trees were venerated in areas of Germany and Scandinavia, considered to be guardians and bringers of luck, and offerings were sometimes made to them. A massive birch tree standing atop a burial mound and located beside a farm in western Norway is recorded as having had ale poured over its roots during festivals. The tree was felled in 1874.^[27]

Davidson comments that "the position of the tree in the centre as a source of luck and protection for gods and men is confirmed" by these rituals to Warden Trees. Davidson notes that the gods are described as meeting beneath Yggdrasil to hold their things, and that the pillars venerated by the Germanic peoples, such as the pillar Irminsul, were also symbolic of the center of the world. Davidson details that it would be difficult to ascertain whether a tree or pillar came first, and that this likely depends on if the holy location was in a thickly wooded area or not. Davidson notes that there is no mention of a sacred tree at Þingvellir in Iceland yet that Adam of Bremen describes a huge tree standing next to the Temple at Uppsala in Sweden, which Adam describes as remaining green throughout summer



Líf and Lífþrasir after emerging from Hoddmímis holt (1895) by Lorenz Frølich



A tree grows atop *Mysselhøj*, a Nordic Bronze Age burial mound in Roskilde, Denmark.

and winter, and that no one knew what type of tree it was. Davidson comments that while it is uncertain that Adam's informant actually witnessed that tree is unknown, but that the existence of sacred trees in pre-Christian Germanic Europe is further evidenced by records of their destruction by early Christian missionaries, such as Thor's Oak by Saint Boniface.^[27]

Ken Dowden comments that behind Irminsul, Thor's Oak in Geismar, and the sacred tree at Uppsala "looms a mythic prototype, an Yggdrasil, the world-ash of the Norsemen".^[28]

Modern influence

In modern times, Yggdrasil is sometimes depicted or referenced in modern popular culture. Modern works of art depicting Yggdrasil include *Die Nornen* (painting, 1888) by K. Ehrenberg; *Yggdrasil* (fresco, 1933) by Axel Revold, located in the University of Oslo library auditorium in Oslo, Norway; *Hjortene beiter i løvet på Yggdrasil asken* (wood relief carving, 1938) on the Oslo City Hall by Dagfin Werenskjold; and the bronze relief on the doors of the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities (around 1950) by B. Marklund in Stockholm, Sweden. Poems mentioning Yggdrasil include *Vårdrädet* by Viktor Rydberg and *Yggdrasill* by J. Linke.^[29]

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:375).
- [2] Dronke (1997:7).
- [3] Dronke (1997:11–12).
- [4] Dronke (1997:12).
- [5] Dronke (1997:14).
- [6] Dronke (1997:19).
- [7] Larrington (1999:34).
- [8] Lindow (2001:321).
- [9] Larrington (1999:56).
- [10] Simek (2007:115).
- [11] Simek (2007:116).
- [12] Simek (2007:252).
- [13] Simek (2007:305).
- [14] Larrington (1999:57).
- [15] Larrington (1999:58).
- [16] Faulkes (1995:17).
- [17] Faulkes (1995:18–19).
- [18] Faulkes (1995:34).
- [19] Faulkes (1995:54).
- [20] Faulkes (1995:146).
- [21] Schön (2004:50).
- [22] Davidson (1993:69).
- [23] Simek (2007:154).
- [24] Lindow (2001:179).
- [25] Larrington (1999:269).
- [26] Simek (2007:189). For Schröder, see Schröder (1931).
- [27] Davidson (1993:170).
- [28] Dowden (2000:72).
- [29] Simek (2007:376).

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Events

Æsir–Vanir War

In Norse mythology, the **Æsir–Vanir War** was a war that occurred between the Æsir and the Vanir, two groups of gods. The war ultimately resulted in the unification of the two tribes into a single tribe of gods. The war is an important event in Norse mythology, and the implications of the war and the potential historicity surrounding the accounts of the war are a matter of an amount of scholarly debate and discourse.

Fragmented information about the war appears in surviving sources. The war is described in *Völuspá*, a poem collected in the *Poetic Edda* in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, in the book *Skáldskaparmál* in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and in euhemerized form in the *Ynglinga saga* from *Heimskringla*, also written by Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century.



Óðinn throws his spear at the Vanir host, illustration by Lorenz Frølich (1895)

Attestations

The following attestations provide information about the war:

Poetic Edda

In two stanzas of *Völuspá*, the war is recounted by a *völva* (who refers to herself here in the third person) while the god Óðinn questions her. In the first of the two stanzas, the *völva* says that she remembers the first war in the world, when Gullveig was stabbed with spears and then burnt three times in one of Óðinn's halls, yet that Gullveig was reborn three times. In the later stanza, the *völva* says that they called Gullveig *Heiðr* (Meaning "Bright One"^[1] or potentially "Gleaming" or "Honor"^[2]) whenever she came to houses, that she was a wise *völva*, and that she cast spells. *Heiðr* performed *seiðr* where she could, did so in a trance, and was "always the favorite of wicked women."^[1]

In a later stanza, the *völva* then tells Óðinn that all the powers went to the judgment seats and discussed whether the Æsir should pay a fine or if all of the gods should instead have tribute. Further in the poem, a stanza provides the last of the *völva*'s account of the events surrounding the war. She says:



Gullveig is executed, illustration by Lorenz Frølich (1895).

Odin shot a spear, hurled it over the host;
 that was still the first war in the world,
 the defense wall was broken of the Æsir's stronghold;
 the Vanir, indomitable, were trampling the plain.^[1]

These stanzas are unclear, particularly the second half of stanza 23, but the battle appears to have been precipitated by the entry of Gullveig/Heiðr among the Æsir.^[3] Stanza 23 relates a difficulty in reaching a truce which led to the all-out war described in stanza 24. However, the reference to "all the gods" could, in Lindow's view, indicate a movement towards a community involving both the Æsir and the Vanir.^[3] Ursula Dronke points to extensive wordplay on all the meanings of the noun *gildi* and the adjective *gildir* to signal the core issue of whether the Æsir will surrender their monopoly on human tribute and join with the "all-too-popular" Vanir; as their only alternative, they attack again.^[4]

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál* (chapter 57), the god Bragi explains the origin of poetry. Bragi says that it originated in the Æsir–Vanir War, when during the peace conference the Æsir and the Vanir formed a truce by spitting into a vat. When they left, the gods decided that it should not be poured out, but rather kept as a symbol of their peace, and so from the contents made a man, Kvasir. Kvasir is later murdered, and from his blood is made the Mead of Poetry.^[5]

Heimskringla

In chapter 4 of *Heimskringla*, Snorri presents a euhemerized account of the war. Snorri states that Óðinn led a great army from Asia ("Ásaland") to attack the people of "Vanaland." However, according to Snorri, the people of Vanaland were well prepared for the invasion; they defended their land so well that victory was up for grabs from both sides, and both sides produced immense damage and ravaged the lands of one another.^[6]

Snorri states that the two sides eventually tired of the war and both agreed to meet to establish a truce. Snorri continues that the two sides did so and exchanged hostages. Vanaland are described as having sent to Asaland their best men: Njörðr—described as wealthy—and his son Freyr in exchange for Asaland's Hœnir—described here as large, handsome, and thought of by the people of Vanaland well suited to be a chieftain. Additionally, Asaland sends Mímir—a man of great understanding—in exchange for Kvasir, who Snorri describes as the wisest man of Vanaland.^[6]



"The Æsir Against the Vanir" (1882) by Karl Ehrenberg.

Snorri continues that, upon arrival in Vanaland, Hœnir was immediately made chief and Mímir often gave him good counsel. However, when Hœnir was at meetings and at the Thing without Mímir by his side, he would always answer the same way: "Let others decide." Subsequently, the Vanaland folk suspected they had been cheated in the exchange by the Asaland folk, so they seized Mímir and beheaded him and sent the head to Asaland. Óðinn took the head of Mímir, embalmed it with herbs so that it would not rot, and spoke charms over it, which gave it the power to speak to him and reveal to him secrets.^[6]

According to Snorri, Óðinn then appointed Njörðr and Freyr to be priests of sacrificial customs and they became *Diar* ("Gods") of the people of Asaland. Freyja, described as daughter of Njörðr, was the priestess of these sacrifices, and here she is described as introducing seiðr to Asaland.^[6]

Theories

A number of theories surround the Æsir–Vanir War:

Proto-Indo-European basis

As the Vanir are often considered fertility gods, the Æsir–Vanir War has been proposed as a reflection of the invasion of local fertility cults somewhere in regions inhabited by the Germanic peoples by a more aggressive, warlike cult.^[3] This has been proposed as an analogy of the invasion of the Indo-Europeans.^[3] Georges Dumézil stated that the war need not necessarily be understood in matters of historicity more than any other myth because it is set before the emigration from the Middle East and, he states, accounts are more focused on the truce than on details regarding the battles.^[7]

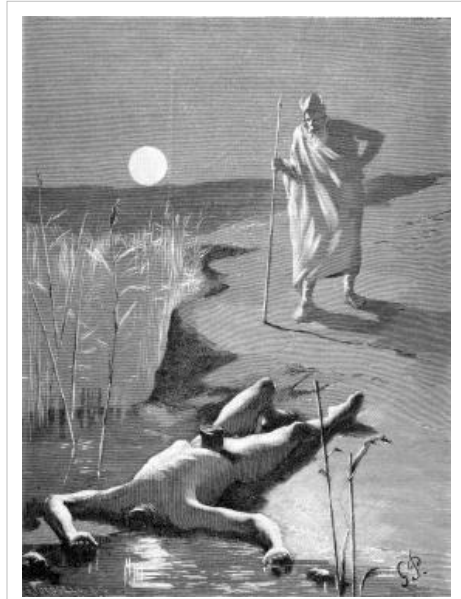
Scholars have cited parallels between the Æsir–Vanir War, The Rape of the Sabine Women from Roman mythology, and the Mahabharata from Hindu mythology, providing support for a Proto-Indo-European "war of the functions." Explaining these parallels, J. P. Mallory states:

Basically, the parallels concern the presence of first-(magico-judicial) and second-(warrior) function representatives on the victorious side of a war that ultimately subdues and incorporates third function characters, for example, the Sabine women or the Norse Vanir. Indeed, the *Iliad* itself has also been examined in a similar light. The ultimate structure of the myth, then, is that the three estates of Proto-Indo-European society were fused only after a war between the first two against the third.^[8]

Other

Many scholars consider the figures of Gullveig/Heiðr and Freyja the same.^[9] These conclusions have been made through comparisons between the figure of Gullveig/Heiðr's use of seiðr in *Völuspá* and the mention of Freyja introducing seiðr to the Æsir from the Vanir in *Heimskringla*.^[3] This is at times taken further that their corruption of the Æsir led to the Æsir–Vanir War.^[3]

Lindow states that he feels that even if the two are not identical, the various accounts of the war seem to share the idea of a disruptive entry of persons into a people.^[3] Lindow compares the appearance of Gullveig/Heiðr into the Æsir to that of Hœnir and Mímir's disruption amongst the Vanir in *Heimskringla*.^[3] Lindow further states that all three accounts share the notion of acquisition of tools for the conquest of wisdom; the practice of seiðr in two accounts and the head of Mímir in one.^[3]



Óðinn with Mímir's body, illustration by Georg Pauli (1893)

In Popular Culture

The lyrics of the song "War Of The Gods" by Swedish death metal band Amon Amarth detail the circumstances of the Æsir–Vanir War.

Notes

- [1] Larrington (1996:7).
- [2] Lindow (2001:165).
- [3] Lindow (2001:51-53).
- [4] Dronke (1997:134).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:61—62).
- [6] Hollander (1964:7-8).
- [7] Dumézil (1973:Chapter 1).
- [8] Mallory (2005:139).
- [9] Grundy (1998:62).

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Fimbulwinter

In Norse mythology, *Fimbulvetr* (or *fimbulvinter*), commonly rendered in English as **Fimbulwinter**, is the immediate prelude to the events of Ragnarök.

Summary

Fimbulvetr is the harsh winter that precedes the end of the world and puts an end to all life on Earth. Fimbulwinter is three successive winters where snow comes in from all directions, without any intervening summer. During this time, there will be innumerable wars and ties of blood will no longer be respected: the next-of-kin will lie together and brothers will kill brothers.^[1]

The event is described primarily in the *Poetic Edda*. In the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*, Odin poses the question to Vafþrúðnir as to who of mankind will survive the Fimbulwinter. Vafþrúðnir responds that Líf and Lífþrasir will survive and that they will live in the forest of Hoddmímis holt.

This mythology might be related to the extreme weather events of 535–536 which resulted in a notable drop in temperature across northern Europe. There have also been several popular ideas about whether or not this particular piece of mythology has a connection to the climate change that occurred in the Nordic countries at the end of the Nordic Bronze Age dating from about 650 BC. Before this climate change, the Nordic countries were considerably warmer.^[2]

In Denmark, Norway, Sweden and other Nordic countries, the term *fimbulvinter* is still used to refer to an unusually cold and harsh winter.^[3]

Etymology

Fimbulvetr comes from Old Norse, meaning "awful, great winter". The prefix "fimbul" means "the great/big" so the correct interpretation of the word is "the great winter".^[3]

References

- [1] *Fimbulvinter* (Store norske leksikon) (<http://www.sn�.no/fimbulvinter>)
- [2] Ström, Folke: *Nordisk Hedendom*, Studentlitteratur, Lund 2005, ISBN 91-44-00551-2 (first published 1961) among others, refer to the climate change theory.
- [3] Svenska Akademiens Ordbok, entry for *Fimbulvinter* (<http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/show.phtml?filenr=1/68/17365.html>)

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Ragnarök

In Norse mythology, **Ragnarök** (UK /ˈræɡnərɜːrk/,^[2] US /ˈræɡnərɒk/ or /ˈræɡnərək/^[3]) is a series of future events, including a great battle foretold to ultimately result in the death of a number of major figures (including the gods Odin, Thor, Týr, Freyr, Heimdallr, and Loki), the occurrence of various natural disasters, and the subsequent submersion of the world in water. Afterward, the world will resurface anew and fertile, the surviving and returning gods will meet, and the world will be repopulated by two human survivors. Ragnarök is an important event in the Norse canon, and has been the subject of scholarly discourse and theory.

The event is attested primarily in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In the *Prose Edda*, and a single poem in the *Poetic Edda*, the event is referred to as **Ragnarök** or **Ragnarøkkr** (Old Norse "Fate of the Gods" or "Twilight of the Gods" respectively), a usage popularized by 19th century composer Richard Wagner with the title of the last of his *Der Ring des Nibelungen* operas, *Götterdämmerung* (1876).

Etymology

The Old Norse word "ragnarök" is a compound of two words. The first is *ragna*, the genitive plural of *regin* ("gods" or "ruling powers"), derived from the reconstructed Proto-Germanic term **ragenō*. The second word, *rök*, has several meanings, such as "development, origin, cause, relation, fate, end." The traditional interpretation is that prior to the merging of /ɔ/ and /ø/ in Icelandic (ca. 1200) the word was *rök*, derived from Proto-Germanic **rakō*.^[4] The word *ragnarök* as a whole is then usually interpreted as the "final destiny of the gods."^[5] In 2007, Haraldur Bernharðsson proposed that the original form of the second word in the compound is *røk*, leading to a Proto-Germanic reconstruction of **rekwa* and opening up other semantic possibilities.^[6]

In stanza 39 of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Lokasenna*, and in the *Prose Edda*, the form *ragnarøk(k)r* appears, *røk(k)r* meaning "twilight." It has often been suggested that this indicates a misunderstanding or a learned reinterpretation of the original form *ragnarök*.^[4] Haraldur Bernharðsson argues instead that the words *ragnarök* and *ragnarøkkr* are closely related, etymologically and semantically, and suggests a meaning of "renewal of the divine powers."^[7] Usage of this form was popularized in modern popular culture by 19th century composer Richard Wagner by way of the title of the last of his *Der Ring des Nibelungen* operas, *Götterdämmerung*.^[8]

Other terms used to refer to the events surrounding Ragnarök in the *Poetic Edda* include *aldar rök* ("end of the world") from stanza 39 of *Vafþrúðnismál*, *tíva rök* from stanzas 38 and 42 of *Vafþrúðnismál*, *þá er regin deyja* ("when the gods die") from *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 47, *unz um rjúfask regin* ("when the gods will be destroyed") from *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 52, *Lokasenna* stanza 41, and *Sigrdrífumál* stanza 19, *aldar rof* ("destruction of the world") from *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* stanza 41, *regin þrjóta* ("end of the gods") from *Hyndluljóð* stanza 42, and, in the *Prose Edda*, *þá er Muspellz-synir herja* ("when the sons of Muspell move into battle") can be found in chapters 18 and 36 of *Gylfaginning*.^[5]



The north portal of the 11th century Urnes stave church has been interpreted as containing depictions of snakes and dragons that represent Ragnarök.^[1]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

The *Poetic Edda* contains various references to Ragnarök:

Völuspá

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, references to Ragnarök begin from stanza 40 until 58, with the rest of the poem describing the aftermath. In the poem, a *völva* recites information to Odin. In stanza 41, the *völva* says:



Then the Awful Fight Began (depiction by George Wright, 1908)



Odin and Fenrir, Freyr and Surt (depiction by Emil Doepler, 1905)



Thor and the Midgard Serpent (by Emil Doepler, 1905)



Battle of the Doomed Gods (by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine, 1882)



The twilight of the gods (by Willy Pogany, 1920)

Old Norse:

Fylliz fiörvi
feigra manna,
rýðr ragna siot
rauðom dreyra.
Svört verða sólskin
of sumor eptir,
veðr öll válynd
Vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?^[9]

English:

It sates itself on the life-blood
of fated men,
paints red the powers' homes
with crimson gore.
Black become the sun's beams
in the summers that follow,
weathers all treacherous.
Do you still seek to know? And what?^[9]

The völvu then describes three roosters crowing: In stanza 42, the jötunn herdsman Eggthér sits on a mound and cheerfully plays his harp while the crimson rooster Fjalar (Old Norse "hider, deceiver"^[10]) crows in the forest Gálgviðr. The golden rooster Gullinkambi crows to the Æsir in Valhalla, and the third, unnamed soot-red rooster crows in the halls of the underworld location of Hel in stanza 43.^[11]

After these stanzas, the völvu further relates that the hound Garmr produces deep howls in front of the cave of Gniphellir. Garmr's bindings break and he runs free. The völvu describes the state of humanity:

Bræðr muno beriaz	Brothers will fight
ok at þonom verða[z]	and kill each other,
muno systrungar	sisters' children
sifom spilla.	will defile kinship.
Hart er í heimi,	It is harsh in the world,
hórdómr mikill	whoredom rife
—skeggöld, skálmöld	—an axe age, a sword age
—skildir ro klofnir—	—shields are riven—
vindöld, vargöld—	a wind age, a wolf age—
áðr veröld steypiz.	before the world goes headlong.
Mun engi maðr	No man will have
gðrom þyrma. ^[12]	mercy on another. ^[12]

The "sons of Mím" are described as being "at play", though this reference is not further explained in surviving sources.^[13] Heimdall raises the Gjallarhorn into the air and blows deeply into it, and Odin converses with Mím's head. The world tree Yggdrasil shudders and groans. The jötunn Hrym comes from the east, his shield before him. The Midgard serpent Jörmungandr furiously writhes, causing waves to crash. "The eagle shrieks, pale-beaked he tears the corpse," and the ship Naglfar breaks free thanks to the waves made by Jormungandr and sets sail from the east. The fire jötnar inhabitants of Muspelheim come forth.^[14]

The völva continues that Jötunheimr, the land of the jötnar, is aroar, and that the Æsir are in council. The dwarves groan by their stone doors.^[12] Surtr advances from the south, his sword brighter than the sun. Rocky cliffs open and the jötnar women sink.^[15] People walk the road to Hel and heavens split apart.

The gods then do battle with the invaders: Odin is swallowed whole and alive fighting the wolf Fenrir, causing his wife Frigg her second great sorrow (the first being the death of her son, the god Baldr).^[16] The god Freyr fights Surtr and loses. Odin's son Víðarr avenges his father by rending Fenrir's jaws apart and stabbing it in the heart with his spear, thus killing the wolf. The serpent Jörmungandr opens its gaping maw, yawning widely in the air, and is met in combat by Thor. Thor, also a son of Odin and described here as protector of the earth, furiously fights the serpent, defeating it, but Thor is only able to take nine steps afterward before collapsing. After this, people flee their homes, and the sun becomes black while the earth sinks into the sea, the stars vanish, steam rises, and flames touch the heavens.^[17]

The völva sees the earth reappearing from the water, and an eagle over a waterfall hunting fish on a mountain. The surviving Æsir meet together at the field of Iðavöllr. They discuss Jörmungandr, great events of the past, and the runic alphabet. In stanza 61, in the grass, they find the golden game pieces that the gods are described as having once happily enjoyed playing games with long ago (attested earlier in the same poem). The reemerged fields grow without needing to be sown. The gods Höðr and Baldr return from Hel and live happily together.^[18]

The völva says that the god Hænir chooses wooden slips for divination, and that the sons of two brothers will widely inhabit the windy world. She sees a hall thatched with gold in Gimlé, where nobility will live and spend their lives pleasurably.^[18] Stanzas 65, found in the *Hauksbók* version of the poem, refers to a "powerful, mighty one" that "rules over everything" and who will arrive from above at the court of the gods (Old Norse *regindómr*),^[19] which has been interpreted as a Christian addition to the poem.^[20] In stanza 66, the völva ends her account with a description of the dragon Níðhöggr, corpses in his jaws, flying through the air. The völva then "sinks down."^[21] It is unclear if stanza 66 indicates that the völva is referring to the present time or if this is an element of the post-Ragnarök world.^[22]

Vafþrúðnismál

The Vanir god Njörðr is mentioned in relation to Ragnarök in stanza 39 of the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*. In the poem, Odin, disguised as "Gagnráðr" faces off with the wise jöttunn Vafþrúðnir in a battle of wits. *Vafþrúðnismál* references Njörðr's status as a hostage during the earlier Æsir-Vanir War, and that he will "come back home among the wise Vanir" at "the doom of men."^[23]

In stanza 44, Odin poses the question to Vafþrúðnir as to who of mankind will survive the "famous" Fimbulvetr ("Mighty Winter"^[24]). Vafþrúðnir responds in stanza 45 that those survivors will be Líf and Lífþrasir, and that they will hide in the forest of Hoddmímis holt, that they will consume the morning dew, and will produce generations of offspring. In stanza 46, Odin asks what sun will come into the sky after Fenrir has consumed the sun that exists. Vafþrúðnir responds that Sól will bear a daughter before Fenrir assails her, and that after Ragnarök this daughter will continue her mother's path.^[25]

In stanza 51, Vafþrúðnir states that, after Surtr's flames have been sated, Odin's sons Víðarr and Váli will live in the temples of the gods, and that Thor's sons Móði and Magni will possess the hammer Mjólnir. In stanza 52, the disguised Odin asks the jöttunn about Odin's own fate. Vafþrúðnir responds that "the wolf" will consume Odin, and that Víðarr will avenge him by sundering its cold jaws in battle. Odin ends the duel with one final question: what did Odin say to his son before preparing his funeral pyre? With this, Vafþrúðnir realizes that he is dealing with none other than Odin, whom he refers to as "the wisest of beings," adding that Odin alone could know this.^[26] Odin's message has been interpreted as a promise of resurrection to Baldr after Ragnarök.^[27]

Helgakviða Hundingsbana II

Ragnarök is briefly referenced in stanza 40 of the poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*. Here, the valkyrie Sigrún's unnamed maid is passing the deceased hero Helgi Hundingsbane's burial mound. Helgi is there with a retinue of men, surprising the maid. The maid asks if she is witnessing a delusion since she sees dead men riding, or if Ragnarök has occurred. In stanza 41, Helgi responds that it is neither.^[28]

Prose Edda

Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* quotes heavily from *Völuspá* and elaborates extensively in prose on the information there, though some of this information conflicts with that provided in *Völuspá*.



An illustration of Víðarr stabbing Fenrir while holding his jaws apart (by W. G. Collingwood, inspired by the Gosforth Cross, 1908)

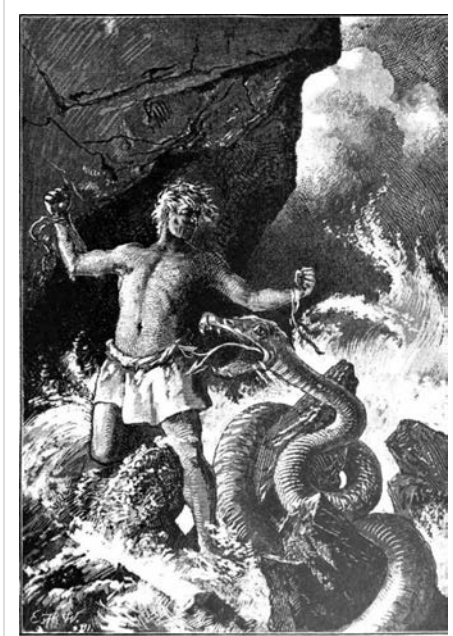


Fenrir and Odin (by Lorenz Frølich, 1895)

Gylfaginning chapters 26 and 34

In the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, various references are made to Ragnarök. Ragnarök is first mentioned in chapter 26, where the throned figure of High, king of the hall, tells Gangleri (King Gylfi in disguise) some basic information about the goddess Iðunn, including that her apples will keep the gods young until Ragnarök.^[29]

In chapter 34, High describes the binding of the wolf Fenrir by the gods, causing the god Týr to lose his right hand, and that Fenrir remains there until Ragnarök. Gangleri asks High why, since the gods could only expect destruction from Fenrir, they did not simply kill Fenrir once he was bound. High responds that "the gods hold their sacred places and sanctuaries in such respect that they chose not to defile them with the wolf's blood, even though the prophecies foretold that he would be the death of Odin."^[30] As a consequence of his role in the death of the god Baldr, Loki (described as father of Fenrir) is bound on top of three stones with the internal organs of his son Narfi (which are turned into iron) in three places. There, venom drops onto his face periodically from a snake placed by the jötunn Skaði, and when his wife Sigyn empties the bucket she is using to collect the dripping venom, the pain he experiences causes convulsions, resulting in earthquakes. Loki is further described as being bound this way until the onset of Ragnarök.^[31]



Loki breaks free at the onset of Ragnarök (by Ernst H. Walther, 1897)

Gylfaginning chapter 51

Chapter 51 provides a detailed account of Ragnarök interspersed with various quotes from *Völuspá*, while chapters 52 and 53 describe the aftermath of these events. In Chapter 51, High states the first sign of Ragnarök will be Fimbulvetr, during which time three winters will arrive without a summer, and the sun will be useless. High details that, prior to these winters, three earlier winters will have occurred, marked with great battles throughout the world. During this time, greed will cause brothers to kill brothers, and fathers and sons will suffer from the collapse of kinship bonds. High then quotes stanza 45 of *Völuspá*. Next, High describes that the wolf will first swallow the sun, and then his brother the moon, and mankind will consider the occurrence as a great disaster resulting in much ruin. The stars will disappear. The earth and mountains will shake so violently that the trees will come loose from the soil, the mountains will topple, and all restraints will break, causing Fenrir to break free from his bonds.^[32]

High relates that the great serpent Jörmungandr, also described as a child of Loki in the same source, will breach land as the sea violently swells onto it. The ship Naglfar, described in the *Prose Edda* as being made from the human nails of the dead, is released from its mooring, and sets sail on the surging sea, steered by a jötunn named Hrym. At the same time, Fenrir, eyes and nostrils spraying flames, charges forward with his mouth wide open, his upper jaw reaching to the heavens, his lower jaw touching the earth. At Fenrir's side, Jörmungandr sprays venom throughout the air and the sea.^[33]

During all of this, the sky splits into two. From the split, the "sons of Muspell" ride forth. Surtr rides first, surrounded by flames, his sword brighter than the sun. High says that "Muspell's sons" will ride across Bifröst, described in *Gylfaginning* as a rainbow bridge, and that the bridge will then break. The sons of Muspell (and their shining battle troop) advance to the field of Vígríðr, described as an expanse that reaches "a hundred leagues in each direction," where Fenrir, Jörmungandr, Loki (followed by "Hel's own"), and Hrym (accompanied by all frost jötnar) join them. While this occurs, Heimdallr stands and blows the Gjallarhorn with all his might. The gods awaken at the sound, and they meet. Odin rides to Mímir's Well in search of counsel from Mímir. Yggdrasil shakes, and everything, everywhere fears.^[33]

High relates that the Æsir and the Einherjar dress for war and head to the field. Odin, wearing a gold helmet and an intricate coat of mail, carries his spear Gungnir and rides before them. Odin advances against Fenrir, while Thor moves at his side, though Thor is unable to assist Odin because he has engaged Jörmungandr in combat. According to High, Freyr fiercely fights with Surtr, but Freyr falls because he lacks the sword he once gave to his messenger, Skirnir. The hound Garmr (described here as the "worst of monsters") breaks free from his bonds in front of Gniphellir, and fights the god Týr, resulting in both of their deaths.^[34]

Thor kills Jörmungandr, yet is poisoned by the serpent, and manages to walk nine steps before falling to the earth dead. Fenrir swallows Odin, though immediately afterward his son Víðarr kicks his foot into Fenrir's lower jaw, grips Fenrir's upper jaw, and rips apart Fenrir's mouth, killing Fenrir. Loki fights Heimdallr, and the two kill one another. Surtr covers the earth in fire, causing the entire world to burn. High quotes stanzas 46 to 47 of *Völuspá*, and additionally stanza 18 of *Vafþrúðnismál* (the latter relating information about the battlefield Vígríðr).^[34]

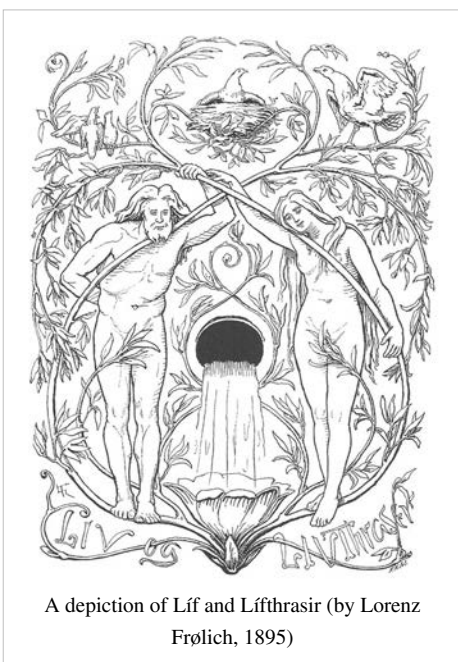


A scene from the last phase of Ragnarök, after Surtr has engulfed the world with fire (by Emil Doepler, 1905)

Gylfaginning chapters 52 and 53



The new world that rises after Ragnarök, as described in *Völuspá* (depiction by Emil Doepler)



A depiction of Líf and Lífthrasir (by Lorenz Frølich, 1895)

At the beginning of chapter 52, Gangleri asks "what will be after heaven and earth and the whole world are burned? All the gods will be dead, together with the Einherjar and the whole of mankind. Didn't you say earlier that each person will live in some world throughout all ages?"^[35]

The figure of Third, seated on the highest throne in the hall, responds that there will be many good places to live, but also many bad ones. Third states that the best place to be is Gimlé in the heavens, where a place exists called Okolnir that houses a hall called Brimir—where one can find plenty to drink. Third describes a hall made of red gold located in Niðafjöll called Sindri, where "good and virtuous men will live."^[35] Third further relates an unnamed hall in Náströnd, the beaches of the dead, that he describes as a large repugnant hall facing north that is built from the spines of snakes, and resembles "a house with walls woven from branches;" the heads of the snakes face the inside of the house and spew so much venom that rivers of it flow throughout the hall, in which oath breakers and murderers must wade. Third here quotes *Völuspá* stanzas 38 to 39, with the insertion of original prose stating that the worst place of all to be is in Hvergelmir, followed by a quote from *Völuspá* to highlight that the dragon Níðhöggr harasses the corpses of the dead there.^[35]

Chapter 53 begins with Gangleri asking if any of the gods will survive, and if there will be anything left of the earth or the sky. High responds that the earth will appear once more from the sea, beautiful and green, where self-sown crops grow. The field Iðavöllr exists where Asgard

once was, and, there, untouched by Surtr's flames, Víðarr and Váli reside. Now possessing their father's hammer Mjólnir, Thor's sons Móði and Magni will meet them there, and, coming from Hel, Baldr and Höðr also arrive. Together, they all sit and recount memories, later finding the gold game pieces the Æsir once owned. *Völuspá* stanza 51 is then quoted.^[36]

High reveals that two humans, Líf and Lífþrasir, will have also survived the destruction by hiding in the wood Hoddmímis holt. These two survivors consume the morning dew for sustenance, and from their descendants the world will be repopulated. *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 45 is then quoted. The personified sun, Sól, will have a daughter at least as beautiful as she, and this daughter will follow the same path as her mother. *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 47 is quoted, and so ends the foretelling of Ragnarök in *Gylfaginning*.^[36]

Archaeological record

Various objects have been identified as depicting events from Ragnarök.

Thorwald's Cross

Thorwald's Cross, a partially surviving runestone erected at Kirk Andreas on the Isle of Man, depicts a bearded human holding a spear downward at a wolf, his right foot in its mouth, while a large bird sits at his shoulder.^[37] Rundata dates it to 940,^[38] while Pluskowski dates it to the 11th century.^[37] This depiction has been interpreted as Odin, with a raven or eagle at his shoulder, being consumed by Fenrir at Ragnarök.^{[37][39]} On the other side of the stone is a depiction of a large cross and another image parallel to the Odin figure that has been described as Christ triumphing over Satan.^[40] These combined elements have led to the cross as being described as "syncretic art"; a mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs.^[37]



Thorwald's Cross, on the grounds of Kirk Andreas, Isle of Man

Gosforth Cross

The Gosforth Cross (920–950), in Cumbria, England, is a standing cross of a typical Anglo-Saxon form, carved on all sides of the long shaft, which is nearly square in section. Apart from panels of ornament, the scenes include a Christian *Crucifixion*, and possibly another scene in Hell, but the other scenes are generally interpreted as narrative incidents from the Ragnarök story,^[41] even by a scholar as cautious of such interpretations as David M. Wilson.^{[37][42]} The Ragnarök battle itself may be depicted on the north side.^[43] The cross features various figures depicted in Borre style, including a man with a spear facing a monstrous head, one of whose feet is thrust into the beast's forked tongue and on its lower jaw, while the other is placed against its upper jaw, a scene interpreted as Víðarr fighting Fenrir.^[37]

Ledberg stone

The 11th century Ledberg stone in Sweden, similarly to Thorwald's Cross, features a figure with his foot at the mouth of a four-legged beast, and this may also be a depiction of Odin being devoured by Fenrir at Ragnarök.^[39] Below the beast and the man is a depiction of a legless, helmeted man, with his arms in a prostrate position.^[39] The Younger Futhark inscription on the stone bears a commonly seen memorial dedication, but is followed by an encoded runic sequence that has been described as "mysterious,"^[44] and "an interesting magic formula which is known from all over the ancient Norse world."^[39]

Skarpåker stone

On the early 11th century Skarpåker Stone, from Södermanland, Sweden, a father grieving his dead son used the same verse form as in the *Poetic Edda* in the following engraving:



A composite image of three different angles of the Ledberg stone

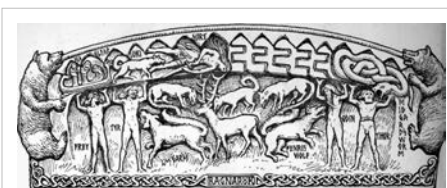
<i>Iarð skal rifna</i>	"Earth shall be riven
<i>ok upphiminn</i>	and the over-heaven."

Jansson (1987) notes that at the time of the inscription, everyone who read the lines would have thought of Ragnarök and the allusion that the father found fitting as an expression of his grief.^[45]

Theories and interpretations

Cyclical time

Rudolf Simek theorizes that the survival of Líf and Lífþrasir at the end Ragnarök is "a case of reduplication of the anthropogeny, understandable from the cyclic nature of the Eddic eschatology". Simek says that *Hoddmímis holt* "should not be understood literally as a wood or even a forest in which the two keep themselves hidden, but rather as an alternative name for the world-tree Yggdrasill. Thus, the creation of mankind from tree trunks (*Askr*, *Embla*) is repeated after the Ragnarök as well". Simek says that in Germanic regions, the concept of mankind originating from trees is ancient, and additionally points out legendary parallels in a Bavarian legend of a shepherd who lives inside a tree, whose descendants repopulate the land after life there has been wiped out by plague (citing a retelling by F. R. Schröder). In addition, Simek points to an Old Norse parallel in the figure of Örvar-Oddr, "who is rejuvenated after living as a tree-man (*Örvar-Odds saga* 24–27)".^[46]



Ragnarök (motive from the Heysham hogback)
(by W. G. Collingwood, 1908)

Muspille, Heliand, and Christianity

Theories have been proposed about the relation to Ragnarök and the 9th century Old High German epic poem *Muspilli* about the Christian Last Judgment, where the word *Muspille* appears, and the 9th century Old Saxon epic poem *Heliand* about the life of Christ, where various other forms of the word appear. In both sources, the word is used to signify the end of the world through fire.^[47] Old Norse forms of the term also appear throughout accounts of Ragnarök, where the world is also consumed in flames, and, though various theories exist about the meaning and origins of the term, its etymology has not been solved.^[47]

Proto-Indo-European basis

Parallels have been pointed out between the Ragnarök of the Norse pagans and the beliefs of other related Indo-European peoples. Subsequently, theories have been put forth that Ragnarök represents a later evolution of a Proto-Indo-European belief along with other cultures descending from the Proto-Indo-Europeans. These parallels include comparisons of a cosmic winter motif between the Norse Fimbulwinter, the Iranian Bundahishn and Yima.^[48] Víðarr's stride has been compared to the Vedic god Vishnu in that both have a "cosmic stride" with a special shoe used to tear apart a beastly wolf.^[48] Larger patterns have also been drawn between "final battle" events in Indo-European cultures, including the occurrence of a blind or semi-blind figure in "final battle" themes, and figures appearing suddenly with surprising skills.^[48]

Volcanic eruptions

Hilda Ellis Davidson theorizes that the events in *Völuspá* occurring after the death of the gods (the sun turning black, steam rising, flames touching the heavens, etc.) may be inspired by the volcanic eruptions on Iceland. Records of eruptions on Iceland bear strong similarities to the sequence of events described in *Völuspá*, especially the eruption at Laki that occurred in 1783.^[49] Bertha Phillpotts theorizes that the figure of Surtr was inspired by Icelandic eruptions, and that he was a volcano demon.^[50] Surtr's name occurs in some Icelandic place names, among them the lava tube caves Surtshellir, a number of dark caverns in the volcanic central region of Iceland.

Bergbúa þáttur

Parallels have been pointed out between a poem spoken by a jötunn found in the 13th century þáttur *Bergbúa þáttur* ("the tale of the mountain dweller"). In the tale, Thórd and his servant get lost while traveling to church in winter, and so take shelter for the night within a cave. Inside the cave they hear noises, witness a pair of immense burning eyes, and then the being with burning eyes recites a poem of 12 stanzas. The poem the being recites contains references to Norse mythology (including a mention of Thor) and also prophecies (including that "mountains will tumble, the earth will move, men will be scoured by hot water and burned by fire"). Surtr's fire receives a mention in stanza 10. John Lindow says that the poem may describe "a mix of the destruction of the race of giants and of humans, as in Ragnarök" but that "many of the predictions of disruption on earth could also fit the volcanic activity that is so common in Iceland."^[51]



The downfall of the Æsir (by Karl Ehrenberg, 1882)

Notes

- [1] Fazio, Moffet, Wodehouse (2003:201).
- [2] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Ragnarök," <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50196452> (subscription needed) . Retrieved April 23, 2009.
- [3] Merriam-Webster
- [4] See e.g. Bjordvand and Lindemann (2007:856–857).
- [5] Simek (2000:259).
- [6] Haraldur Bernharðsson (2007:30–32).
- [7] Haraldur Bernharðsson (2007:35).
- [8] Lindow (2001:254).
- [9] Dronke (1997:18).
- [10] Orchard (1997:43).
- [11] Larrington (1996:9).
- [12] Dronke (1997:19).
- [13] Larrington (1996:265).
- [14] Larrington (1996:10).
- [15] Bellows (2004:22).
- [16] Larrington (1996:266).
- [17] Bellows (2004:23).
- [18] Larrington (1996:12).
- [19] Simek (2007:262)
- [20] Lindow (2001:257).
- [21] Larrington (1996:13).
- [22] Larrington (1996:3).
- [23] Larrington (1999:46).
- [24] Lindow (2001:115).
- [25] Larrington (1999:47).
- [26] Larrington (1999:48–49).
- [27] Larrington (1999:269).
- [28] Larrington (1999:139).
- [29] Byock (2005:36).
- [30] Byock (2005:42).
- [31] Byock (2005:70).
- [32] Byock (2005:71–72).
- [33] Byock (2005:72).
- [34] Byock (2005:73).
- [35] Byock (2005:76).
- [36] Byock (2005:77).
- [37] Pluskowski (2004:158).
- [38] Entry Br Olsen;185A in Rundata 2.0
- [39] Jansson (1987:152)
- [40] Hunter, Ralston (1999:200).
- [42] Wilson, David M.; *Anglo-Saxon: Art From The Seventh Century To The Norman Conquest*, pp. 149–150, Thames and Hudson (US edn. Overlook Press), 1984.
- [43] Orchard (1997:13).
- [44] MacLeod, Mees (2006:145).
- [45] Jansson (1987:141)
- [46] Simek (2007:189). For Schröder, see Schröder (1931).
- [47] Simek (2007:222–224).
- [48] Mallory, Adams (1997:182–183).
- [49] Davidson (1990:208–209).
- [50] Phillpotts (1905:14 ff.) in Davidson (1990:208).
- [51] Lindow (2001:73–74).

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Others

Ask and Embla

In Norse mythology, **Ask and Embla** (from Old Norse *Askr ok Embla*)—male and female respectively—were the first two humans, created by the gods. The pair are attested in both the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In both sources, three gods, one of whom is Odin, find Ask and Embla and bestow upon them various corporeal and spiritual gifts. A number of theories have been proposed to explain the two figures, and there are occasional references to them in popular culture.



"Hœnir, Lóðurr and Odin create Ask and Embla" (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Etymology

Old Norse *askr* literally means "ash tree" but the etymology of *embla* is uncertain, and two possibilities of the meaning of *embla* are generally proposed. The first meaning, "elm tree", is problematic, and is reached by deriving **Elm-la* from **Almilōn* and subsequently to *almr* ("elm").^[1] The second suggestion is "vine", which is reached through **Ambilō*, which may be related to the Greek term *ámpelos*, itself meaning "vine, liana".^[1] The latter etymology has resulted in a number of theories.

According to Benjamin Thorpe "Grimm says the word *embla*, *emla*, signifies a busy woman, from *amr*, *ambr*, *aml*, *ambl*, assiduous labour; the same relation as *Meshia* and *Meshiane*, the ancient Persian names of the first man and woman, who were also formed from trees."^[2]

Attestations

In stanza 17 of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, the *völva* reciting the poem states that Hœnir, Lóðurr and Odin once found Ask and Embla on land. The *völva* says that the two were capable of very little, lacking in *þrlög* and says that they were given three gifts by the three gods:



A depiction of Ask and Embla (1919) by Robert Engels.

<p>Old Norse:</p> <p><i>Qnd þau né áttu, óð þau né hefðu, lá né læti né lito góða. Qnd gaf Óðinn, óð gaf Hæmir, lá gaf Lóðurr ok lito góða.^[3]</i></p>	<p>Benjamin Thorpe translation:</p> <p>Spirit they possessed not, sense they had not, blood nor motive powers, nor goodly colour. Spirit gave Odin, sense gave Hæmir, blood gave Lodur, and goodly colour.^[4]</p>	<p>Henry Adams Bellows translation:</p> <p>Soul they had not, sense they had not, Heat nor motion, nor goodly hue; Soul gave Othin, sense gave Hömir, Heat gave Lothur and goodly hue.^[5]</p>
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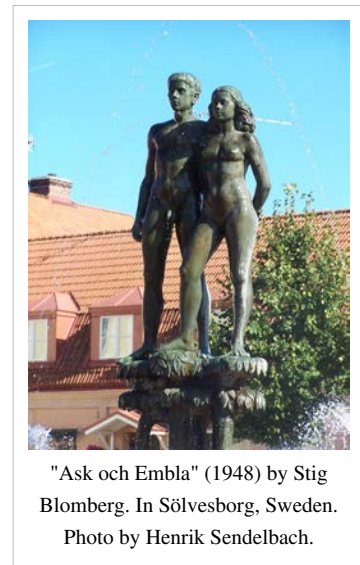
The meaning of these gifts has been a matter of scholarly disagreement and translations therefore vary.^[6]

According to chapter 9 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the three brothers Vili, Vé, and Odin, are the creators of the first man and woman. The brothers were once walking along a beach and found two trees there. They took the wood and from it created the first human beings; Ask and Embla. One of the three gave them the breath of life, the second gave them movement and intelligence, and the third gave them shape, speech, hearing and sight. Further, the three gods gave them clothing and names. Ask and Embla go on to become the progenitors of all humanity and were given a home within the walls of Midgard.^[7]

Theories

A Proto-Indo-European basis has been theorized for the duo based on the etymology of *embla* meaning "vine." In Indo-European societies, an analogy is derived from the drilling of fire and sexual intercourse. Vines were used as a flammable wood, where they were placed beneath a drill made of harder wood, resulting in fire. Further evidence of ritual making of fire in Scandinavia has been theorized from a depiction on a stone plate on a Bronze Age grave in Kivik, Scania, Sweden.^[1]

A preceding stanza to the account of the creation of Ask and Embla in *Völuspá* provides a catalog of dwarfs, and stanza 10 has been considered as describing the creation of human forms from the earth. This may potentially mean that dwarfs formed humans, and that the three gods gave them life.^[8] Carolyne Larrington theorizes that humans are metaphorically designated as trees in Old Norse works (examples include "trees of jewellery" for women and "trees of battle" for men) due to the origin of humankind stemming from trees; Ask and Embla.^[9]



"Ask och Embla" (1948) by Stig Blomberg. In Sölvesborg, Sweden.
Photo by Henrik Sendelbach.

Two wooden figures of "more than human height" were unearthed from a peat bog at Braak in Schleswig, Germany. The figures depict a nude male and a nude female. Hilda Ellis Davidson comments that these figures may represent a "Lord and Lady" of the Vanir, a group of Norse gods, and that "another memory of [these wooden deities] may survive in the tradition of the creation of Ask and Embla, the man and woman who founded the human race, created by the gods from trees on the seashore".^[10]

A figure named Æsc (Old English "ash tree") appears as the son of Hengest in the Anglo-Saxon genealogy for the kings of Kent. This has resulted in an amount of theories that the figures may have had an earlier basis in pre-Norse Germanic mythology.^[11]

Connections have been proposed between Ask and Embla and the Vandal kings Assi and Ambri, attested in Paul the Deacon's 7th century AD work *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*. There, the two ask the god Godan (Odin) for victory. The name *Ambri*, like *Embla*, likely derives from **Ambilō*.^[1]

In his study of the comparative evidence for an origin of mankind from trees in Indo-European society, Anders Hultgård observes that "myths of the origin of mankind from trees or wood seem to be particularly connected with ancient Europe and Indo-Europe and Indo-European-speaking peoples of Asia Minor and Iran. By contrast the cultures of the Near East show almost exclusively the type of anthropogonic stories that derive man's origin from clay, earth or blood by means of a divine creation act".^[12]

Modern influence

Ask and Embla have been the subject of a number of references and artistic depictions. A sculpture depicting the two stands in the southern Swedish city of Sölvesborg, created in 1948 by Stig Blomberg. Ask and Embla are depicted on two of the sixteen wooden panels found on the Oslo City Hall in Oslo, Norway by Dagfin Werenskiöld.^[1] In 2003, Faroese artist Anker Eli Petersen included a depiction of the couple in his series of Faroe Islands stamps.

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:74).
- [2] Thorpe (1907:337).
- [3] Dronke (1997:11).
- [4] Thorpe (1866:5).
- [5] Bellows (1936:8).
- [6] Schach (1985:93).
- [7] Byock (2006:18).
- [8] Lindow (2001:62—63).
- [9] Larrington (1999:279).
- [10] Davidson (1975:88—89).
- [11] Orchard (1997:8).
- [12] Hultgård (2006:62).

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Borr

Borr or **Burr**^[1] (Old Norse: 'son';^[2] sometimes anglicized **Bor**, **Bör** or **Bur**) was the son of Búri, the husband of Bestla, and the father of Odin and his brothers in Norse mythology.

Attestation

Borr is mentioned in the fourth verse of the *Völuspá*, a poem contained in the *Poetic Edda*, and in the sixth chapter of the *Gylfaginning*, part of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*.

Völuspá

Original Text:^[3]

Áðr Burs synir
bjóðum umb ypðu,
þeir er Miðgarð
mæran skópu.

Bellow's Translation:^[4]

Then Bur's sons lifted
the level land,
Mithgarth the mighty
there they made.

Gylfaginning

Original Text:^[5]

Hann [Búri] gat son þann er Borr hét,
hann fekk þeirar konu er Bes[t]la hét,
dóttir Bölþorns iötuns, ok fengu þau .iii. [þrjá] sonu,
hét einn Óðinn, annarr Vili, .iii. [þriði] Vé.

Brodeur's translation

[Búri] begat a son called Borr,
who wedded the woman named Bestla,
daughter of Bölthorn the giant; and they had three sons:
one was Odin, the second Vili, the third Vé.

Borr is not mentioned again in the *Prose Edda*. In skaldic and eddaic poetry Odin is occasionally referred to as *Borr's son* but no further information on Borr is given.

Theories and interpretations

The role of Borr in Norse mythology is unclear. 19th century German scholar Jacob Grimm proposed to equate Borr with Mannus as related in Tacitus' *Germania* on the basis of the similarity in their functions in Germanic theogeny.^[6] 19th century Icelandic scholar and archaeologist Finnur Magnússon hypothesized that Borr was "intended to signify [...] the first mountain or mountain-chain, which it was deemed by the forefathers of our race had emerged from the waters in the same region where the first land made its appearance. This mountain chain is probably the Caucasus, called by the Persians *Borz* (the genitive of the Old Norse *Borr*). Bör's wife, Belsta or Bestla, a daughter of the giant Bölthorn (*spina calamitosa*), is possibly the mass of ice formed on the alpine summits."^[7] In his *Lexicon Mythologicum*, published four years later, he modified his theory to claim that Borr symbolized the earth, and Bestla the ocean, which gave birth to Odin as the "world spirit" or "great soul of the earth" (*spiritus mundi nostri; terrae magna anima, aëris et auræ numen*), Vili or Hoenir as the "heavenly light" (*lux, imprimis coelestis*) and Vé or Lódur as "fire" (*ignis, vel elementalis vel proprie sic dictus*).^[8]

Notes

- [1] The *Konungsbók* or *Codex Regius* MS of the *Völuspá* reads *Búrr*; the *Hauksbók* MS reads *Borr*. Cf. Nordal (1980:31). The latter form alone was used by 13th century historian and poet Snorri Sturluson. Cf. Simek (1988:54).
- [2] Lindow (2001:90). Thorpe interprets the names *Buri* and *Bör* to signify "the producing" or "the bringer forth" and "the produced" or "the brought forth" respectively, linking both to Sanskrit *bâras*, Gothic *baurs*, Latin *por*, *puer*. Cf. Thorpe (1851:4; 141-2).
- [3] Cf. Nordal (1980:31).
- [4] Bellows (1923:4).
- [5] Cf. Lorenz (1984:136).
- [6] "Must not *Buri*, *Börr*, *Oðinn* be parallel, though under other names, to *Tvisco*, *Mannus*, *Inguio*? Inguio has two brothers at his side, Iscio and Hermino, as Oðinn has Vili and Ve; we should then see the reason why the names Týski (Tvisco, i.e. Tuisto) and Maðr (Mannus) are absent from the Edda, because Buri and Börr are their substitutes." Grimm (1883:349).
- [7] Magnusen (1824:42). Quoted in Millet (1847:486-7).
- [8] Millet (1847:487).

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Búri

Búri (or **Buri**) was the first god in Norse mythology. He is the father of Borr and grandfather of Odin, Vili and Ve. He was formed by the cow Auðumbla licking the salty ice of Ginnungagap. The only extant source of this myth is Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*.



Búri is licked out of a salty ice-block by the cow Auðumbla in this illustration from an 18th-century Icelandic manuscript.

Hon sleikti hrímsteinana er saltir váru. Ok hinn fyrsta <dag> er hon sleikti steina, kom ór steininum at kveldi manns hár, annan dag manns höfuð, þriðja dag var þar allr maðr. Sá er nefndr Búri. Hann var fagr álitum, mikill ok máttugr. Hann gat son þann er Borr hét.^[1]

She licked the ice-blocks, which were salty; and the first day that she licked the blocks, there came forth from the blocks in the evening a man's hair; the second day, a man's head; the third day the whole man was there. He is named Búri: he was fair of feature, great and mighty. He begat a son called Borr[.] – Brodeur's translation

Búri is mentioned nowhere in the *Poetic Edda* and only once in the skaldic corpus. In *Skáldskaparmál* Snorri Sturluson quotes the following verse by the 12th century skald **Þórvaldr blönduskáld**.

*Nú hefk mart
í miði greipat
burar Bors,
Búra arfa.*^[2]

Now have I snatched
much of the mead [made a lot of poetry]
of Buri's heir
Bor's son [Odin] – Faulkes' translation

Búri's name



Búri is licked out of the ice by Auðumbla in this 18th-century painting by Nicolai Abraham Abildgaard (1790)

The length of the u in the name is not explicitly marked in the manuscripts but it is traditionally assumed to be long because of its metrical position in Þórvaldr's stanza. However, the metrical structure of fornyrðislag is hardly strict enough for definite conclusions to be reached from a single occurrence - especially when the imperfect oral and manuscript traditions are taken into account. It is thus entirely possible that the original form was *Buri*.

The meaning of either *Búri* or *Buri* is not known. The first could be related to *búr* meaning "storage room" and the second could be related to *burr* meaning "son". "Buri" may mean "producer".

In any case the form *Buri* is often used in an ASCII context or as an anglicization of *Búri*. In the mainland

Scandinavian languages *Bure* is used as a familiar form.

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[1] Normalized text of R (<http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/gg/gg4par06.html>)

[2] Finnur Jónsson's edition (<http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/ugm/skindex/tblond.html>)

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Dís

In Norse mythology, a **dís** ("lady", plural **dísir**) is a ghost, spirit or deity associated with fate who can be both benevolent and antagonistic towards mortal people. Dísir may act as protective spirits of Norse clans. Their original function was possibly that of fertility goddesses who were the object of both private and official worship called *dísablót*,^[1] and their veneration may derive from the worship of the spirits of the dead.^[2] The *dísir*, like the valkyries, *norns*, and *vættir*, are almost always referred to collectively.^{[1][3]} The North Germanic *dísir* and West Germanic *Idisi* are believed by some scholars to be related due to linguistic and mythological similarities,^[4] but the direct evidence of Anglo-Saxon and Continental German mythology is limited. The *dísir* play roles in Norse texts that resemble those of *fylgjur*, valkyries, and *norns*, so that some have suggested *dísir* is a broad term including the other beings.^[2]

Etymology and meaning

The basic meaning of the word *dís* is "goddess".^{Wikipedia:Disputed statement}^[5] It is now usually derived from the Indo-European root **dhēi-*, "to suck, suckle" and a form *dhī́sana*.^[6]

Scholars have associated the *dísir* with the West Germanic *Idisi*,^[4] seeing the initial *i-* as having been lost early in Old or Proto-Norse. Jacob Grimm points out that *dís Skjöldunga* in the Eddic *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (v. 52) is exactly parallel to *ides Scildinga* "Scylding queen" in *Beowulf* (l. 1168).^[7] He also suggests that *Iðunn* may be a reflex of the original form of the word.^[8] However, except for the Second Merseburg Charm, in which they work battle-magic, *idis* only occurs with the meaning "lady," sometimes "maiden."^{[9][10]} The words are not assumed to be directly related by some scholars, although the resemblance evidently led to influence on Old Norse poetic usage.^[11]

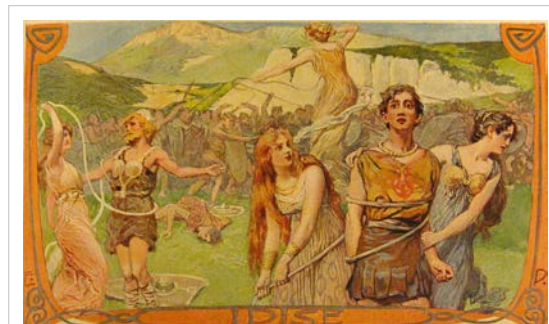
Other scholars group all female spirits and deities associated with battle under the class of *idis*, *dis*, valkyrie and other names such as *sigewif* (victory-women, associated by the Anglo-Saxons with a swarm of bees) and find the commonalities both linguistically and in surviving myths and variations on this theme from various



"The Dises" (1909) by Dorothy Hardy.



The dying Viking hero Ragnar Lodbrok exclaimed in *Krákumál*: "the *dísir* invite me home (to Valhalla)". This is an illustration of a lady welcoming Odin back to Valhalla on the Tjängvide image stone, Gotland.

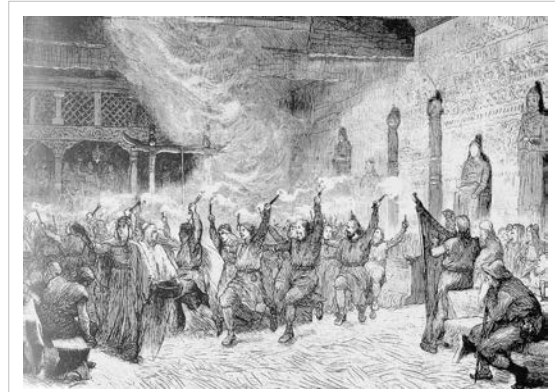


"Idise" (1905) by Emil Doepler.

magic charms sufficient cause to group together all Germanic cultures.^[4] Stories from

these other cultures survive from earlier dates than the Eddas and it is difficult to conclusively construct a clear pre-Christian mythology without conjecture. However, the Germanic languages appear to have had a northward rather than southward progression from the initial contact with the speakers of Indo-European languages near Denmark or Jutland^[12] H. Davidson notes a similar northward progression of mythology where elements of Proto-Germanic concepts have morphed or been combined by the time of the recording of the Icelandic sagas.^[4]

According to Rudolf Simek, Old Norse *dís* appears commonly as simply a term for 'woman,' just as Old High German *itis*, Old Saxon *idis*, and Anglo-Saxon *ides*, and may have also been used to denote a type of goddess. According to Simek, "several of the Eddic sources might lead us to conclude that the *disir* were valkyrie-like guardians of the dead, and indeed in *Guðrúnarkviða* I 19 the valkyries are even called *Herjans disir* 'Odin's disir'. The *disir* are explicitly called dead women in *Atlamál* 28 and a secondary belief that the *disir* were the souls of dead women (see *fylgjur*) also underlies the *landdísir* of Icelandic folklore."^[13] Simek says that "as the function of the matrons was also extremely varied – fertility goddess, personal guardians, but also warrior-goddesses – the belief in the *dísir*, like the belief in the valkyries, norns, and matrons, may be considered to be different manifestations of a belief in a number of female (half-?) goddesses."^[13]



The *dísablót* by August Malmström.



The annual Disting fair still carries the name of the *dísir*. A scene from the Disting of 2008.

Dísablót

There is considerable evidence that the *dísir* were worshipped in Scandinavia in pagan times.

Firstly, a sacrificial festival (blót) honouring them, the *dísablót*, is mentioned in one version of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs* and in *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Egils saga* and the *Heimskringla*.^[14] According to *Víga-Glúms saga* it was held at Winter Nights (at the onset of winter).^[15] In *Hervarar saga*, the *dísablót* is also held in autumn, and is performed by a woman, the daughter of King Álfr of Álheim, who "reddens the *hörgr* with sacrifices and is subsequently rescued by the god Thor after she has been abducted; John Lindow suggests that the passage depicts a model of heathen behaviour.^[16] In western Scandinavia, *dísablót* appears to have been a private observance; even the large gathering in *Víga-Glúms saga* was for family and friends.^[17]

In contrast, according to the *Saga of St. Olaf* in *Heimskringla*, at Gamla Uppsala the *dísablót* was celebrated during the month of Góí, i.e. in late February or early March, and accompanied by a popular assembly known as the Thing of all Swedes or *Dísaping* and a yearly fair. When Christianity arrived, the assembly and market were moved to a Christian feast at the beginning of February:

At the time when heathendom still prevailed in Sweden, it was an old custom there that the main sacrifices were held in Uppsala in the month of Góí . . . Sacrifices were to be made at that time for peace and victory for the king, and people from all over Sweden were to resort there. At that place and time

also was to be the assembly of all Swedes, and there was also a market and a fair which lasted a week. Now when Christianity was introduced, the general assembly and the market were still held there. But at present, when Christianity is general in Sweden and the kings have ceased residing at Uppsala, the market has been shifted to meet at Candlemas; . . . but now it lasts only three days. The general assembly of the Swedes is there.^[18]

The name *Dísabing* (now *Disting*) remained in use, however, and the fair is still held every year in Uppsala on the first Tuesday in February and may be one of the oldest in Sweden.^[19]

The stated purpose of the *dísablót* at Uppsala is to sacrifice for peace and victory. Norwegian places called *Disin*, from Old Norse *Dísavin*, "meadow of the *dísir*," and the possible relationship of the word to the Indian *dhīsanās* have suggested to some scholars that the *dísir* were fertility figures.^[20]

There are also two mentions of a hall or temple of a *dís*. In the *Ynglinga saga* part of *Heimskringla*, Aðils, the king of Sweden, dies when he rides one of his horses around the *dísarsálr* at the time of *Dísablót* and he is thrown and brains himself on a rock.^[21] In addition, it also appears in *Hervarar saga* where Helga becomes so infuriated over the death of her father at the hands of Heiðrekr, her husband, that she hangs herself in the shrine.^[22]

Although Snorri Sturluson does not mention the *dísir* in the Prose Edda, he does list *Vanadís*—'dís of the Vanir'—as a name for Freyja, and *öndurdís*—'snow-shoe dís'—as a name for Skaði.^[23] Lotte Motz suggested that *dís* was the original Old Norse word for 'goddess' and had been replaced later by *ásynja*, which is simply the feminine of *áss*.^[24]

Relationship to other female figures

In many texts, the *dísir* are equated to or seem to play the same role as other female figures.

In *Þiðranda þáttur ok Þórhalls*, the youth Þiðrandi is killed by *dísir* dressed in black, riding black horses, while a troop of *dísir* dressed in white and riding white horses are unable to save him. The two groups represent the struggle between heathenry and Christianity. The benevolent *dísir* here play the role of tutelary spirits associated with a family, and Thorhall the Prophet explains them as *fylgjur*.^[25] The *dísir* are also referred to as if they are, or include, protective *fylgjur* in an exchange of verses in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*. Útsteinn quarrels with Úlfr at the court of King Eysteinn of Denmark, saying he believes "our *dísir*" have come with him, armed, to Denmark; Úlfr replies that he thinks all the *dísir* of Útsteinn and his men are dead and their luck run out.^[26]

In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, when the hero Helgi Hundingsbane first meets the valkyrie Sigrún, the poet calls her a "dís of the south"; Henry Adams Bellows rendered this simply "the southern maid".^[27]

The *dísir* are also equated with or play the role of norns. They give an impression of great age, but by the time of our texts, their significance had become blurred and the word had lost almost all distinct meaning.^[28]

Accordingly, some scholars have argued that *dísir* may be the original term for the valkyries (lit. "choosers of the slain"), which in turn would be a kenning for *dís*.^[29] As opposed to *valkyrja* and *norn*, the term *dís* never appears in the Prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson. As stated above, *dís* has been regarded as cognate with Old High German *itis*, Old Saxon *idis* and the Anglo-Saxon *ides*, all meaning "lady";^[2] and *idisi* appears as the name of the valkyries in the only surviving pagan source from Germany, the *Merseburg Incantations* (see below).^[30] *Dís* also had the meaning "lady" in Old Norse poetry^[2] as in the case of Freyja whose name itself means "lady" (*frawjō*) and who is called *Vanadís* ("lady of the vanir"). Adding to the ambiguous meaning of *dís* is the fact that just like supernatural women were called *dísir* in the sense "ladies", mortal women were frequently called by names for supernatural women, as noted by Snorri Sturluson in *Skáldskaparmál*:

“Woman is also metaphorically called by the names of the Asynjur or the Valkyrs or Norns or women of supernatural kind.”^[31]

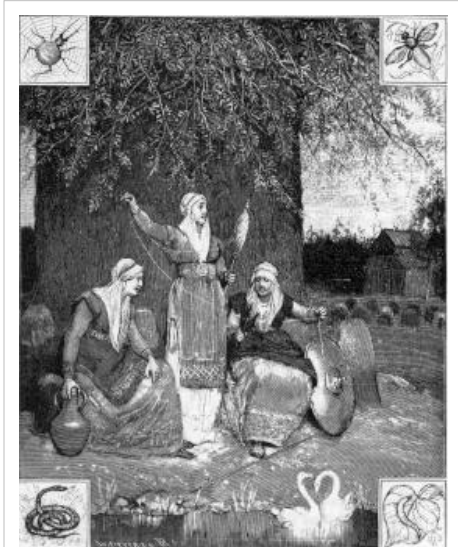
The name *dís* appears in several place names in Norway and Sweden.^[11] Moreover, it was a common element in girls' names as evidenced on runestones,^[32] and it still is in Iceland. The word appears as a first element in Old High

German female given names such as Itispuruc and Itislant. More frequent are Old Norse given names such as Thórdís, Hjördís, Ásdís, Vigdís, Halldís, Freydís.

Old Norse sources

The generic *dísir* appears instead of the more specific labels *norns*, *fylgjas* and *valkyries* in a couple of Eddic and skaldic poems, and in various kennings.

The eddic poem *Hamðismál* deals with how Hamðir and Sörli go to the Gothic king Ermanaric to exact vengeance for the cruel death of their half-sister Svanhild. On the way, they kill their reluctant brother Erpr. Knowing that he is about to die at the hands of the Goths, Sörli talks of the cruelty of the *dísir* who incited him to kill Erpr, who would have cut off the head of Ermanaric and made their expedition successful. In this poem, *dísir* appears as a synonym of *norn* and the translator Henry Adams Bellows simply translates *dísir* as *norns*:



The Norns spin the threads of fate at the foot of Yggdrasil, the tree of the world.

Hamðir kvað:

28. "Af væri nú höfuð,
ef Erpr lifði,
bróðir okkarr inn böðfrækni,
er vit á braut vágum,
verr inn vígfrækni,
- hvöttumk at dísir, -
gumi inn gunnhelgi,
- gerðumk at vígi -."

Sörli kvað:

29. "Ekki hygg ek okkr
vera ulfa dæmi,
at vit mynim sjalfir of sakask
sem grey norna,
þá er gráðug eru
í auðn of alin.^[33]

Hamther spake:

28. "His head were now off
if Erp were living,
The brother so keen
whom we killed on our road,
The warrior noble,--
'twas the Norns [*dísir*] that drove me
The hero to slay
who in fight should be holy.

-

29. "In fashion of wolves

it befits us not
Amongst ourselves to strive,
Like the hounds of the Norns,
that nourished were
In greed mid wastes so grim.^[34]

In *Grímnismál*, the wise Grímnir (Odin) predicts king Geirröðr's death, which he attributes to the wrath of the *dísir*. Again, *dísir* is used as a synonym for the *norns*.^[35]

Eggmóðan val	The fallen by the sword
nú mun Yggr hafa,	Ygg shall now have;
þitt veit ek líf of liðit;	thy life is now run out:
úfar ro dísir,	Wroth with thee are the dísir:
nú knáttu Óðin sjá,	Odin thou now shalt see:
nálgastu mik ef þú megir. ^[36]	draw near to me if thou canst. ^[37]

In *Reginsmál*, the unmarried girl Lyngheiðr is called *dís ulfhuguð* (dís/lady with the soul of a wolf) as an insult. Later in the same poem, there is a stanza, where the dísir appear as female spirits accompanying a warrior in order to see him dead in battle, a role where they are synonymous with valkyries:

Þat er fár mikit	Foul is the sign
ef þú fœti drepr,	if thy foot shall stumble
þars þú at vígi veðr,	As thou goest forth to fight;
tálar dísir,	Goddesses [dísir] baneful
standa þér á tvær hliðar	at both thy sides
ok vilja þik sáran sjá. ^[38]	Will that wounds thou shalt get. ^[39]

An additional instance where dís is synonymous with valkyrie is the skaldic poem *Krákumál* – composed by Ragnarr Loðbrók while awaiting his death in a snake pit. It features the line: *Heim bjóða mér dísir* (the dísir invite me home), as one of several poetic circumscriptions for what awaits him.

One source seems to describe the Dísir as the ghosts or spirits of dead women. In *Atlamál*, believed to have been written in Greenland in the 12th century, the character Glaumvör warns her husband Gunnar that she had a dream about the Dísir. Some of the surrounding text has been lost and it is not known what Gunnar may have said prior to this, and there is disagreement on which stanza number this should be given. A possible translation of the material is given as follows by John Lindow in his 2001 book *Norse Mythology*:

"I thought dead women
 came hither into the hall,
 not poorly decked out.
 They wished to choose you,
 would've invited you quickly
 to their benches;
 I declare of no value
 these dísir to you."

Notes

- [1] The article *Diser* in *Nationalencyklopedin* (1991).
- [2] The article *Dis* (<http://runeberg.org/nfbf/0272.html>) in *Nordisk familjebok* (1907).
- [3] Else Mundal, "The Position of the Individual Gods and Goddesses in Various Types of Sources - With Special Reference to the Female Divinities," (1990) Bergen Open Research Archive, pp. 310-11 ([https://bora.uib.no/bitstream/1956/671/1/The Position of the Individual Gods and Goddesses in Various Types of Sources...pdf](https://bora.uib.no/bitstream/1956/671/1/The%20Position%20of%20the%20Individual%20Gods%20and%20Goddesses%20in%20Various%20Types%20of%20Sources...pdf)) (pdf).
- [4] *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* by H. Davidson, Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 62-64, ISBN 0-14-013627-4
- [5] August Fick, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Indogermanischen Sprachen Part 3 Wortschatz der Germanischen Sprachinheit*, 4th ed. rev. Alf Torp, Hjalmar Falk, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1909, OCLC 491891019, "dís, dīsi," p. 206 (http://web.ff.cuni.cz/cgi-bin/uua_slovník/gmc_search_v3?cmd=viewthis&id=tp:b0206:7).
- [6] Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 2 vols., vol. 2, 2nd ed. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1957, repr. as 3rd ed. 1970, p. 299, note 2 (German); the etymology was proposed by K.F. Johansson, *Über die Altindische Göttin Dhisana und Verwandtes: Beiträge zum Fruchtbarkeitskultus in Indien*, Skrifter utgifna af Kungl. Vet. Samf. i Uppsala 20.1 (1918).
- [7] Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, tr. James Steven Stallybrass, 4 vols., vol. 1, London: Bell, 1882, p. 402 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=YxwAAAAQAQAJ&pg=PA403&dq=Grimm+Idunn&lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=4#v=onepage&q=doubt disappears on comparing&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=YxwAAAAQAQAJ&pg=PA403&dq=Grimm+Idunn&lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=4#v=onepage&q=doubt%20disappears%20on%20comparing&f=false)).
- [8] Grimm, vol. 1, pp. 402-3 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=YxwAAAAQAQAJ&pg=PA403&dq=Grimm+Idunn&lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=4#v=onepage&q=&f=false>); the promised treatment in the Supplement, vol. 4, does not appear to exist.
- [9] De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1956, repr. as 3rd ed. 1970, p. 322 (German).
- [10] E.O.G. Turville Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, London: Weidenfeld, 1964, p. 222 (http://books.google.com/books?lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=1&id=44AIAQAIAAJ&dq=Turville-Petre+Myth+and+Religion+of+the+North&q=woman+also+virgin#search_anchor).
- [11] Turville-Petre, p. 222 (http://books.google.com/books?lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=1&id=44AIAQAIAAJ&dq=Turville-Petre+Myth+and+Religion+of+the+North&q=later+scholars+have+favoured#search_anchor).
- [12] *A Linguistic History of English: From Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic* by Donald Ringe, Oxford University Press, 2009, ISBN 0-19-955229-0
- [13] Simek (2007:61–62).
- [14] "Disablot", *Nationalencyklopedin*.
- [15] Chapter 6, translated by John McKinnell, "Killer-Glum's Saga", *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, Volume 2, Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997, ISBN 9979-9293-0-8, pp. 267-314, p. 275: "A feast was held during the Winter Nights, and sacrifice made to the dísir, and everyone had to take part in this observance".
- [16] John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*, Oxford University Press, 2001, ISBN 0-19-515382-0, p. 94 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=KIT7tv3eMSwC&pg=PA97&dq=Lindow+dÅsir+dÅsablÅt&cd=1#v=onepage&q=mythological model for human behavior&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=KIT7tv3eMSwC&pg=PA97&dq=Lindow+d%26A%26sir+d%26Asabl%26t&cd=1#v=onepage&q=mythological%20model%20for%20human%20behavior&f=false)).
- [17] Turville-Petre, p. 221 (http://books.google.com/books?lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=1&id=44AIAQAIAAJ&dq=Turville-Petre+Myth+and+Religion+of+the+North&q=tutelary+goddesses#search_anchor).
- [18] Chapter 77; Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, tr. Lee M. Hollander, p. 315 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=qHpwje7-wNkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Hollander+Heimskringla&source=bl&ots=g3Frk5dQQP&sig=1wyUm1EiYlri4z6DnXG7o_D7wJI&hl=en&ei=au72S6vsKaPMMYqziIQI&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBUQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=main sacrifices were held at Uppsala in the month of&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=qHpwje7-wNkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Hollander+Heimskringla&source=bl&ots=g3Frk5dQQP&sig=1wyUm1EiYlri4z6DnXG7o_D7wJI&hl=en&ei=au72S6vsKaPMMYqziIQI&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBUQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=main%20sacrifices%20were%20held%20at%20Uppsala%20in%20the%20month%20of&f=false)).
- [19] The article *Distingen*, in the encyclopedia *Nationalencyklopedin*.
- [20] De Vries, pp. 298, 299.
- [21] Chapter 29; Hollander, p. 33 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=qHpwje7-wNkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Hollander+Heimskringla&source=bl&ots=g3Frk5dQQP&sig=1wyUm1EiYlri4z6DnXG7o_D7wJI&hl=en&ei=au72S6vsKaPMMYqziIQI&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBUQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=hall of the goddess&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=qHpwje7-wNkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Hollander+Heimskringla&source=bl&ots=g3Frk5dQQP&sig=1wyUm1EiYlri4z6DnXG7o_D7wJI&hl=en&ei=au72S6vsKaPMMYqziIQI&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBUQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=hall%20of%20the%20goddess&f=false)) translates *dísarsálr* "the hall of the goddess". See also Lindow, p. 94 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=KIT7tv3eMSwC&pg=PA97&dq=Lindow+dÅsir+dÅsablÅt&cd=1#v=snippet&q=hall of the dÅs&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=KIT7tv3eMSwC&pg=PA97&dq=Lindow+d%26A%26sir+d%26Asabl%26t&cd=1#v=snippet&q=hall%20of%20the%20d%26A%26s&f=false)), de Vries, p. 456 (German) suggests a ritual killing.
- [22] *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, tr. Christopher Tolkien, London: Nelson, 1960, OCLC 503375723, p. 26 ([http://books.google.com/books?lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=1&id=ouizAAAAIAAJ&dq=HeiÅrek+hangs+herself&q=hanged+herself+in+the+hall#search_anchor](http://books.google.com/books?lr=&client=firefox-a&cd=1&id=ouizAAAAIAAJ&dq=Hei%26A%26rek+hangs+herself&q=hanged+herself+in+the+hall#search_anchor)): "hanged herself in the hall of the dís".
- [23] *Gylfaginning* Chapter 35 (<http://www.voluspa.org/gylfaginning31-40.htm>), *Skáldskaparmál* Chapter 28 (<http://www.voluspa.org/skaldskaparmal21-30.htm>); Chapter 23 (<http://www.voluspa.org/gylfaginning21-30.htm>). In both cases the compound using dís immediately follows one using *göð*, 'deity': *Vanagoð, öndurgoð*.
- [24] Lotte Motz, "Sister in the Cave: The Stature and the Function of the Female Figures of the Eddas", *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 95 (1980) 168-82.
- [25] Turville-Petre, pp. 222-24. De Vries p. 297 also draws special attention to this story as an example of the dísir drawing close to fylgjur.
- [26] *Hygg við hjálmum | hingat komnar | til Danmerkr | dísir várar. . . . at Netútgáfan in modernised spelling* (<http://www.snerpa.is/net/forn/halfs.htm>), ch. 15; "Dead must be | All your dísir; | Luck is gone, I say, | from Hálf's warriors", translation in *Hilda Roderick Ellis*

- [Davidson], *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1943, repr. New York: Greenwood, 1968, OCLC 442899, p. 134.
- [27] Verse 16, *dísir suðrænar*, Old Norse and translation at voluspa.org (<http://www.voluspa.org/helgakvidahundingsbana116-20.htm>).
- [28] De Vries, p. 298.
- [29] Including: Ström, Folke (1954) *Diser, nornor, valkyrjor: Fruktberhetskult och sakralt kungadöme i Norden*; Näsström, Britt-Mari (1995) *Freyja: The Great Goddess of the North*; and Hall, Alaric (2004) *The Meanings of Elf, and Elves, in Medieval England* (<http://www.alarichall.org.uk/ahphdprol.pdf>).
- [30] Calvin, Thomas. 'An Anthology of German Literature', D. C. Heath & co. ASIN: B0008BTK3E,B00089RS3K. P5.
- [31] *Skáldskaparmál* (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose/141144.php>) in translation by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (1916), at northvegr.org
- [32] Rundata
- [33] *Hamðismál* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/hamdismal.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [34] *The Ballad of Hamther* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe37.htm>) in translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [35] See Bellows' commentary (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe06.htm>)
- [36] *Grímnismál* (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/poeticon/003.php>) at northvegr.org
- [37] Thorpe's translation (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/poetic2/003_02.php) at northvegr.org
- [38] *Reginismál* (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/poeticon/024.php>) at northvegr.org
- [39] Bellows' translation (<http://northvegr.org/lore/poetic/021.php>) at northvegr.org

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Norns

The **Norns** (Old Norse: *norn*, plural: *nornir*) in Norse mythology^[1] are female beings who rule the destiny of gods and men, possibly a kind of *dísir* (see below), and comparable to the Fates in Greek mythology.

According to Snorri Sturluson's interpretation of the *Völuspá*, the three most important norns, Urðr (Wyrd), Verðandi and Skuld come out from a hall standing at the Well of Urðr (well of fate) and they draw water from the well and take sand that lies around it, which they pour over Yggdrasill so that its branches will not rot.^[2] These norns are described as three powerful maiden giantesses (Jotuns) whose arrival from Jötunheimr ended the golden age of the gods.^[2] They may be the same as the maidens of Mögþrasir who are described in *Vafþrúðnismál* (see below).^[2]

Beside these three norns, there are many other norns who arrive when a person is born in order to determine his or her future.^[2] There were both malevolent and benevolent norns, and the former caused all the malevolent and tragic events in the world while the latter were kind and protective goddesses.^[2] Recent research has discussed the relation between the myths associated with norns and valkyries and traveling *Völvas* (*seiðr*-workers). The norns were thought to have visited newborn children in the pre-Christian Norse societies.^[3]



Norns within skaldic references are often seen as negative beings that are mostly associated with transitional situations such as violent death and battle. In Egil's Saga, Kveldulf composes a poem lamenting the loss of his eldest son Thorolf.^[4] Here, what is stressed is the personal tragedy felt by Kveldulf and the sense that what happened was out of his control or in the hands of fate. It is presumed that Óðinn has chosen Thorolf to be among his einherjar so Bek-Pedersen suggests that since Óðinn has caused the death then the norn has caused the emotional turmoil.^[5] Another negative aspect associated with the norns is that they are associated with death (see Skaldic Poetry). Not all aspects of the norns were negative, however, as they were associated with life and birth as well (see *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* and *Gylfaginning*).

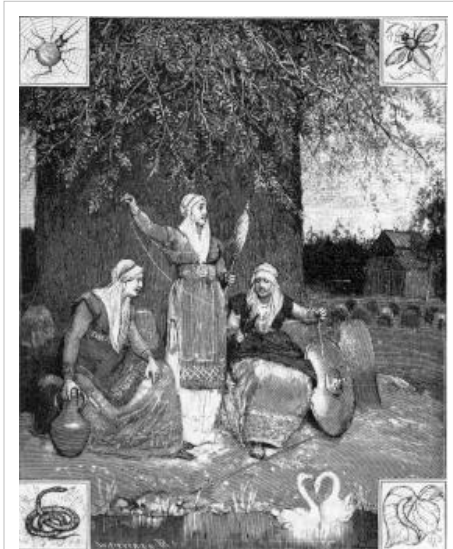
Etymology

The origin of the name *norn* is uncertain, it may derive from a word meaning "to twine" and which would refer to their twining the thread of fate.^[2] Bek-Pedersen suggests that the word *norn* has relation to the Swedish dialect word *norna* (*nyrna*), a verb that means "secretly communicate". This relates to the perception of norns as shadowy, background figures who only really ever reveal their fateful secrets to men as their fates come to pass.^[6]

The name *Urðr* (Old English *Wyrd*, *Weird*) means "fate". It should be noted that *wyrd* and *urðr* are etymological cognates, which does not guarantee that *wyrd* and *urðr* share the same semantic quality of "fate" over time.^[7] Both *Urðr* and *Verðandi* are derived from the Old Norse verb *verða*, "to be".^[1] While *Urðr* derives from the past tense ("that which became or happened"), *Verðandi* derives from the present tense of *verða* ("that which is happening"). *Skuld* is derived from the Old Norse verb *skulla*, "need/ought to be/shall be";^{[2][1]} its meaning is "that which should become, or that needs to occur".^[1]

Relation to other Germanic female deities

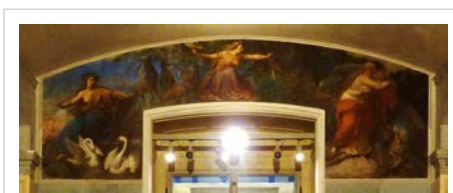
There is no clear distinction between norns, fylgjas, hamingjas and valkyries, nor with the generic term *dísir*. Moreover, artistic license permitted such terms to be used for mortal women in Old Norse poetry, or to quote Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* on the various names used for women:



The Norns spin the threads of fate at the foot of Yggdrasil, the tree of the world. Beneath them is the well Urðarbrunnr with the two swans that have engendered all the swans in the world.



The Norns (1889) by Johannes Gehrts.



Fresco of the Norns in Neues Museum, Berlin

Woman is also metaphorically called by the names of the Asynjur or the Valkyrs or Norns or women of supernatural kind.^[8]

These unclear distinctions among norns and other Germanic female deities are discussed in Bek-Pedersen's book *Norns in old Norse Mythology*, as well as, in Lionarons article "Disir, Valkyries, Volur, and Norns: The Weise Frauen of the Deutsche Mythologie"(See references).

Attestations

There are a number of surviving Old Norse sources that relate to the norns. The most important sources are the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda. The latter contains pagan poetry where the norns are frequently referred to, while the former contains, in addition to pagan poetry, retellings, descriptions and commentaries by the 12th and 13th century Icelandic chieftain and scholar Snorri Sturluson.



Mímer and Balder Consulting the Norns
(1821-1822) by H. E. Freund.

Skaldic Poetry

A skaldic reference to the norns appears in Hvini's poem in *Ynglingatal* 24 found in *Ynglingasaga* 47, where King Halfdan is put to rest by his men at Borró. This reference brings in the phrase "*norna dómr*" which means "judgment of the nornir". In most cases, when the norns pass judgment, it means death to those who have been judged - in this case, Halfdan.^[9] Along with being associated with being bringers of death, Bek-Pedersen suggests that this phrase brings in a quasi-legal aspect to the nature of the norns. This legal association is employed quite frequently within skaldic and eddic sources. This phrase can also be seen as a threat, as death is the final and inevitable decision that the norns can make with regard to human life.^[10]

Ok til þings	And to a meeting
Þriðja jöfri	Hveðrungr's maid
Hveðrungs mæ	called the third king
ór heimi bauð	from the world,
pás Halfdan,	at the time when Halfdan,
sás Holtum bjó,	he who lived at Holt,
norna dóms	had embraced
of notit hafði.	the judgment of the nornir;
Ok buðlung	and at Borró
á Borrói	the victorious men
sigrhafendr	later did hide
síðan fólu. ^[11]	the king. ^[12]

Poetic Edda

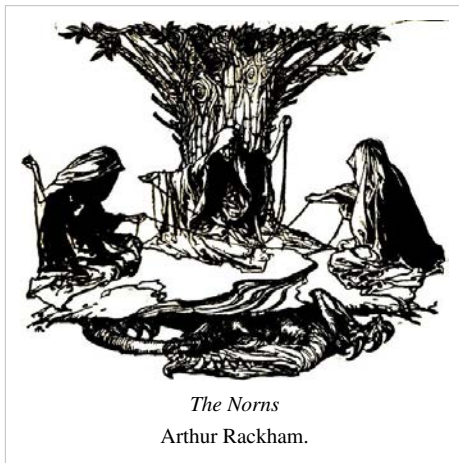
The Poetic Edda is valuable in representing older material in poetry from which Snorri tapped information in the *Prose Edda*. Like *Gylfaginning*, the *Poetic Edda* mentions the existence of many lesser norns beside the three main norns. Moreover, it also agrees with *Gylfaginning* by telling that they were of several races and that the dwarven norns were the daughters of Dvalin. It also suggests that the three main norns were giantesses (female Jotuns).^[13]

Fáfnismál contains a discussion between the hero Sigurd and the dragon Fafnir who is dying from a mortal wound from Sigurd. The hero asks Fafnir of many things, among them the nature of the norns. Fafnir explains that they are many and from several races:

Sigurðr kvað:	<i>Sigurth spake:</i>
12. "Segðu mér, Fáfnir, alls þik fróðan kveða ok vel margt vita, hverjar ro þær nornir, er nauðgönglar ro ok kjósa mæðr frá mögum."	12. "Tell me then, Fafnir, for wise thou art famed, And much thou knowest now: Who are the Norns who are helpful in need, And the babe from the mother bring?"
-	-
Fáfnir kvað:	<i>Fafnir spake:</i>
13. "Sundrbornar mjök segí ek nornir vera, eigu-t þær ætt saman; sumar eru áskunngar, sumar alfkunngar, sumar dætr Dvalins." ^[14]	13. "Of many births the Norns must be, Nor one in race they were; Some to gods, others to elves are kin, And Dvalin's daughters some." ^[15]

It appears from *Völuspá* and *Vafþrúðnismál* that the three main norns were not originally goddesses but giantesses (Jotuns), and that their arrival ended the early days of bliss for the gods, but that they come for the good of mankind.

Völuspá relates that three giantesses of huge might are reported to have arrived to the gods from Jotunheim:



8. Tefldu í túni,	8. In their dwellings at peace
teitir váru,	they played at tables,
var þeim vettergis	Of gold no lack
vant ór gulli,	did the gods then know,--
uns þrjár kvámu	Till thither came
þursa meyjar	up giant-maids three,
ámáttkar mjök	Huge of might,
ór Jötunheimum. ^[16]	out of Jotunheim. ^[15]

Vafþrúðnismál probably refers to the norns when it talks of maiden giantesses who arrive to protect the people of earth as protective spirits (hamingjas):^{[2][17]}

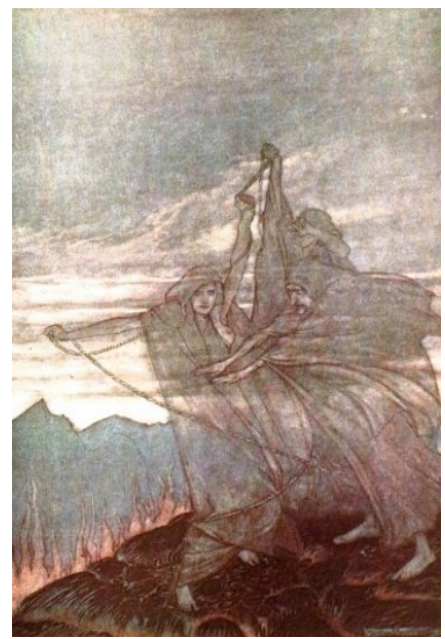
49. "Þrjár þjóðár	49. O'er people's dwellings
falla þorp yfir	three descend
meyja Mögþrasir;	of Møgthrasir's maidens,
hamingjur einar	the sole Hamingjur
þær er í heimi eru,	who are in the world,
þó þær með jötnum alask. ^[18]	although with Jötuns nurtured. ^[19]

The *Völuspá* contains the names of the three main Norns referring to them as maidens like *Vafþrúðnismál* probably does:

20. Þaðan koma meyjar	20. Thence come the maidens
margs vitandi	mighty in wisdom,
þrjár ór þeim sæ,	Three from the dwelling
er und þolli stendr;	down 'neath the tree;
Urð hétu eina,	Urth is one named,
aðra Verðandi,	Verthandi the next,--
- skáru á skíði, -	On the wood they scored,--
Skuld ina þriðju;	and Skuld the third.
þær lög lögðu,	Laws they made there,
þær líf kuru	and life allotted
alda börnum,	To the sons of men,
örlög seggja. ^[16]	and set their fates. ^[15]

Helgakviða Hundingsbana I

The norns visited each newly born child to allot his or her future, and in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, the hero Helgi Hundingsbane has just been born and norns arrive at the homestead:



The Norns
Arthur Rackham.



The Norns Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld under the world oak Yggdrasil (1882) by Ludwig Burger.

2. Nótt varð í bæ, nornir kómu, þær er öðlingi aldr of skópu; þann báðu fylki frægstan verða ok buðlunga beztan þykkja. -	2. 'Twas night in the dwelling, and Norns there came, Who shaped the life of the lofty one; They bade him most famed of fighters all And best of princes ever to be. -
3. Sneru þær af afli örlögþáttu, þá er borgir braut í Bráluni; þær of greiddu gullin símu ok und mánasal miðjan festu. -	3. Mightily wove they the web of fate, While Bralund's towns were trembling all; And there the golden threads they wove, And in the moon's hall fast they made them. -
4. Þær austr ok vestr enda fálu, þar átti lofðungur land á milli; brá nift Nera á norðrvega einni festi, ey það hon halda. ^[20]	4. East and west the ends they hid, In the middle the hero should have his land; And Neri's kinswoman northward cast A chain, and bade it firm ever to be. ^[21]

Helgakviða Hundingsbana II

In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, Helgi Hundingsbane blames the norns for the fact that he had to kill Sigrún's father Högni and brother Bragi in order to wed her:

26 "Er-at þér at öllu, alvitr, gefit, - þó kveð ek nökkvi nornir valda -: fellu í morgun at Frekasteini Bragi ok Högni, varð ek bani þeira. ^[22]	"Maid, not fair is all thy fortune, The Norris ^[23] I blame that this should be; This morn there fell at Frekastein Bragi and Hogni beneath my hand. ^[24]
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Reginsmál

Like Snorri Sturluson stated in *Gylfaginning*, people's fate depended on the benevolence or the malevolence of particular norns. In *Reginsmál*, the water dwelling dwarf Andvari blames his plight on an evil norn, presumably one of the daughters of Dvalin:



The Norns
Arthur Rackham.

2. "Andvari ek heiti,
Óinn hét minn faðir,
margan hef ek fors of farit;
aumlig norn
skóp oss í árdaga,
at ek skylda í vatni vaða."^[25]

2. "Andvari am I,
and Oin my father,
In many a fall have I fared;
An evil Norn
in olden days
Doomed me In waters to dwell."^[26]

Sigurðarkviða hin skamma

Another instance of Norns being blamed for an undesirable situation appears in *Sigurðarkviða hin skamma*, where the valkyrie Brynhild blames malevolent norns for her long yearning for the embrace of Sigurd:

7. Orð mæltak nú,
iðrumk eftir þess:
kván er hans Guðrún,
en ek Gunnars;
ljótar nornir
skópu oss langa þrá."^[27]

7. "The word I have spoken;
soon shall I rue it,
His wife is Guthrun,
and Gunnar's am I;
Ill Norns set for me
long desire."^[28]

Guðrúnarkviða II

Brynhild's solution was to have Gunnarr and his brothers, the lords of the Burgundians, kill Sigurd and afterwards to commit suicide in order to join Sigurd in the afterlife. Her brother Atli (Attila the Hun) avenged her death by killing the lords of the Burgundians, but since he was married to their sister Guðrún, Atli would soon be killed by her. In *Guðrúnarkviða II*, the Norns actively enter the series of events by informing Atli in a dream that his wife would kill him. The description of the dream begins with this stanza:



Norns in *Die Helden Und Götter Des Nordens, Oder: Das Buch Der Sagen* by Amalia Schoppe, (1832)

"Svá mik nýliga nomir vekja," - vílsinnis spá vildi, at ek réða, - "hugða ek þik, Guðrún Gjúka dóttir, læblöndnum hjör leggja mik í gögnum." ^[29]	39. "Now from sleep the Norns have waked me With visions of terror,-- To thee will I tell them; Methought thou, Guthrun, Gjúki's daughter, With poisoned blade didst pierce my body." ^[3]
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Guðrúnarhvöt

After having killed both her husband Atli and their sons, Guðrún blames the Norns for her misfortunes, as in *Guðrúnarhvöt*, where Guðrún talks of trying to escaping the wrath of the norns by trying to kill herself:

13. Gekk ek til strandar, gröm vark nornum, vilda ek hrinda stríð grið þeira; hófu mik, né drekkðu, hávar báurur, því ek land of sték, at lifa skyldak. ^[30]	13. "To the sea I went, my heart full sore For the Norns, whose wrath I would now escape; But the lofty billows bore me undrowned, Till to land I came, so I longer must live." ^[31]
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Hamðismál

Guðrúnarhvöt deals with how Guðrún incited her sons to avenge the cruel death of their sister Svanhild. In *Hamðismál*, her sons' expedition to the Gothic king Ermanaric to exact vengeance is fateful. Knowing that he is about to die at the hands of the Goths, her son Sörli talks of the cruelty of the norns:



A statue of the Norns at St Stephen's Green, *The Tree Fates*, donated by the German government in thanks for Operation Shamrock.

29. "Ekki hygg ek okkr
vera ulfa dæmi,
at vit mynjam sjálfir of sakask
sem grey norna,
þá er gráðug eru
í auðn of alin.

-

30. Vel höfum vit vegit,
stöndum á val Gotna,
ofan eggmóðum,
sem ernir á kvisti;
góðs höfum tírar fengit,
þótt skylim nú eða í gær deyja;
kveld lifir maðr ekki
eftir kvið norna."

-

31. Þar fell Sörli
at salar gafli,
enn Hamðir hné
at húsbaki.^[32]

29. "In fashion of wolves
it befits us not
Amongst ourselves to strive,
Like the hounds of the Norns,
that nourished were
In greed mid wastes so grim.

-

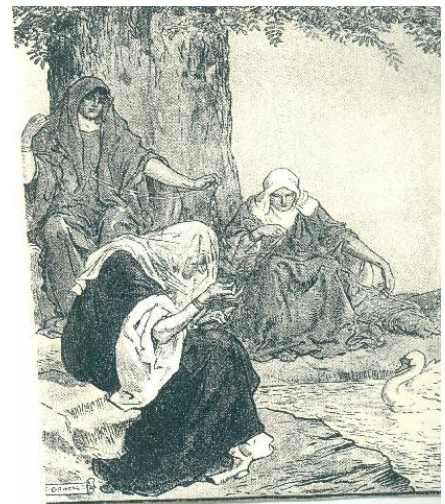
30. "We have greatly fought,
o'er the Goths do we stand
By our blades laid low,
like eagles on branches;
Great our fame though we die
today or tomorrow;
None outlives the night
when the Norris^[23] have spoken."

-

31. Then Sorli beside
the gable sank,
And Hamther fell
at the back of the house.^[33]

Sigrdrífumál

Since the norns were beings of ultimate power who were working in the dark, it should be no surprise that they could be referred to in charms, as they are by Sigrdrífa in *Sigrdrífumál*:



The Norns
C. E. Brock.

17. Á gleri ok á gulli	17. On glass and on gold,
ok á gumna heillum,	and on goodly charms,
í víni ok í virtri	In wine and in beer,
ok vilisessi,	and on well-loved seats,
á Gungnis oddi	On Gungnir's point,
ok á Grana brjósti,	and on Grani's breast,
á nornar nagli	On the nails of Norns,
ok á nefi uglu. ^[34]	and the night-owl's beak. ^[35]

Prose Edda

In the part of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* which is called *Gylfaginning*, Gylfi, the king of Sweden, has arrived at Valhalla calling himself Gangleri. There, he receives an education in Norse mythology from what is Odin in the shape of three men. They explain to Gylfi that there are three main norns, but also many others of various races, æsir, elves and dwarves:

A hall stands there, fair, under the ash by the well, and out of that hall come three maids, who are called thus: Urdr, Verdandi, Skuld; these maids determine the period of men's lives: we call them Norns; but there are many norns: those who come to each child that is born, to appoint his life; these are of the race of the gods, but the second are of the Elf-people, and the third are of the kindred of the dwarves, as it is said here:

Most sundered in birth
I say the Norns are;
They claim no common kin:
Some are of Æsir-kin,
some are of Elf-kind,
Some are Dvalinn's daughters."

Then said Gangleri: "If the Norns determine the weards of men, then they apportion exceeding unevenly, seeing that some have a pleasant and luxurious life, but others have little worldly goods or fame; some have long life, others short." Hárr said: "Good norns and of honorable race appoint good life; but those men that suffer evil fortunes are governed by evil norns."^[36]

The three main norns take water out of the well of Urd and water Yggdrasil:

It is further said that these Norns who dwell by the Well of Urdr take water of the well every day, and with it that clay which lies about the well, and sprinkle it over the Ash, to the end that its limbs shall not wither nor rot; for that water is so holy that all things which come there into the well become as white as the film which lies within the egg-shell,--as is here said:

I know an Ash standing
called Yggdrasil,
A high tree sprinkled
with snow-white clay;
Thence come the dews
in the dale that fall--
It stands ever green
above Urdr's Well.

That dew which falls from it onto the earth is called by men honey-dew, and thereon are bees nourished. Two fowls are fed in Urdr's Well: they are called Swans, and from those fowls has come the race of birds which is so called."^[36]

Snorri furthermore informs the reader that the youngest norn, Skuld, is in effect also a valkyrie, taking part in the selection of warriors from the slain:

These are called Valkyrs: them Odin sends to every battle; they determine men's feyness and award victory. Gudr and Róta and the youngest Norn, she who is called Skuld, ride ever to take the slain and decide fights.^[36]

Legendary sagas

Some of the legendary sagas also contain references to the norns. The *Hervarar saga* contains a poem named *Hlöðskviða*, where the Gothic king Angantýr defeats a Hunnish invasion led by his Hunnish half-brother Hlöðr. Knowing that his sister, the shieldmaiden Hervör, is one of the casualties, Angantýr looks at his dead brother and laments the cruelty of the norns:



...and the youngest Norn, she who is called Skuld, ride ever to take the slain and decide fights...Faroe stamp by Anker Eli Petersen depicting the norns (2003).

32. Bölvat er okkr, bróðir,	"We are cursed, kinsman,
bani em ek þinn orðinn;	your killer am I!
þat mun æ uppi;	It will never be forgotten;
illr er dómr norna." ^[37]	the Norns' doom is evil." ^[38]

In younger legendary sagas, such as *Norna-Gests þáttur* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*, the norns appear to have been synonymous with *völvas* (witches, female shamans). In *Norna-Gests þáttur*, where they arrive at the birth of the hero to shape his destiny, the norns are not described as weaving the web of fate, instead *Norna* appears to be interchangeable and possibly a synonym of *vala* (*völva*).

One of the last legendary sagas to be written down, the *Hrólfs saga kraka* talks of the norns simply as evil witches. When the evil half-elven princess Skuld assembles her army to attack Hrólf Kraki, it contains in addition to undead warriors, elves and norns.

Runic inscription N 351 M

The belief in the norns as bringers of both gain and loss would last beyond Christianization, as testifies the runic inscription N 351 M from the Borgund stave church:

Þórir carved these runes on the eve of Olaus-mass, when he travelled past here. The norns did both good and evil, great toil ... they created for me.^[39]

Franks Casket

Three women carved on the right panel of Franks Casket, an Anglo-Saxon whalebone chest from the eighth century, have been identified by some scholars as being three norns.

Theories

A number of theories have been proposed regarding the norns.^[40]

Matres and Matrones

The Germanic Matres and Matrones, female deities venerated in North-West Europe from the 1st to the 5th century AD depicted on votive objects and altars almost entirely in groups of three from the first to the fifth century AD have been proposed as connected with the later Germanic *dísir*, valkyries, and norns,^[40] potentially stemming from them.^[41]

Three norns

Theories have been proposed that there is no foundation in Norse mythology for the notion that the three main norns should each be associated exclusively with the past, the present, and the future;^[2] rather, all three represent *destiny* as it is twined with the flow of time.^[2] Moreover, theories have been proposed that the idea that there are three main norns may be due to a late influence from Greek and Roman mythology, where there are also spinning fate goddesses (Moirai and Parcae).^[2]



This romantic representation of the norns depicts one of them (Verdandi according to the runes below) with wings, contrary to folklore.

Appearances in Media and Popular Culture

Television

The TV series *Lost Girl* features a Norn as a recurring antagonist; a powerful Fae, she is able to make deals, described as granting what others desire most in exchange for that which they hold dearest. In the first season finale, she granted the desire of Dyson- a werewolf and the love interest of series protagonist Bo- that Bo would gain the strength to defeat her insane mother, but instead of taking Dyson's wolf (Which she had requested when he last attempted to make a deal with her), she took his love for Bo, leaving him unable to feel love for anyone until the Norn was forced to undo the deal in the second season.

Anime and Manga

The main love interest of *Oh My Goddess!* is the Norn Verðandi, rendered as Belldandy. Her elder sister Urðr (rendered as Urd) and younger sister Skuld also show up, living with the protagonist Keichii Morisato and their sister Belldandy. Aside from sticking loosely to the theme of Belldandy representing the present, Urd the past and Skuld the future, they are only loosely related to their mythic namesakes in this media.

The terminals that Yggdrasil from *Digimon* created for the New Digital World experiments consisting 3 layers are named Ulud, Versandi, and Skuld which are representing for past, present, and future. Ulud Urðr is a past plain which is a volcanic wasteland, inhabited by Dinosaur type and draconic Digimon. Versandi Verðandi is the "present" region which is a world of lush greenery and is home to beast, bird, plant and other nature Digimon. Skuld is the "future" region, a high-tech city where machine and insect Digimon inhabit.

The Games


- 《Tower of Saviors》
- Guild Wars 2

Notes

- [1] The article *Dis* (<http://runeberg.org/nfbf/0272.html>) in *Nordisk familjebok* (1907).
- [2] The article *Nornor* (<http://runeberg.org/nfbs/0792.html>) in *Nordisk familjebok* (1913).
- [8] *Skáldskaparmál* in translation by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (1916), at Google Books (http://books.google.com/books?id=_T1cAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA268&dq=Brodeur,+Prose+Edda&hl=en&sa=X&ei=tGVGT96yEonZiAKK6bDbDQ&ved=0CEkQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=Woman) is also metaphorically called by the names of the Asynjur&f=false).
- [14] *Fáfnismál* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/fafnismal.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [15] *Fafnismol* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe24.htm>) in translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [16] *Völuspá* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/voluspa.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [18] *Vafþrúðnismál* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/vafthrudnesmal.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [19] *The lay of Vafþrúdnir* in translation by Benjamin Thorpe (1866), at Google Books (http://books.google.com/books?id=s_kqAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Benjamin+Thorpe+The+Elder+Eddas&hl=en&sa=X&ei=gBBJT8LzCYriiAKQyvDaDQ&ved=0CDQQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=the+sole+Hamingiur&f=false).
- [20] *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/helgakvidahundingsbanaa.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [21] *The First Lay of Helgi Hundingsbane* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe19.htm>) in translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [22] *Völsungakviða in forna* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/helgakvidahundingsbanab.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [23] Typographical error for *Norns*, cf. the text in Old Norse.
- [24] *The Second Lay of Helgi Hundingsbane* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe20.htm>) in translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [25] *Reginismál* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/reginismal.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [26] *The Ballad of Regin* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe23.htm>) in translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1936), at Sacred Texts.

- [27] *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/sigurdarkvidainskamma.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [28] *The Short Lay of Sigurth* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe28.htm>) in translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [29] *Guðrúnarkviða in forna* at «Norrøne Tekster og Kvad», Norway. (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/gudrunarkvidainforna.php>)
- [30] *Guðrúnarhvöt* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/gudrunarhvot.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [31] *Guthrun's Inciting* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe36.htm>) in translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [32] *Hamðismál* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/hamdismal.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [33] *The Ballad of Hamther* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe37.htm>) in translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [34] *Sigrdrífumál* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/sigrdrifumal.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [35] *The Ballad of The Victory-Bringer* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe25.htm>) in translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1936), at Sacred Texts.
- [36] *Gylfaginning* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/pre/pre04.htm>) in translation by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (1916), at Sacred Texts.
- [37] *Hlöðskviða* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/hlodskvida.php>) Guðni Jónsson's edition of the text with normalized spelling.
- [38] *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* in translation by Christopher Tolkien (1960) verse 104, p. 58, pdf p. 153 (http://vsnrweb-publications.org.uk/The_Saga_Of_King_Heidrek_The_Wise.pdf).
- [39] Translation of rune inscription N 351 M provided by Rundata.
- [40] Lindow (2001:224).
- [41] Simek (2007:236).

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Valkyrie

In Norse mythology, a **valkyrie** (from Old Norse *valkyrja* "chooser of the slain") is one of a host of female figures who decide which soldiers die in battle and which live. Selecting among half of those who die in battle (the other half go to the goddess Freyja's afterlife field Fólkvangr), the valkyries bring their chosen to the afterlife hall of the slain, Valhalla, ruled over by the god Odin. There, the deceased warriors become einherjar. When the einherjar are not preparing for the events of Ragnarök, the valkyries bear them mead. Valkyries also appear as lovers of heroes and other mortals, where they are sometimes described as the daughters of royalty, sometimes accompanied by ravens, and sometimes connected to swans or horses.



The Ride of the Valkyrs (1909) by John Charles Dollman

Valkyries are attested in the *Poetic Edda*, a book of poems compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla* (by Snorri Sturluson), and *Njáls saga*, a Saga of Icelanders, all written in the 13th century. They appear throughout the poetry of skalds, in a 14th-century charm, and in various runic inscriptions.

The Old English cognate terms *wælcyrge* and *wælcyrrie* appear in several Old English manuscripts, and scholars have explored whether the terms appear in Old English by way of Norse influence, or reflect a tradition also native among the Anglo-Saxon pagans. Scholarly theories have been proposed about the relation between the valkyries, the norms, the *dísir*, Germanic seeresses, and shieldmaidens. Archaeological excavations throughout Scandinavia have uncovered amulets theorized as depicting valkyries. In modern culture, valkyries have been the subject of works of art, musical works, video games and poetry.

Etymology

The word *valkyrie* derives from Old Norse *valkyrja* (plural *valkyrjur*), which is composed of two words; the noun *valr* (referring to the slain on the battlefield) and the verb *kjósa* (meaning "to choose"). Together, they mean "chooser of the slain". The Old Norse *valkyrja* is cognate to Old English *wælcyrge*.^[1] Other terms for valkyries include *óskmey* (Old Norse "wish girl"), appearing in the poem *Oddrúnargrátr*, and *Óðins meyjar* (Old Norse "Odin's girls"), appearing in the *Nafnapulur*. *Óskmey* may be related to the Odinic name *Óski* (Old Norse, roughly meaning "wish fulfiller"), referring to the fact that Odin receives slain warriors in Valhalla.^[2]

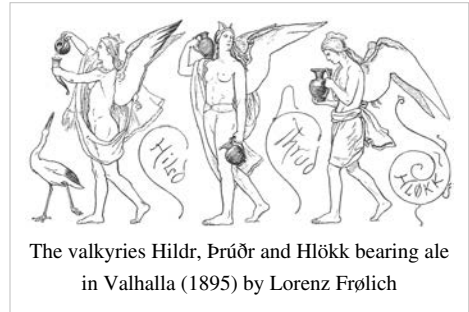
Old Norse attestations

Poetic Edda

Valkyries are mentioned or appear in the *Poetic Edda* poems *Völuspá*, *Grímnismál*, *Völundarkviða*, *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, and *Sigrdrífumál*.

Völuspá and *Grímnismál*

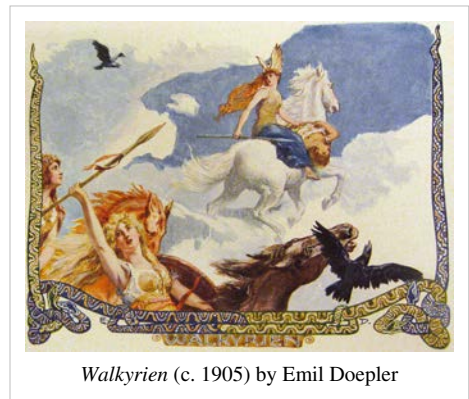
In stanza 30 of the poem *Völuspá*, a *völva* (a traveling seeress in Germanic society) tells Odin that "she saw" valkyries coming from far away who are ready to ride to "the realm of the gods". The *völva* follows this with a list of six valkyries: Skuld (Old Norse, possibly "debt" or "future") who "bore a shield", Skögul ("shaker"), Gunnr ("war"), Hildr ("battle"), Göndul ("wand-wielder"), and Geirskögul ("Spear-Skögul"). Afterwards, the *völva* tells him she has listed the "ladies of the War Lord, ready to ride, valkyries, over the earth".^[3]



In the poem *Grímnismál*, Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*), tortured, starved and thirsty, tells the young Agnar that he wishes that the valkyries Hrist ("shaker") and Mist ("cloud") would "bear him a [drinking] horn", then provides a list of 11 more valkyries who he says "bear ale to the einherjar"; Skeggjöld ("axe-age"), Skögul, Hildr, Þrúðr ("power"), Hlökk ("noise", or "battle"), Herfjötur ("host-fetter"), Göll ("tumult"), Geirahöð ("spear-fight"), Randgríð ("shield-truce"), Ráðgríð ("council-truce"), and Reginleif ("power-truce").^[4]

Völundarkviða

A prose introduction in the poem *Völundarkviða* relates that the brothers Slagfiðr, Egil, and Völund dwelt in a house sited in a location called Úlfdalir ("wolf dales"). There, early one morning, the brothers find three women spinning linen on the shore of the lake Úlfsjár ("wolf lake"), and "near them were their swan's garments; they were valkyries". Two, daughters of King Hlödver, are named Hlaðguðr svanhvít ("swan-white") and Hervör alvitr (possibly meaning "all-wise" or "strange creature"^[5]); the third, daughter of Kjárr of Valland, is named Ölrún (possibly meaning "beer rune"^[6]). The brothers take the three women back to their hall with them—Egil takes Ölrún, Slagfiðr takes Hlaðguðr svanhvít, and Völund takes Hervör alvitr. They live together for seven winters, until the women fly off to go to a battle and do not return. Egil goes off in snow-shoes to look for Ölrún, Slagfiðr goes searching for Hlaðguðr svanhvít, and Völund sits in Úlfdalir.^[7]



Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar

In the poem *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, a prose narrative says that an unnamed and silent young man, the son of the Norwegian King Hjörvarðr and Sigrlinn of Sváfaland, witnesses nine valkyries riding by while sitting atop a burial mound. He finds one particularly striking; this valkyrie is detailed later in a prose narrative as Sváva, king Eylimi's daughter, who "often protected him in battles". The valkyrie speaks to the unnamed man, and gives him the name *Helgi* (meaning "the holy one"^[8]). The previously silent Helgi speaks; he refers to the valkyrie as "bright-face lady", and asks her what gift he will receive with the name she has bestowed upon him, but he will not accept it if he cannot have her as well. The valkyrie tells him she knows of a hoard of swords in Sigarsholm, and that one of them is of particular importance, which she describes in detail.^[9] Further into the poem, Atli flytes with the female jötunn Hrímgærðr. While flyting with Atli, Hrímgærðr says that she had seen 27 valkyries around Helgi, yet one particularly fair valkyrie led the band:

Three times nine girls, but one girl rode ahead,
 white-skinned under her helmet;
 the horses were trembling, from their manes
 dew fell into the deep valleys,
 hail in the high woods;
 good fortune comes to men from there;
 all that I saw was hateful to me.^[10]

After Hrímgærðr is turned to stone by the daylight, a prose narrative continues that Helgi, who is now king, goes to Sváva's father—King Eylimi—and asks for his daughter. Helgi and Sváva are betrothed and love one another dearly. Sváva stays at home with King Eylimi, and Helgi goes raiding, and to this the narrative adds that Sváva "was a valkyrie just as before".^[11] The poem continues, and, among various other events, Helgi dies from a wound received in battle. A narrative at the end of the poem says that Helgi and his valkyrie wife Sváva "are said to be reincarnated".^[12]



Valkyrie (1908) by Stephan Sinding located in Churchill Park at Kastellet in Copenhagen, Denmark

Helgakviða Hundingsbana I

In the poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, the hero Helgi Hundingsbane sits in the corpse-strewn battlefield of Logafjöll. A light shines from the fell, and from that light strike bolts of lightning. Flying through the sky, helmeted valkyries appear. Their waist-length mail armor is drenched in blood; their spears shine brightly:

Then light shone from Logafell,
and from that radiance there came bolts of lightning;
wearing helmets at Himingvani [came the valkyries].
Their byrnies were drenched in blood;
and rays shone from their spears.^[13]

In the stanza that follows, Helgi asks the valkyries (who he refers to as "southern goddesses") if they would like to come home with the warriors when night falls (all the while arrows were flying). The battle over, the valkyrie Sigrún ("victory-rune"^[14]), informs him from her horse that her father Högni has betrothed her to Höðbroddr, the son of king Granmar of the Hniflung clan, who Sigrún deems unworthy. Helgi assembles an immense host to ride to wage battle at Frekastein against the Hniflung clan to assist Sigrún in her plight to avoid her betrothment.^[15] Later in the poem, the hero Sinfjötli flyts with Guðmundr. Sinfjötli accuses Guðmundr of having once been female, and gibes that Guðmundr was "a witch, horrible, unnatural, among Odin's valkyries", adding that all of the einherjar "had to fight, headstrong woman, on your account".^[16] Further in the poem, the phrase "the valkyrie's airy sea" is used for "mist".^[17]

Towards the end of the poem, valkyries again descend from the sky, this time to protect Helgi amid the battle at Frekastein. After the battle, all the valkyries fly away but Sigrún, and wolves (referred to as "the troll-woman's mount") consume corpses:

Helmeted valkyries came down from the sky
—the noise of spears grew loud—they protected the prince;
then said Sigrun—the wound-giving valkyries flew,
the troll-woman's mount was feasting on the fodder of ravens.^[18]

The battle won, Sigrún tells Helgi that he will become a great ruler, and pledges herself to him.^[19]



Helgi Hundingsbane and Sigrún (1919) by Robert Engels

Helgakviða Hundingsbana II

At the beginning of the poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, a prose narrative says that King Sigmund (son of Völsung) and his wife Borghild (of Brálund) have a son named Helgi, who they named for Helgi Hjörvarðsson (the antagonist of the earlier *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*).^[20] After Helgi has killed King Hundling in stanza 4, a prose narrative says that Helgi escapes, consumes the raw meat of cattle he has slaughtered on a beach, and encounters Sigrún. Sigrún, daughter of King Högni, is "a valkyrie and rode through air and sea", and she is the valkyrie Sváva reincarnated.^[21] In stanza 7, Sigrún uses the phrase "fed the gosling of Gunn's sisters". Gunnr and her sisters are valkyries, and these goslings are ravens, who feed on the corpses left on the battlefield by warriors.^[22]

After stanza 18, a prose narrative relates that Helgi and his immense fleet of ships are heading to Frekastein, but encounter a great storm. Lightning strikes one of the ships. The fleet sees nine valkyries flying through the air, among whom they recognize Sigrún. The storm abates, and the fleets arrive safely at land.^[23] Helgi dies in battle, yet returns to visit Sigrún from Valhalla once in a burial mound, and at the end of the poem, a prose epilogue explains that Sigrún later dies of grief. The epilogue details that "there was a belief in the pagan religion, which we now reckon [is] an old wives' tale, that people could be reincarnated" and that "Helgi and Sigrun were thought to have been reborn" as another Helgi and valkyrie couple; Helgi as Helgi Haddingjaskaði and Sigrún as the daughter of Halfdan; the valkyrie Kára. The epilogue details that further information about the two can be found in the (now lost) work *Kárukjóð*.^[24]

Sigrdrífumál

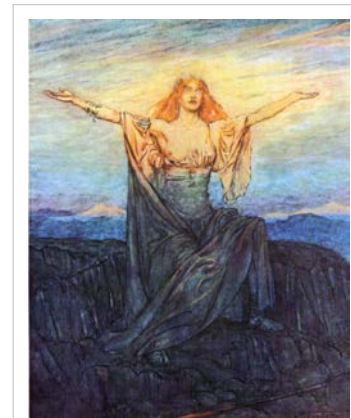
In the prose introduction to the poem *Sigrdrífumál*, the hero Sigurd rides up to Hindarfell and heads south towards "the land of the Franks". On the mountain Sigurd sees a great light, "as if fire were burning, which blazed up to the sky". Sigurd approaches it, and there he sees a *skjaldborg* with a banner flying overhead. Sigurd enters the *skjaldborg*, and sees a warrior lying there—asleep and fully armed. Sigurd removes the helmet of the warrior, and sees the face of a woman. The woman's corslet is so tight that it seems to have grown into the woman's body. Sigurd uses his sword Gram to cut the corslet, starting from the neck of the corslet downwards, he continues cutting down her sleeves, and takes the corslet off of her.^[25]

The woman wakes, sits up, looks at Sigurd, and the two converse in two stanzas of verse. In the second stanza, the woman explains that Odin placed a sleeping spell on her she could not break, and due to that spell she has been asleep a long time. Sigurd asks for her name, and the woman gives Sigurd a horn of mead to help him retain her words in his memory. The woman recites a heathen prayer in two stanzas. A prose narrative explains that the woman is named Sigrdrífa and that she is a valkyrie.^[26]

A narrative relates that Sigrdrífa explains to Sigurd that there were two kings fighting one another. Odin had promised one of these—Hjalmgunnar—victory in battle, yet she had "brought down" Hjalmgunnar in battle. Odin pricked her with a sleeping-thorn in consequence, told her she would never again "fight victoriously in battle", and condemned her to marriage. In response, Sigrdrífa told Odin she had sworn a great oath that she would never wed a



Helgi und Sigrun (1901) by Johannes Gehrts



The valkyrie Sigrdrífa says a pagan Norse prayer in *Sigrdrífumál*.
Illustration (1911) by Arthur Rackham.

man who knew fear. Sigurd asks Sigrdrífa to share with him her wisdom of all worlds. The poem continues in verse, where Sigrdrífa provides Sigurd with knowledge in inscribing runes, mystic wisdom, and prophecy.^[27]

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, valkyries are first mentioned in chapter 36 of the book *Gylfaginning*, where the enthroned figure of High informs Gangleri (King Gylfi in disguise) of the activities of the valkyries and mentions a few goddesses. High says "there are still others whose duty it is to serve in Valhalla. They bring drink and see to the table and the ale cups." Following this, High gives a stanza from the poem *Grímnismál* that contains a list of valkyries. High says "these women are called valkyries, and they are sent by Odin to every battle, where they choose which men are to die and they determine who has victory". High adds that Gunnr ("war"^[14]), Róta, and Skuld—the latter of the three he refers to as "the youngest norn"—"always ride to choose the slain and decide the outcome of battle".^[28] In chapter 49, High describes that when Odin and his wife Frigg arrived at the funeral of their slain son Baldr, with them came the valkyries and also Odin's ravens.^[29]

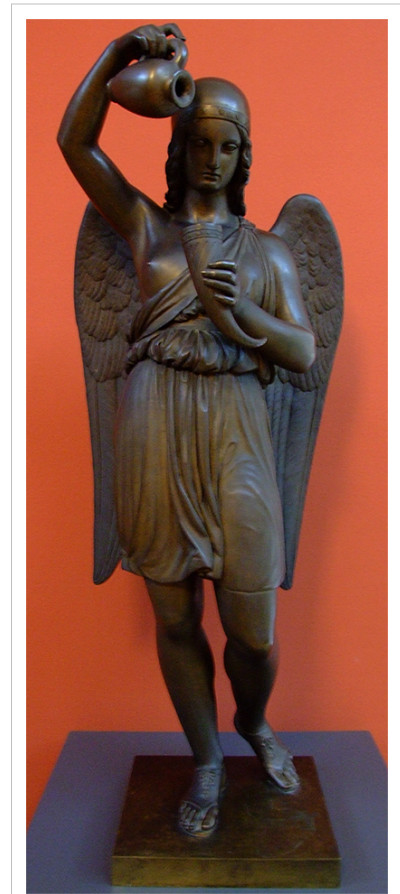
References to valkyries appear throughout the book *Skáldskaparmál*, which provides information about skaldic poetry. In chapter 2, a quote is given from the work *Húsdrápa* by the 10th-century skald Úlfr Uggason. In the poem, Úlfr describes mythological scenes depicted in a newly built hall, including valkyries and ravens accompanying Odin at Baldr's funeral feast:

There I perceive valkyries and ravens,
 accompanying the wise victory-tree [Odin]
 to the drink of the holy offering [Baldr's funeral feast]
 Within have appeared these motifs.^[30]

Further in chapter 2, a quote from the anonymous 10th-century poem *Eiríksmál* is provided (see the *Fagrskinna* section below for more detail about the poem and another translation):

What sort of dream is that, Odin?
 I dreamed I rose up before dawn
 to clear up Val-hall for slain people.
 I aroused the Einheriar,
 bade them get up to strew the benches,
 clean the beer-cups,
 the valkyries to serve wine
 for the arrival of a prince.^[31]

In chapter 31, poetic terms for referring to a woman are given, including "[a] woman is also referred to in terms of all Asyniur or valkyries or norns or *dísir*".^[32] In chapter 41, while the hero Sigurd is riding his horse Grani, he encounters a building on a mountain. Within this building Sigurd finds a sleeping woman wearing a helmet and a coat of mail. Sigurd cuts the mail from her, and she awakes. She tells him her name is Hildir, and "she is known as Brynhildir, and was a valkyrie".^[33]



Valkyrie (1835) by Herman Wilhelm Bissen

In chapter 48, poetic terms for "battle" include "weather of weapons or shields, or of Odin or valkyrie or war-kings, or their clash or noise", followed by examples of compositions by various skalds that have used the name of valkyries in said manner (Þorbjörn Hornklofi uses "Skögul's din" for "battlefield", Bersi Skáldtorfuson uses "Gunnr's fire" for "sword" and "Hlökk's snow" for "battle", Einarr Skúlason uses "Hildir's sail" for "shield" and "Göndul's crushing wind" for "battle", and Einarr skálaglamm uses "Göndul's din"). Chapter 49 gives similar information when referring to weapons and armor (though the term "death-maidens"—Old Norse *valmeyjar*—instead of "valkyries" is used here), with further examples.^[34] In chapter 57, within a list of names of ásynjur (and after alternate names for the goddess Freyja are provided), a further section contains a list of "Odin's maids"; valkyries: Hildir, Göndul, Hlökk, Mist, Skögul. And then an additional four names; Hrund, Eir, Hrist, and Skuld. The section adds that "they are called norns who shape necessity".^[35]

Some manuscripts of the feature *Nafnabulur* section of *Skáldskaparmál* contain an extended list of 29 valkyrie names (listed as the "valkyries of Viðrir"—a name of Odin). The first stanza lists: Hrist, Mist, Herja, Hlökk, Geiravör, Göll, Hjörprimul, Guðr, Herfjötra, Skuld, Geirönul, Skögul, and Randgníð. The second stanza lists: Ráðgríðr, Göndul, Svipul, Geirskögul, Hildir, Skeggöld, Hrund, Geirdriful, Randgríðr, Þrúðr, Reginleif, Sveið, Þögn, Hjalmprimul, Þrima, and Skalmöld.^[36]

Hrafnsmál

The fragmentary skaldic poem *Hrafnsmál* (generally accepted as authored by 9th-century Norwegian skald Þorbjörn Hornklofi) features a conversation between a valkyrie and a raven, largely consisting of the life and deeds of Harald I of Norway. The poem begins with a request for silence among noblemen so that the skald may tell the deeds of Harald Fairhair. The narrator states that they once overheard a "high-minded", "golden-haired", and "white-armed" maiden speaking with a "glossy-beaked raven". The valkyrie considers herself wise, understands the speech of birds, is further described as having a white-throat and sparkling eyes, and she takes no pleasure in men:

Wise thought her the valkyrie; were welcome never
men to the bright-eyed one, her who the birds' speech
knew well.

The hymir's-skull-cleaver as on cliff he was perching.

The valkyrie, previously described as fair and beautiful, then speaks to the gore-drenched and corpse-reeking raven:

"How is it, ye ravens—whence are ye come now
with beaks all gory, at break of morning?

Carrion-reek ye carry, and your claws are bloody.

Were ye near, at night-time, where ye knew of
corpses?"^[37]

The black raven shakes himself, and he responds that he and the rest of the ravens have followed Harald since hatching from their eggs. The raven expresses surprise that the valkyrie seems unfamiliar with the deeds of Harald, and tells her about his deeds for several stanzas. At stanza 15, a question and answer format begins where the valkyrie asks the raven a question regarding Harald, and the raven responds in turn. This continues until the poem ends abruptly.^[38]



A valkyrie speaks with a raven (1862) by
Anthony Frederick Augustus Sandys

Njáls saga

In chapter 157 of *Njáls saga*, a man named Dörruð witnesses 12 people riding together to a stone hut on Good Friday in Caithness. The 12 go into the hut and Dörruð can no longer see them. Dörruð goes to the hut, and looks through a chink in the wall. He sees that there are women within, and that they have set up a particular loom; the heads of men are the weights, the entrails of men are the warp and weft, a sword is the shuttle, and the reels are composed of arrows. The women sing a song called *Darraðarljóð*, which Dörruð memorizes.^[39]

The song consists of 11 stanzas, and within it the valkyries weave and choose who is to be slain at the Battle of Clontarf (fought outside Dublin in 1014 CE). Of the 12 valkyries weaving, six have their names given in the song: Hildir, Hjörprimul, Sanngríðr, Svipul, Guðr, and Göndul. Stanza 9 of the song reads:

Now awful it is to be without,
as blood-red rack races overhead;
is the welkin gory with warriors' blood
as we valkyries war-songs chanted.^[40]

At the end of the poem, the valkyries sing "start we swiftly with steeds unsaddled—hence to battle with brandished swords!"^[40] The prose narrative picks up again, and says that the valkyries tear their loom down and into pieces. Each valkyrie holds on to what she has in her hands. Dörruð leaves the chink in the wall and heads home, and the women mount their horses and ride away; six to the south and six to the north.^[39]

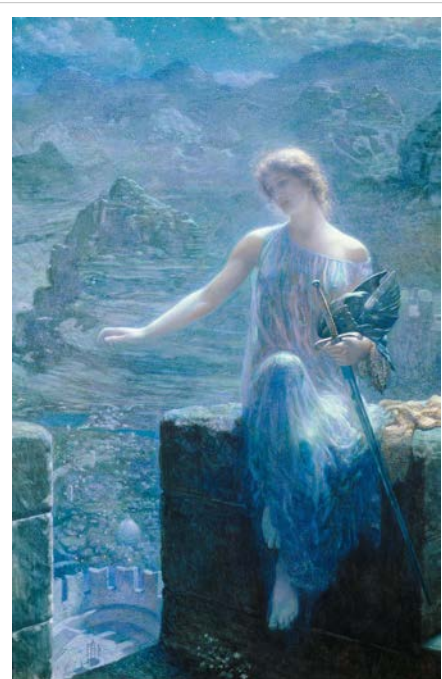
Heimskringla

At the end of the *Heimskringla* saga *Hákonar saga góða*, the poem *Hákonarmál* by the 10th-century skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir is presented. The saga relates that king Haakon I of Norway died in battle, and although he is Christian, he requests that since he has died "among heathens, then give me such burial place as seems most fitting to you". The saga relates that shortly after Haakon died on the same slab of rock that he was born upon, he was greatly mourned by friend and foe alike, and that his friends moved his body northward to Sæheim in North Hordaland. Haakon was buried there in a large burial mound in full armor and his finest clothing, yet with no other valuables. Further, "words were spoken over his grave according to the custom of heathen men, and they put him on the way to Valhalla". The poem *Hákonarmál* is then provided.^[41]

In *Hákonarmál*, Odin sends forth the two valkyries Göndul and Skögul to "choose among the kings' kinsmen" and who in battle should dwell with Odin in Valhalla. A battle rages with great slaughter, and part of the description employs the kenning "Skögul's-stormblast" for "battle". Haakon and his men die in battle, and they see the valkyrie Göndul leaning on a spear shaft. Göndul comments that "groweth now the



Ride of the Valkyries (around 1890) by Henry De Groux



The Valkyrie's Vigil (1906) by Edward Robert Hughes

gods' following, since Hákon has been with host so goodly bidden home with holy godheads". Haakon hears "what the valkyries said", and the valkyries are described as sitting "high-hearted on horseback", wearing helmets, carrying shields and that the horses wisely bore them.^[42] A brief exchange follows between Haakon and the valkyrie Skögul:

Hákon said:

"Why didst Geirskogul grudge us victory?
though worthy we were for the gods to grant it?"

Skogul said:

"'Tis owing to us that the issue was won
and your foemen fled."^[43]

Skögul says that they shall now ride forth to the "green homes of the godheads" to tell Odin the king will come to Valhalla. The poem continues, and Haakon becomes a part of the einherjar in Valhalla, awaiting to do battle with the monstrous wolf Fenrir.^[44]

Fagrskinna

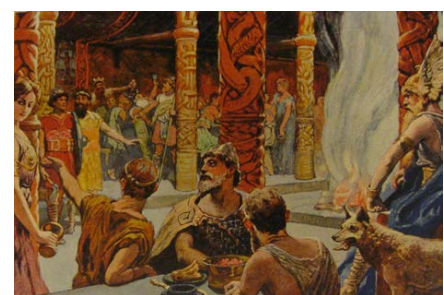
In chapter 8 of *Fagrskinna*, a prose narrative states that, after the death of her husband Eric Bloodaxe, Gunnhild Mother of Kings had a poem composed about him. The composition is by an anonymous author from the 10th century and is referred to as *Eiríksmál*. It describes Eric Bloodaxe and five other kings arriving in Valhalla after their death. The poem begins with comments by Odin (as Old Norse *Óðinn*):

'What kind of a dream is it,' said Óðinn,
in which just before daybreak,
I thought I cleared Valhöll,
for coming of slain men?
I waked the Einherjar,
bade valkyries rise up,
to strew the bench,
and scour the beakers,
wine to carry,
as for a king's coming,
here to me I expect
heroes' coming from the world,
certain great ones,
so glad is my heart.^[45]

The god Bragi asks where a thundering sound is coming from, and says that the benches of Valhalla are creaking—as if the god Baldr had returned to Valhalla—and that it sounds like the movement of a thousand. Odin responds that Bragi knows well that the sounds are for Eric Bloodaxe, who will soon arrive in Valhalla. Odin tells the heroes Sigmund and Sinfjötli to rise to greet Eric and invite him into the hall, if it is indeed he.^[46]



An illustration of valkyries encountering the god Heimdallr as they carry a dead man to Valhalla (1906) by Lorenz Frølich



Valhalla (1905) by Emil Doepler

Ragnhild Tregagás charm

A witchcraft trial held in 1324 in Bergen, Norway, records a spell used by the accused Ragnhild Tregagás to end the marriage of her former lover, a man named Bárd. The charm contains a mention of the valkyrie Göndul being "sent out":

I send out from me the spirits of (the valkyrie) Gondul.

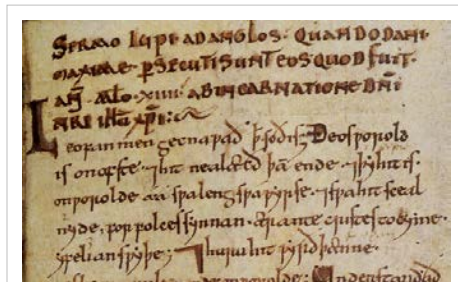
May the first bite you in the back.

May the second bite you in the breast.

May the third turn hate and envy upon you.^[47]

Old English attestations

The Old English *wælcyrge* and *wælcyrrie* appear several times in Old English manuscripts, generally to translate foreign concepts into Old English. In the sermon *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, written by Wulfstan II, *wælcyrrie* is used, and considered to appear as word for a human "sorceress".^[48] An early 11th-century manuscript of Aldhelm's *De laudis virginitatis* (Oxford, Bodleian library, Digby 146) glosses *ueneris* with *wælcyrge* (with *gydene* meaning "goddess"). *Wælcyrge* is used to translate the names of the classical furies in two manuscripts (Cotton Cleopatra A. iii, and the older *Corpus Glossary*). In the manuscript Cotton Cleopatra A. iii, *wælcyrge* is also used to gloss the Roman goddess Bellona. A description of a raven flying over the Egyptian army appears as *wonn wælceaseg* (meaning "dark one choosing the slain"). Scholarly theories debate whether these attestations point to an indigenous belief among the Anglo-Saxons shared with the Norse, or if they were a result of later Norse influence (see section below).^[48]



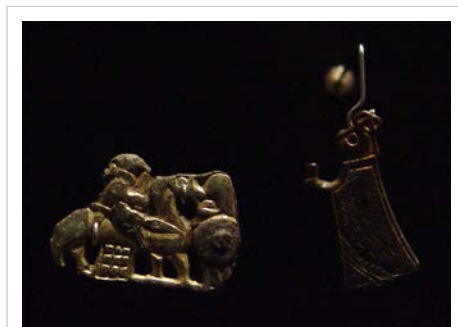
A page from *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*

Archaeological record

Female figures and cup and horn-bearers

Viking Age stylized silver amulets depicting women with long gowns, their hair pulled back, sometimes bearing forth drinking horns have been discovered throughout Scandinavia. These figures are commonly considered to represent valkyries or *dísir*.^[49] According to Mindy MacLeod and Bernard Mees, the amulets appear in Viking Age graves, and were presumably placed there because "they were thought to have protective powers".^[47]

The Tjängvide image stone from the island of Gotland, Sweden features a rider on an eight-legged horse, which may be Odin's eight-legged horse Sleipnir, being greeted by a female, which may be a valkyrie at Valhalla.^[50] The 11th-century runestone U 1163 features a carving of a female bearing a horn that has been interpreted as the valkyrie Sigdrífa handing the hero Sigurd (also depicted on the stone) a drinking horn.^[51]



A figure on horse meeting a figure carrying a shield (left) and one of numerous female silver figures (right)



A silver figure of a woman holding a drinking horn found in Birka, Björkö, Uppland, Sweden.



Both silver, a female figure touches her hair while facing forward (left) and a figure sits atop a horse, facing another figure with a shield (right).



A female figure bears a horn to a rider on an eight-legged horse on the Tjängvide image stone in Sweden.



A female figure bearing a horn on runestone U 1163.

Runic inscriptions

Specific valkyries are mentioned on two runestones; the early 9th-century Rök Runestone in Östergötland, Sweden, and the 10th-century Karlevi Runestone on the island of Öland, Sweden, which mentions the valkyrie Þrúðr.^[47] On the Rök Runestone, a kenning is employed that involves a valkyrie riding a wolf as her steed:

That we tell the twelfth, where the horse of the Valkyrie [literally "the horse of Gunn"] sees food on the battlefield, where twenty kings are lying.^[52]

Among the Bryggen inscriptions found in Bergen, Norway, is the "valkyrie stick" from the late 14th century. The stick features a runic inscription intended as a charm. The inscription says that "I cut cure-runes", and also "help-runes", once against elves, twice against trolls, thrice against thurs, and then a mention of a valkyrie occurs:

Against the harmful *skag*-valkyrie,
so that she never shall, though she never would -
evil woman! - injure (?) your life.^[53]

This is followed by "I send you, I look at you, wolfish perversion, and unbearable desire, may distress descend on you and *jöluns* wrath. Never shall you sit, never shall you sleep ... (that you) love me as yourself." According to Mindy MacLeod and Bernard Mees, the inscription "seems to begin as a benevolent formulation before abruptly switching to the infliction of distress and misery, presumably upon the recipient of the charm rather than the baleful valkyrie", and they posit the final line appears "to constitute a rather spiteful kind of charm aimed at securing the love of a woman".^[54]

MacLeod and Mees state that the opening lines of the charm correspond to the *Poetic Edda* poem *Sigrdrífumál*, where the valkyrie Sigrdrífa provides runic advice, and that the meaning of the term *skag* is unclear, but a cognate exists in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* where Sinfjötli accuses Guðmundr of having once been a "*skass*-valkyrie". MacLeod and Mees believe the word means something like "supernatural sending", and that this points to a connection to the Ragnhild Tregagás charm, where a valkyrie is also "sent forth".^[1]



The Rök Runestone

Valkyrie names

The Old Norse poems *Völuspá*, *Grímnismál*, *Darraðarljóð*, and the *Nafnþulur* section of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, provide lists of valkyrie names. In addition, some valkyrie names appear solely outside of these lists, such as *Sigrún* (who is attested in the poems *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* and *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*). Many valkyrie names emphasize associations with battle and, in many cases, on the spear—a weapon heavily associated with the god Odin.^[55] Some scholars propose that the names of the valkyries themselves contain no individuality, but are rather descriptive of the traits and nature of war-goddesses, and are possibly the descriptive creations of skalds.^[56]

Some valkyrie names may be descriptive of the roles and abilities of the valkyries. The valkyrie name *Herja* has been theorized as pointing to a connection to the name of the goddess *Hariasa*, who is attested from a stone from 187 CE.^[57] The name *Herfjötur* has been theorized as pointing to the ability of the valkyries to place fetters.^[58] The name *Svipul* may be descriptive of the influence the valkyries have over *wyrd* or *ørlog*—a Germanic concept of fate.^[59]

Theories

Old English *wælcyrge* and Old English charms

Richard North says that the description of a raven flying over the Egyptian army (glossed as *wonn wælc easeg*) may have been directly influenced by the Old Norse concept of Valhalla, the usage of *wælcyrge* in *De laudibus virginittatis* may represent a loan or loan-translation of Old Norse *valkyrja*, but the Cotton Cleopatra A. iii and the *Corpus Glossary* instances "appear to show an Anglo-Saxon conception of *wælcyrge* that was independent of contemporary Scandinavian influence".^[48]

Two Old English charms mention figures that are theorized as representing an Anglo-Saxon notion of valkyries or valkyrie-like female beings; *Wið færstice*, a charm to cure a sudden pain or stitch, and *For a Swarm of Bees*, a charm to keep honey bees from swarming. In *Wið færstice*, a sudden pain is attributed to a small, "shrieking" spear thrown with supernatural strength (Old English *mægen*) by "fierce" loudly flying "mighty women" (Old English *mihtigan wif*) who have ridden over a burial mound:

They were loud, yes, loud,
when they rode over the (burial) mound;
they were fierce when they rode across the land.
Shield yourself now, you can survive this strife.
Out, little spear, if there is one here within.
It stood under/behind lime-wood (i.e. a shield), under a light-coloured/light-weight shield,
where those mighty women marshalled their powers, and they send shrieking spears.^[60]

Theories have been proposed that these figures are connected to valkyries.^[61] Richard North says that "though it is not clear what the poet takes these women to be, their female sex, riding in flight and throwing spears suggest that they were imagined in England as a female being analogous to the later Norse *valkyrjur*."^[62] Hilda Ellis Davidson theorizes that *Wið færstice* was originally a battle spell that had, over time, been reduced to evoke "a prosaic stitch in the side".^[63] Towards the end of *For a Swarm of Bees*, the swarming bees are referred to as "victory-women" (Old English *sigewif*):



An Anglo-Saxon burial mound at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk, England

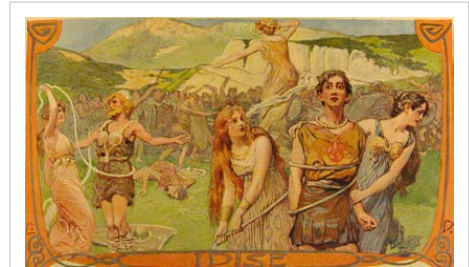
Settle down, victory-women,
 never be wild and fly to the woods.
 Be as mindful of my welfare,
 as is each man of eating and of home.^[64]

The term "victory women" has been theorized as pointing to an association with valkyries. This theory is not universally accepted, and the reference has also been theorized as a simple metaphor for the "victorious sword" (the stinging) of the bees.^[64]

Merseburg Incantation, fetters, *dísir*, *idisi*, and norns

One of the two Old High German Merseburg Incantations call upon female beings—*Idisi*—to bind and hamper an army. The incantation reads:

Once the Idisi sat, sat here and there,
 some bound fetters, some hampered the army,
 some untied fetters:
 Escape from the fetters, flee from the enemies.^[65]



Idise (1905) by Emil Doepler

The *Idisi* mentioned in the incantation are generally considered to be valkyries. Rudolf Simek says that "these Idisi are obviously a kind of valkyrie, as these also have the power to hamper enemies in Norse mythology" and points to a connection with the valkyrie name *Herfjötur* (Old Norse "army-fetter").^[65] Hilda R. Davidson compares the incantation to the Old English *Wið færstice* charm, and theorizes a similar role for them both.^[63]

Simek says that the West Germanic term *Idisi* (Old Saxon *idis*, Old High German *itis*, Old English *ides*) refers to a "dignified, well respected woman (married or unmarried), possibly a term for any woman, and therefore glosses exactly Latin *matrona*" and that a link to the North Germanic term *dísir* is reasonable to assume, yet not undisputed. In addition, the place name Idisiaviso (meaning "plain of the Idisi") where forces commanded by Arminius fought those commanded by Germanicus at the Battle of the Weser River in 16 CE. Simek points to a connection between the name *Idisiaviso*, the role of the *Idisi* in one of the two Merseburg Incantations, and valkyries.^[65]

Regarding the *dísir*, Simek states that Old Norse *dís* appears commonly as simply a term for "woman", just as Old High German *itis*, Old Saxon *idis*, and Old English *ides*, and may have also been used to denote a type of goddess. According to Simek, "several of the Eddic sources might lead us to conclude that the *dísir* were valkyrie-like guardians of the dead, and indeed in *Guðrúnarkviða* I 19 the valkyries are even called *Herjans dísir* "Odin's *dísir*". The *dísir* are explicitly called dead women in *Atlamál* 28 and a secondary belief that the *dísir* were the souls of dead women (see *fylgjur*) also underlies the *landdísir* of Icelandic folklore.^[66] Simek says that "as the function of the matrons was also extremely varied—fertility goddess, personal guardians, but also warrior-goddesses—the belief in the *dísir*, like the belief in the valkyries, norns, and matrons, may be considered to be different manifestations of a belief in a number of female (half-?) goddesses."^[13]



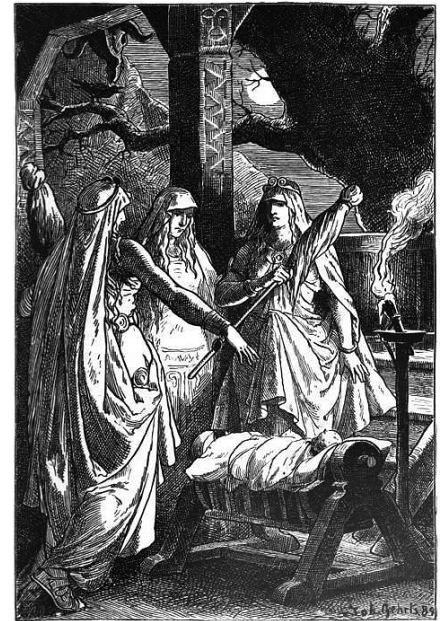
The Dises (1909) by Dorothy Hardy

Jacob Grimm states that, though the norns and valkyries are similar in nature, there is a fundamental difference between the two. Grimm states that a *dís* can be both norn and a valkyrie, "but their functions are separate and usually the persons. The norns have to pronounce the *fatum* [fate], they sit on their chairs, or they roam through the country among mortals, fastening their threads. Nowhere is it said that they ride. The valkyrs *ride* to war, decide the

issues of fighting, and conduct the fallen to heaven; their riding is like that of heroes and gods [...]."^[67]

Origins and development

Various theories have been proposed about the origins and development of the valkyries from Germanic paganism to later Norse mythology. Rudolf Simek suggests valkyries were likely originally viewed as "demons of the dead to whom warriors slain on the battlefield belonged", and that a shift in interpretation of the valkyries may have occurred "when the concept of Valhalla changed from a battlefield to a warrior's paradise". Simek says that this original concept was "superseded by the shield girls—Irish female warriors who lived on like the *einherjar* in Valhall." Simek says that the valkyries were closely associated with Odin, and that this connection existed in an earlier role as "demons of death". Simek states that due to the shift of concept, the valkyries became popular figures in heroic poetry, and during this transition were stripped of their "demonic characteristics and became more human, and therefore become capable of falling in love with mortals [...]." Simek says that the majority of the names of the valkyries point to a warlike function, that most of valkyrie names do not appear to be very old, and that the names "mostly come from poetic creativity rather than from real folk-belief."^[68]



The Norns (1889) by Johannes Gehrts

MacLeod and Mees theorize that "the role of the corpse-choosing valkyries became increasingly confused in later Norse mythology with that of the Norns, the supernatural females responsible for determining human destiny [...]."^[69]

Hilda Ellis Davidson says that, regarding valkyries, "evidently an elaborate literary picture has been built up by generations of poets and storytellers, in which several conceptions can be discerned. We recognize something akin to Norns, spirits who decide destinies of men; to the seeresses, who could protect men in battle with their spells; to the powerful female guardian spirits attached to certain families, bringing luck to youth under their protection; even to certain women who armed themselves and fought like men, for whom there is some historical evidence from the regions round the Black Sea." She adds that there may also be a memory in this of a "priestess of the god of war, women who officiated at the sacrificial rites when captives were put to death after battle."^[70]

Davidson places emphasis on the fact that *valkyrie* literally means "chooser of the slain". She compares Wulfstan's mention of a "chooser of the slain" in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* sermon, which appears among "a blacklist of sinners, witches, and evildoers", to "all the other classes whom he [Wulfstan] mentions", and concludes as those "are human ones, it seems unlikely that he has introduced mythological figures as well." Davidson points out that Arab traveler Ibn Fadlan's detailed account of a 10th-century Rus ship funeral on the Volga River features an "old Hunnish woman, massive and grim to look upon" (who Fadlan refers to as the "Angel of Death") who organizes the killing of the slave girl, and has two other women with her that Fadlan refers to as her daughters. Davidson says that "it would hardly be surprising if strange legends grew up about such women, who must have been kept apart from their kind due to their gruesome duties. Since it was often decided by lot which prisoners should be killed, the idea that the god "chose" his victims, through the instrument of the priestesses, must have been a familiar one, apart from the obvious assumption that some were chosen to fall in war." Davidson says that it appears that from "early times" the Germanic peoples "believed in fierce female spirits doing the command of the war god, stirring up disorder, taking part in battle, seizing and perhaps devouring the slain."^[71]

Freyja and Fólkvangr

The goddess Freyja and her afterlife field Fólkvangr, where she receives half of the slain, has been theorized as connected to the valkyries. Britt-Mari Näsström points out the description in *Gylfaginning* where it is said of Freyja "whenever she rides into battle she takes half of the slain", and interprets *Fólkvangr* as "the field of the Warriors". Näsström notes that, just like Odin, Freyja receives slain heroes who have died on the battlefield, and that her house is Sessrumnir (which she translates as "filled with many seats"), a dwelling that Näsström posits likely fills the same function as Valhalla. Näsström comments that "still, we must ask why there are two heroic paradises in the Old Norse view of afterlife. It might possibly be a consequence of different forms of initiation of warriors, where one part seemed to have belonged to Óðinn and the other to Freyja. These examples indicate that Freyja was a war-goddess, and she even appears as a valkyrie, literally 'the one who chooses the slain'."^[72]

Siegfried Andres Dobat comments that "in her mythological role as the chooser of half the fallen warriors for her death realm Fólkvangr, the goddess Freyja, however, emerges as the mythological role model for the Valkyrjar [*sic*] and the *dísir*."^[73]

Modern influence

Valkyries have been the subjects of various poems, works of art, and musical works. In poetry, valkyries appear in "Die Walküren" by H. Heine (appearing in *Romanzero*, 1847), "Die Walküren" (1864) by H. v. Linge, "Sköldmon" (appearing in *Gömda Land*, 1904).^[68]

Works of art depicting valkyries include "Die Walküren" (sketch, 1818) by J. G. Sandberg, "Reitende Walküre" (fresco), previously located in Munich palace but now destroyed, 1865/1866 by M. Echter, "Valkyrien" and "Valkyriens død" (paintings, both from 1860), "Walkürenritt" (etching, 1871) by A. Welti, "Walkürenritt" (woodcut, 1871) by T. Pixis, "Walkürenritt" (1872) by A. Becker (reproduced in 1873 with the same title by A. v. Heyde), "Die Walkyren" (charcoal, 1880) and "Walkyren wählen und wecken die gefallenen Helden (Einherier), um sie vom Schlachtfeld nach Walhall zu geleiten" (painting, 1882) and "Walkyrenschlacht" (oil painting, 1884) by K. Ehrenberg, "Walkürenritt" (oil painting, 1888, and etching, 1890) by A. Welti, "Walküre" (statue) by H. Günther, "Walkürenritt" (oil painting) by H. Hendrich, "Walkürenritt" (painting) by F. Leeke, "Einherier" (painting, from around 1900), by K. Dielitz, "The Ride of the Valkyries" (painting, from around 1900) by J. C. Dollman, "Valkyrie" (statue, 1910) and "Walhalla-freeze" (located in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, 1886/1887), "Walkyrien" (print, 1915) by A. Kolb, and "Valkyrier" (drawing, 1925) by E. Hansen.^[74]



Freyja (1882) by Carl Emil Doepler



A valkyrie examines a bottle of Söhnlein's "Rheingold" sekt in a 1901 Jugendstil advertisement

In music, valkyries play a major role in "Die Walküre" (1870) by Richard Wagner (the second of the four operas that comprise *Der Ring des Nibelungen*), in which the "Ride of the Valkyries" begins Act III. The heroine of the cycle, Brünnhilde, the chief valkyrie in Wagner's mythos, is stripped of her immortality for defying the god Wotan (Odin) and trying to protect the condemned Siegmund.

Operation Valkyrie was a German Army plan that was converted into an attempted coup d'état that failed after the July 20 Plot (1944). The 2008 film *Valkyrie* is based on events surrounding the operation.

The British rock band *Asia* will be releasing their latest studio album named *Valkyrie* in 2013.

Notes

- [1] Byock (2005:142–143).
- [2] Simek (2007:254 and 349).
- [3] Dronke (1997:15). Valkyrie name etymologies from Orchard (1995:193–195).
- [4] Larrington (1999:57). Valkyrie name etymologies from Orchard (1995:193–195).
- [5] Orchard (1997:83).
- [6] Simek (2007:251).
- [7] Larrington (1999:102).
- [8] Orchard (1997:81).
- [9] Larrington (1999:125).
- [10] Larrington (1999:128).
- [11] Larrington (1999:129).
- [12] Larrington (1999:130–131).
- [13] Larrington (1999:116).
- [14] Orchard (1997:194).
- [15] Larrington (1999:116–117).
- [16] Larrington (1999:119).
- [17] Larrington (1999:120).
- [18] Larrington (1999:121).
- [19] Larrington (1999:122).
- [20] Larrington (1999:132).
- [21] Larrington (1999:133).
- [22] Larrington (1999:133 and 281).
- [23] Larrington (1999:135).
- [24] Larrington (1999:141).
- [25] Thorpe (1907:180).
- [26] Larrington (1999:166–167).
- [27] Larrington (1999:167).
- [28] Byock (2005:44–45).
- [29] Byock (2005:67).
- [30] Faulkes (1995:68).
- [31] Faulkes (1995:69).
- [32] Faulkes (1995:94).
- [33] Faulkes (1995:102).
- [34] Faulkes (1995:117–119).
- [35] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [36] Jónsson (1973:678).
- [37] Hollander (1980:54).
- [38] Hollander (1980:54–57).
- [39] Hollander (1980:66).
- [40] Hollander (1980:68).
- [41] Hollander (2007:124–125).
- [42] Hollander (2007:125).
- [43] Hollander (2007:126).
- [44] Hollander (2007:126–127).
- [45] Finlay (2004:58).
- [46] Finlay (2004:59).
- [47] MacLeod (2006:37).

- [48] North (1997:106).
- [49] Orchard (1997:172) and Lindow (2001:96).
- [50] Lindow (2001:276).
- [51] Wessén & Jansson (1953–58:621).
- [52] Andrén (2006:11).
- [53] MacLeod (2006:34–35).
- [54] MacLeod (2006:34–37).
- [55] Davidson (1988:96).
- [56] Examples include Davidson (1988:96–97) and Simek (2007:349).
- [57] Simek (2007:143). For Hariasa, Simek (2007:131).
- [58] Simek (2007:142).
- [59] Simek (2007:308).
- [60] Hall (2007:1–2).
- [61] Greenfield (1996:257).
- [62] North (1997:105).
- [63] Davidson (1990:63).
- [64] Greenfield (1996:256).
- [65] Simek (2007:171).
- [66] Simek (2007:61–62).
- [67] Grimm (1882:421).
- [68] Simek (2007:349).
- [69] MacLeod (2006:39).
- [70] Davidson (1990:61).
- [71] Davidson (1990:61–62).
- [72] Näsström (1999:61).
- [73] Dobat (2006:186).
- [74] Simek (2007:349–350).

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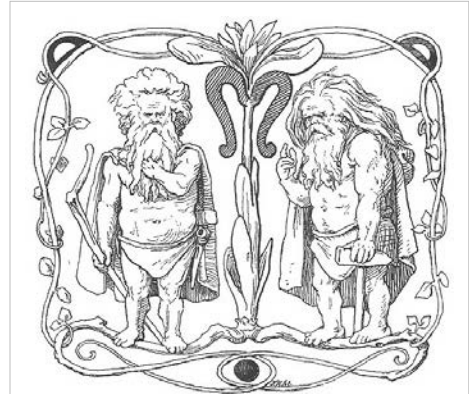
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Dwarf (Germanic mythology)

__notoc__

In Germanic mythology, a **dwarf** or **dwerrow** (Old English: *dweorg*;^[1] Old Norse: *dvergr*;^[2] Old High German: *twerc*, *twergr*;^[3] among other forms;^[4] plural "dwarves" or "dwarfs") is a being that dwells in mountains and in the earth, and is associated with wisdom, smithing, mining, and crafting. Dwarves are also described as short and ugly, although some scholars have questioned whether this is a later development stemming from comical portrayals of the beings.^[5]

The etymology of the word *dwarf* is contested, and scholars have proposed varying theories about the origins of the being, including that dwarves may have originated as nature spirits or beings associated with death, or as a mixture of concepts. Competing etymologies include a basis in the Indo-European root **dheur-* (meaning "damage"), the Indo-European root **dhreugh* (whence modern German *Traum*/English *dream* and *trug* "deception"), and comparisons have been made with Sanskrit *dhvaras* (a type of demonic being).^[5]



Two dwarves as depicted in a 19th century edition of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá* (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Norse mythology, as recorded in the *Poetic Edda* (compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources) and the *Prose Edda* (written by Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century) provide different mythical origins for the beings. The *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá* details that the dwarves were the product of the primordial blood of the being Brimir and the bones of Bláinn. The *Prose Edda*, however, describes dwarves as beings similar to maggots that festered in the flesh of the primal being Ymir before being gifted with reason by the gods. The *Poetic Edda* and *Prose Edda* contain over 100 dwarf names, while the *Prose Edda* gives the four dwarves Norðri, Suðri, Austri and Vestri a cosmological role – they hold up the sky.^[5] In addition, scholars have noted that the Svartálfar, who, like dwarves, are said in the *Prose Edda* to dwell in Svartálfaheimr, appear to be the same beings as dwarves.^[6] Very few actual dwarf characters appear in the *Poetic Edda* and *Prose Edda* and have quite diverse roles: murderous creators of the mead of poetry, 'reluctant donors' of important artifacts with magical qualities, or sexual predators who lust after goddesses.^[7]

Some scholars have proposed that the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá* may contain an account of the first human beings, Ask and Embla, as having been created by dwarves. A preceding stanza to the account of the creation of Ask and Embla in *Völuspá* provides a catalog of dwarf names, and stanza 10 has been read as describing the creation of human forms from the earth. This may potentially mean that dwarves formed humans, and that the three gods gave them life.^[8]

After the Christianization of the Germanic peoples, tales of dwarves continued to be told in the folklore of areas of Europe where Germanic languages were (and are) spoken.^[9]

Notes

- [1] Whence Middle English *dwerȝ*, *dwerf*, and *dwerowe*; modern English *dwarf*.
- [2] Whence Norwegian *dverg*; Swedish *dvärg*; Danish *dværg*; Icelandic *dvergur*; Faroese *dvørgur*.
- [3] Whence Middle High German *twerc*; German *Zwerg*
- [4] Dutch *dwerf*; West Frisian *dwerch*.
- [5] Simek (2007:67–68).
- [6] Simek (2007:305), Orchard (1997:35), and Hafstein (2002:111).
- [7] Jakobsson (2005).
- [8] Lindow (2001:62–63).
- [9] Lindow (2001:101).

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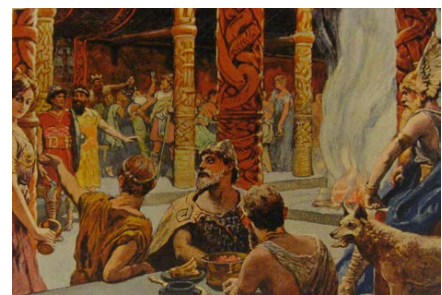
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Einherjar

In Norse mythology, the **einherjar** (Old Norse "single (or once) fighters"^[1]) are those that have died in battle and are brought to Valhalla by valkyries. In Valhalla, the einherjar eat their fill of the nightly-resurrecting beast Sæhrímnir, and are brought their fill of mead (from the udder of the goat Heiðrún) by valkyries. The einherjar prepare daily for the events of Ragnarök, when they will advance for an immense battle at the field of Vígríðr; the battle which the "ein" (here meaning single-time) refers to.

The einherjar are attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, the poem *Hákonarmál* (by the 10th century skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir) as collected in *Heimskringla*, and a stanza of an anonymous 10th century poem commemorating the death of Eric Bloodaxe known as *Eiríksmál* as compiled in *Fagrskinna*.

Scholarly theories have been proposed etymologically connecting the einherjar to the Harii (a Germanic tribe attested in the 1st century CE), the eternal battle of Hjaðningavíg, and the Wild Hunt. The einherjar have been the subject of works of art and poetry.

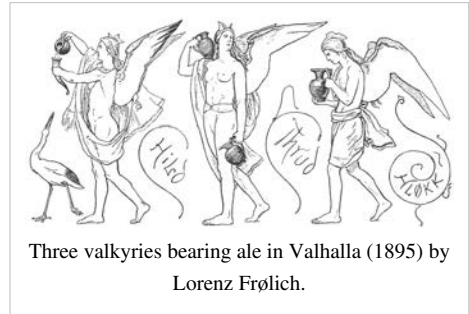


"Walhalla" (1905) by Emil Doepler.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*, Odin engages the wise jötunn Vafþrúðnir in a game of wits. Disguised as *Gagnráðr*, Odin asks Vafþrúðnir "where men fight in courts every day." Vafþrúðnir responds that (here *einherjar* is translated as *einheriar*):



“All the Einheriar fight in Odin's courts every day; they choose the slain and ride from battle; then they sit more at peace together.”^[2]

In the poem *Grímnismál*, Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) tells the young Agnar that the cook Andhrímnir boils the beast Sæhrímnir, which he refers to as "the best of pork", in the container Eldhrímnir, yet adds that "but few know by what the einheriar are nourished."^[3] Further into *Grímnismál*, Odin gives a list of valkyries (Skeggjöld, Skögun, Hildir, Þrúðr, Hlökk, Herfjötur, Göll, Geirahöð, Randgríð, Ráðgríð, and Reginleif), and states that they bear ale to the einherjar.^[4] Towards the end of the poem, another reference to the einherjar appears when Odin tells the king Geirröd (unaware that the man he has been torturing is Odin) that Geirröd is drunk, and that Geirröd loses much when he loses his favor and the favor of "all the Einherjar."^[5]

In the poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, the hero Sinfjötli flyts with Guðmundr. Sinfjötli accuses Guðmundr of having once been a female, including that he was "a witch, horrible, unnatural, among Odin's valkyries" and that all of the einherjar "had to fight, headstrong women, on your account".^[6]

Prose Edda

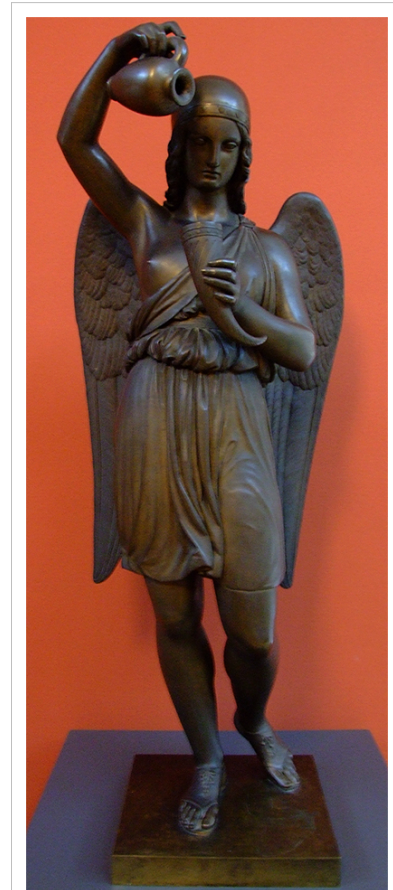
In the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the einherjar are introduced in chapter 20. In chapter 20, Third tells Gangleri (described as king Gylfi in disguise) that Odin is called *Valföðr* (Old Norse "father of the slain") "since all those who fall in battle are his adopted sons," and that Odin assigns them places in Valhalla and Vingólf where they are known as einherjar.^[7] In chapter 35, High quotes the *Grímnismál* valkyrie list, and says that these valkyries wait in Valhalla, and there serve drink, and look after tableware and drinking vessels in Valhalla. In addition, High says that Odin sends valkyries to every battle, that they allot death to men, and govern victory.^[8]

In chapter 38, High provides more detail about the einherjar. Gangleri says that "you say that all those men that have fallen in battle since the beginning of the world have now come to Odin in Val-hall. What has he got to offer them food? I should have thought that there must be a pretty large number there." High replies that it is true there are a pretty large number of men there, adding many more have yet to arrive, yet that "there will seem too few when the wolf comes." However, High adds that food is not a problem because there will never be too many people in Valhalla that the meat of Sæhrímnir (which he calls a boar) cannot sufficiently feed. High says that Sæhrímnir is cooked every day by the cook Andhrímnir in the pot Eldhrímnir, and is again whole every evening. High then quotes the stanza of *Grímnismál* mentioning the cook, meal, and container in reference.^[9]

Further into chapter 38, Gangleri asks if Odin consumes the same meals as the einherjar. High responds that Odin gives the food on his table to his two wolves Geri and Freki, and that Odin himself needs no food, for Odin gains sustenance from wine as if it were drink and meat. High then quotes another stanza from *Grímnismál* in reference. In chapter 39, Gangleri asks what the einherjar drink that is as plentiful as their food, and if they drink water. High responds that it is strange that Gangleri is asking if Odin, the All-Father, would invite kings, earls, and other "men of rank" to his home and give them water to drink. High says that he "swears by his faith" that many who come to Valhalla would think that he paid a high price for a drink of water if there were no better beverages there, after having died of wounds and in agony. High continues that atop Valhalla stands the goat Heiðrún, and it feeds on the foliage of the tree called Læraðr. From Heiðrún's udders flow mead that fills a vat a day. The vat is so large that all of the einherjar are able to drink to their fullness from it.^[10]

In chapter 40, Gangleri says that Valhalla must be an immense building, yet it must often be crowded around the doorways. High responds that there are plenty of doors, and that crowding doesn't occur around them. In support, High again quotes a stanza from *Grímnismál*. In chapter 41, Gangleri notes that there are very many people in Valhalla, and that Odin is a "very great lord when he commands such a troop". Gangleri then asks what entertainment the einherjar have when they're not drinking. High responds that every day, the einherjar get dressed and "put on war-gear and go out into the courtyard and fight each other and fall upon each other. This is their sport." High says that when dinner time arrives, the einherjar ride back to Valhalla and sit down to drink. In reference, High quotes a stanza from *Grímnismál*.^[11]

In chapter 51, High foretells the events of Ragnarök. After the god Heimdallr awakens all the gods by blowing his horn Gjallarhorn, they will assemble at a thing, Odin will ride to the well Mímisbrunnr and consult Mímir on behalf of himself and his people, the world tree Yggdrasil will shake, and then the Æsir and the einherjar will don their war gear. The Æsir and einherjar will ride to the field Vígríðr while Odin rides before them clad in a golden helmet, mail,



"Valkyrie" (1834–1835) by Herman Wilhelm Bissen.

and holding his spear Gungnir, and heading towards the wolf Fenrir.^[12]

In chapter 52, Gangleri asks what will happen after the heavens, earth, and all of the world are burned and the gods, einherjar and all of mankind have died, noting that he had previously been told that "everyone will live in some world or other for ever and ever." High replies with a list of locations, and then describes the re-emerging of the world after Ragnarök.^[13] The einherjar receive a final mention in the *Prose Edda* in chapter 2 of the book *Skáldskaparmál*, where a quote from the anonymous 10th century poem *Eiríksmál* is provided (see the *Fagrskinna* section below for more detail and another translation from another source):

“What sort of dream is that, Odin?
I dreamed I rose up before dawn
to clear up Val-hall for slain people.
I aroused the Einheriar,
bade them get up to strew the
benches,
clean the beer-cups,
the valkyries to serve wine
for the arrival of a prince.”^[14]

Heimskringla

At the end of the *Heimskringla* saga *Hákonar saga góða*, the poem *Hákonarmál* (by the 10th century skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir) is presented. The saga relates that king Haakon I of Norway died in battle, and yet though he is Christian, he requests that since he has died "among heathens, then give me such burial place as seems most fitting to you." The saga relates that, shortly after, Haakon died on the same slab of rock that he was born upon, that he was greatly mourned by friend and foe alike, and that his friends moved his body northward to Sæheim in North Hordaland. Haakon was there buried in a large burial mound in full armor and his finest clothing, yet with no other valuables. Further, "words were spoken over his grave according to the custom of heathen men, and they put him on the way to Valhalla." The poem *Hákonarmál* is then provided.^[15]

In *Hákonarmál*, Odin sends forth the two valkyries Göndul and Skögul to "choose among the kings' kinsmen" and who in battle should dwell with Odin in Valhalla. A battle rages with great slaughter. Haakon and his men die in battle, and they see the valkyrie Göndul leaning on a spear shaft. Göndul comments that "groweth now the gods' following, since Hákon has been with host so goodly bidden home with holy godheads." Haakon hears "what the valkyries said," and the valkyries are described as sitting "high-hearted on horseback," wearing helmets, carrying shields and that the horses wisely bore them.^[16] A brief exchange follows between Haakon and the valkyrie Skögul:

“*Hákon said:*
'Why didst Geirskogul grudge us victory?
though worthy we were for the gods to grant
it?'
Skogul said:
'Tis owing to us that the issue was won
and your foemen fled.’”^[17]

Skögul says that they shall now ride forth to the "green homes of the godheads" to tell Odin the king will come to Valhalla. In Valhalla, Haakon is greeted by Hermóðr and Bragi. Haakon expresses concern that he shall receive



An illustration of valkyries encountering the god Heimdallr as they carry a dead man to Valhalla (1906) by Lorenz Frølich.

Odin's hate (Lee Hollander theorizes this may be due to Haakon's conversion to Christianity from his native heathenism), yet Bragi responds that he is welcome:

“All einherjar shall swear oaths to thee:
share thou the Æsir's ale, thou enemy-of-earls!
Here within hast thou brethren eight,' said Bragi.^[17]”

Fagrskinna

In chapter 8 of *Fagrskinna*, a prose narrative states that, after the death of her husband Eric Bloodaxe, Gunnhild Mother of Kings had a poem composed about him. The composition is by an anonymous author from the 10th century and is referred to as *Eiríksmál*, and describes Eric Bloodaxe and five other kings arriving in Valhalla after their death. The poem begins with comments by Odin (as Old Norse *Óðinn*):

“What kind of a dream is it,' said
Óðinn,
'in which just before daybreak,
I thought I cleared Valhöll,
for coming of slain men?
I waked the Einherjar,
bade valkyries rise up,
to strew the benches,
and scour the beakers,
wine to carry,
as for a king's coming,
here to me I expect
heroes' coming from the world,
certain great ones,
so glad is my heart.^[18]”

The god Bragi asks where a thundering sound is coming from, and says that the benches of Valhalla are creaking—as if the god Baldr had returned to Valhalla—and that it sounds like the movement of a thousand. Odin responds that Bragi knows well that the sounds are for Eric Bloodaxe, who will soon arrive in Valhalla. Odin tells the heroes Sigmund and Sinfjötli to rise to greet Eric and invite him into the hall, if it is indeed he.^[19]

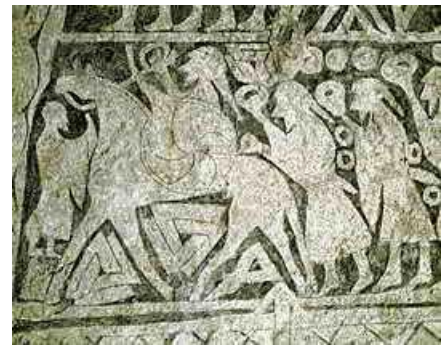
Sigmund asks Odin why he would expect Eric more than any other king, to which Odin responds that Eric has reddened his gore-drenched sword with many other lands. Eric arrives, and Sigmund greets him, tells him that he is welcome to come into the hall, and asks him what other lords he has brought with him to Valhalla. Eric says that with him are five kings, that he will tell them the name of them all, and that he, himself, is the sixth.^[19]

Theories and etymological connections

According to John Lindow, Andy Orchard, and Rudolf Simek the einherjar are commonly connected to the Harii, a Germanic tribe attested by Tacitus in his 1st century CE work *Germania*.^{[20][21][22]}

Tacitus writes:

As for the Harii, quite apart from their strength, which exceeds that of the other tribes I have just listed, they pander to their innate savagery by skill and timing: with black shields and painted bodies, they choose dark nights to fight, and by means of terror and shadow of a ghostly army they cause panic, since no enemy can bear a sight so unexpected and hellish; in every battle the eyes are the first to be conquered.^[21]



The 8th century Tängelgård stone depicts a figure leading a troop of warriors all bearing rings. Valknut symbols are drawn beneath his horse.

Lindow says that "many scholars think there may be basis for the myth in an ancient Odin cult, which would be centered on young warriors who entered into an ecstatic relationship with Odin" and that the name *Harii* has been etymologically connected to the *-herjar* element of *einherjar*.^[20] Simek says that since the connection has become widespread, "one tends to interpret these obviously living armies of the dead as religiously motivated bands of warriors, who led to the formation of the concept of the *einherjar* as well as the Wild Hunt [...]" . Simek continues that the notion of an eternal battle and daily resurrection can be found in book I of Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* and in reports of the eternal battle of Hjaðningavíg.^[22]

According to Guðbrandur Vigfússon, the concept of the einherjar is directly connected to the Old Norse name *Einarr*. Vigfússon comments that "the name Einarr is properly = einheri" and points to a relation to the term with the Old Norse common nouns *einarr* (meaning "bold") and *einorr* (meaning "valour").^[23]

Modern influence

In art and poetry, the einherjar are often portrayed as an element of the larger concept of Valhalla. Examples include "Gastmahl in Walhalla (mit einziehenden Einheriern)" (1880, charcoal drawing) by K. Ehrenberg, and the poem "Einheriarne" (published in *Nordens Guder*, 1819) by A. Oehlenschläger, and "Braga" (1771) by Klopstock.^[22] The Norwegian musical group Einherjer take their name from the einherjar.

The sports club of Vopnafjörður, Iceland is named *Einherji* (singular form of *einherjar*).

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:36) and Lindow (2001:104).

[2] Larrington (1999:46).

[3] Larrington (1999:54).

[4] Larrington (1999:57).

[5] Larrington (1999:59).

[6] Larrington (1999:119)

[7] Faulkes (1995:21).

[8] Faulkes (1995:31).

[9] Faulkes (1995:32).

[10] Faulkes (1995:33).

[11] Faulkes (1995:34).

[12] Faulkes (1995:54).

[13] Faulkes (1995:55–56).

[14] Faulkes (1995:69).

[15] Hollander (2007:124–125).

- [16] Hollander (2007:125).
- [17] Hollander (2007:126).
- [18] Finlay (2004:58).
- [19] Finlay (2004:59).
- [20] Lindow (2001:104–105).
- [21] Orchard (1997:36).
- [22] Simek (2007:71).
- [23] Vigfusson (1874:121).

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Elf

An **elf** (plural: **elves**) is a type of supernatural being in Germanic mythology and folklore.^{[1][2]} Elves are first attested in Old English and Old Norse texts and are prominent in traditional British and Scandinavian folklore.

Elves were originally thought of as ambivalent beings with certain magical abilities capable of helping or hindering humans, but in later traditions became increasingly sinister^[3] and were believed to afflict humans and livestock in various ways. In early modern folklore they became associated with the fairies of Romance culture. The Romanticist movement revived literary interest in folk beliefs and culture,^[4] and elves entered the 20th-century high fantasy genre in the wake of works published by authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien.

The "Christmas elves" of contemporary popular culture are of relatively recent tradition, popularized during the late 19th century in the United States, in publications such as *Godey's Lady's Book*.



Ängsälvbor (Meadow Elves), a Swedish painting from 1850 by Nils Blommér

Overview

While the Scandinavian tradition preserves some evidence of the ON *álfar* as skillful supernatural beings with positive connotations, much like the *æsir* or "gods", the elves of Anglo-Saxon and continental tradition are almost exclusively presented as mischievous or malevolent beings responsible for misfortune or illness.

Etymology

The English word *elf* is from the Old English *ælf*, *elf*, *ylve*, etc.,^{[5][6]} which in turn is derived from the Proto-Germanic **albiz*. In sister languages the forms are Old Norse *álfr*, Old High German *alp* (plural *alpî*, *elpî*) and Middle High German *alp* (feminine singular *elbe*, plural *elbe*, *elber*,^[7]).

**Albiz* may be from the Proto-Indo-European root **albh-* meaning "white", from which also stems the Latin *albus* "white".^[8] A connection to the *Rbhus*, semi-divine craftsmen in Indian mythology, was also suggested by Kuhn, in 1855.^{[9][10]}

German cognates

The Middle High German *alp*^[11] had the primary sense of "ghostly being" or "specter, spirit".^{[12][13][} And already in the Medieval Period, it had developed a narrower sense of "nightmare" (German: *Alpdrück*),^[14] and eventually this became the more prevailing use of the term.^{[15][16]}

The Modern German *Elf* (*m*) (*Elfe* (*f*), *Elfen*) was introduced as a loan from English in the 1740s.^{[15][16][17][18]} Jacob Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1830s), rejected *Elfe* as a recent Anglicism, and came up with the reconstructed form *Elb* (*m*, plural *Elbe* or *Elben*), though the form *Elbe* (*f*) is attested in Middle High German writings.^[16] Jacob Grimm in his *Deutsches Wörterbuch* deplored the "unhochdeutsch" form *Elf*, borrowed "unthinkingly" from the English, and Tolkien was inspired by Grimm to recommend reviving the genuinely German form in his *Guide to the Names in The Lord of the Rings* (1967) and *Elb*, *Elben* was consequently reintroduced in the 1972 German translation of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Gender forms

Originally in Old English, *ælf* or *elf* and its plural *ælfe* were the masculine forms, while the corresponding feminine form (first found in eighth century glosses) was *ælfen* or *elfen* (with a possible feminine plural *-ælfa*, found in *dunælfa*). In Middle English the feminine form was *elven*, with feminine suffix *-en* (earlier form *-inn*; from Proto-Germanic **-innja*).^[19] By the earlier eleventh century *ælf* could denote a supernatural female.^[20] Words for the nymphs of the Greek and Roman mythos were translated by Anglo-Saxon scholars with *ælf* and variants on it.^[21]

Onomastics

In personal names

Throughout Germanic tradition, given names which contain *elf* as an element are frequently attested. Gothic has no direct testimony of **albs*, plural **albeis*, but Procopius has the personal name *Albila*. In the modern period, Alfred is the only name with this element which continues to be in comparatively widespread use.

Anglo-Saxon historical given names with the *elf* element include: Ælfwine (m.; continental *Albewin*, *Alboin*, Scandinavian *Alfvin*) "elf-friend", Ælfric (m.; cf. German Alberich) "elf-ruler", Ælfweard (m.) Ælfwaru (f.) "elf-guardian", Ælfsige "elf-victory", Ælflæd (f.) "elf-beauty", Ælfwynn (f.) "elf-bliss", among others.

In German heroic epic material, Alphart and Alphere (father of Walter of Aquitaine)^{[22][23]} have been regarded as bearing the "elf" element in their names. The OE counterpart to the latter name may be Ælfhere in the *Waldere* fragment.^[24]

Mythology

The elf as a race of supernatural beings

Jacob Grimm discusses "Wights and Elves" comparatively in chapter 17 of his *Teutonic Mythology*.^[25] He notes that the Elder Edda couples the Æsir and the álfar, a conjunction that recurs in Old English *êðs* and *ylfe*, clearly grouping the elves as a divine or supernatural class of beings, sometimes extended by the Vanir as a third class: The Hrafnagaldr states *Alföðr orkar, álfar skilja, vanir vita* "The Allfather [i.e. the áss] has power, the álfar have skill, and vanir knowledge".^[16]

A notable crux in the Old Norse mythology is the distinction of *álfar* and *dvergar*. They appear as separate races in extended lists such as the one in *Alvíssmál*, listing *Æsir*, *álfar*, *Vanir*, *goð* (gods), *mennt* (humans), *ginregin*, *jötnar*, *dvergar* and denizens of *Hell*. *Álfr* "elf" is the name of a dwarf in a list.

Loki is particularly difficult to classify; he is usually called an *áss*, but is really of *jötnunn* origin, and is nevertheless also addressed as *álfr*.^[16] The conclusion of Grimm is that the classification "elf" can be considered to "shrink and stretch by turns".^[26] The etymology connecting **alboz* with *albus* "white" suggests an original dichotomy of "white" vs. "black" genii, corresponding to the elves vs. the dwarves which was subsequently confused.^[26] Thus the elves proper were named *ljósálfar* "light elves", contrasting with *dökkálfar* "dark elves".^[26]

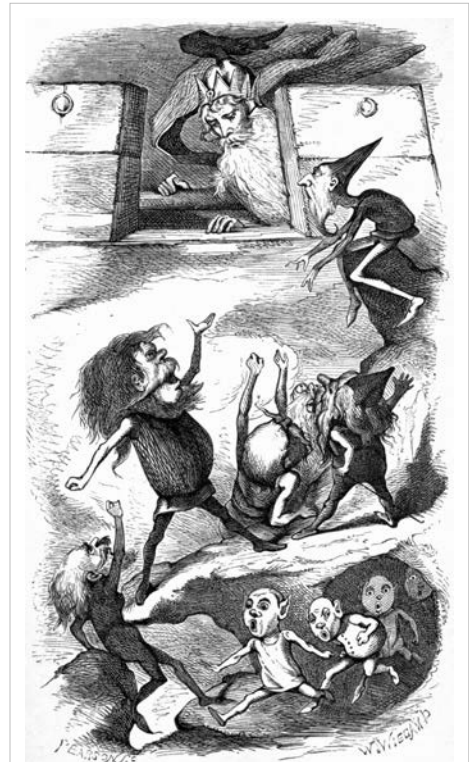
Snorri in the Prose Edda states that the light elves dwell in *Álfheim* while the dark elves dwell underground. Confusion arises from the introduction of the additional term *svartálfar* "black elves", which at first appears synonymous to the "dark elves"; Snorri identifies with the *dvergar* and has them reside in *Svartálfaheim*. This prompts Grimm to assume a tripartite division of light elves, dark elves and black elves, of which only the latter are identical with dwarves, while the dark elves are an intermediate class, "not so much downright black, as dim, dingy". In support of such an intermediate class between light elves, or "elves proper", on one hand, and black elves or dwarves on the other, Grimm adduces the evidence of the Scottish *brownies* and other traditions of dwarves wearing grey or brown clothing.

The earliest preserved descriptions of elves comes from Norse mythology. In Old Norse they are called *álfar* (nominative singular *álfr*). In Norse Mythology, the Elves are believed to inhabit *Alfheim* or *Yggdrasil* of the World tree. Alternatively, the "dark elves" are said to inhabit *Svartalfheim*.

Abode

"There is one place there that is called the Elf Home (*Álfheimr* which is the elven city). People live there that are named the light elves (*Ljósálfar*). But the dark elves (*Dökkálfar*) live below in earth, in caves and the dark forest and they are unlike them in appearance – and more unlike them in reality. The Light Elves are brighter than the sun in appearance, but the Dark Elves are blacker than pitch." (Snorri, *Gylfaginning* 17, Prose Edda)

"*Sá er einn staðr þar, er kallaðr er Álfheimr. Þar byggvir fólk þat, er Ljósálfar heita, en Dökkálfar búa niðri í jörðu, ok eru þeir ólíkir þeim sýnum ok miklu ólíkari reyndum. Ljósálfar eru fegri en sól sýnum, en Dökkálfar eru svartari en bik.*"^[27]



King Olaf and the Little People. Published in 1871.



The god Frey, the lord of the light-elves

They are also found in the *Heimskringla* and in *The Saga of Thorstein, Viking's Son* accounts of a line of local kings who ruled over Álheim, and since they had elven blood they were said to be more beautiful than most men.

The land governed by King Alf was called Alfheim, and all his offspring are related to the elves. They were fairer than any other people...^[28]

Creation

Further evidence for elves in Norse mythology comes from Skaldic poetry, the *Poetic Edda* and legendary sagas. In these elves are linked to the Æsir, particularly by the common phrase "Æsir and the elves". In the *Alvíssmál* ("The Sayings of All-Wise"), elves are considered distinct from both the Æsir and the Vanir.

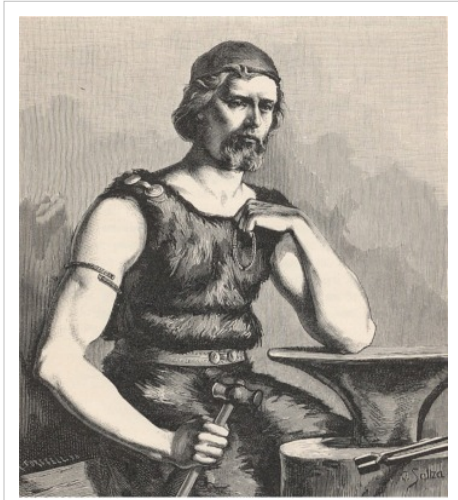
Grímnismál relates that the Van Frey was the lord of *Álfheimr* (meaning "elf-world"), the home of the light-elves. *Lokasenna* relates that a large group of Æsir and elves had assembled at Ægir's court for a banquet.

Men could be elevated to the rank of elves after death, such as the petty king Olaf Geirstad-Elf. The smith hero Völundr is identified as 'Ruler of Elves' (*vísi álfa*) and 'One among the Elven Folk' (*álfa ljóði*), in the poem *Völundarkviða*, whose later prose introduction also identifies him as the son of a king of 'Finnar', an Arctic people respected for their shamanic magic (most likely, the sami). In the *Thidrek's Saga* a human queen is surprised to learn that the lover who has made her pregnant is an elf and not a man. In *the saga of Hrolf Kraki* a king named Helgi rapes and impregnates an elf-woman clad in silk who is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen.

Crossbreeding

Crossbreeding was possible between elves and humans in the Old Norse belief. The human queen who had an elvish lover bore the hero Högni, and the elf-woman who was raped by Helgi bore Skuld, who married Hjörvard, Hrólf Kraki's killer. *The saga of Hrolf Kraki* adds that since Skuld was half-elven, she was very skilled in witchcraft (*seiðr*), and this to the point that she was almost invincible in battle. When her warriors fell, she made them rise again to continue fighting. The only way to defeat her was to capture her before she could summon her armies, which included elvish warriors.^[29]

In addition to these human aspects, they are commonly described as semi-divine beings associated with fertility and the cult of the ancestors and ancestor worship. The notion of elves thus appears similar to the animistic belief in spirits of nature and of the deceased, common to nearly all human religions; this is also true for the Old Norse belief in *dísir*, *fylgjur* and *vörðar* ("follower" and "warden" spirits, respectively). Like spirits, the elves were not bound by physical limitations and could pass through walls and doors in the manner of ghosts, which happens in *Norna-Gests þátr*.



The hero Völundr the 'ruler of the elves' (*vísi álfa*), sometimes thought to be dwarves, nicknamed 'dark elves' (*dökkálfa*)

Dark Elves

The Icelandic mythographer and historian Snorri Sturluson referred to dwarves (*dvergar*) as "dark-elves" (*dökkálfar*) or "black-elves" (*svartálfar*). He referred to other elves as "light-elves" (*ljósálfar*), which has often been associated with elves' connection with Freyr, the god of fertility (according to *Grímnismál*, Poetic Edda). Snorri describes the elf differences.

Rituals

In addition to this, *Kormáks saga* accounts for how a sacrifice to elves was apparently believed able to heal a severe battle wound:

Þorvarð healed but slowly; and when he could get on his feet he went to see Þorðís, and asked her what was best to help his healing.

"A hill there is," answered she, "not far away from here, where elves have their haunt. Now get you the bull that Kormák killed, and redden the outer side of the hill with its blood, and make a feast for the elves with its flesh. Then thou wilt be healed."^[30]

A poem from around 1020, the *Austrfaravísur* ('Eastern-journey verses') of Sigvat Thordarson, mentions that, as a Christian, he was refused board in a heathen household, in Sweden, because an *álfablót* ("elves' sacrifice") was being conducted there.

From the time of year (close to the autumnal equinox) and the elves' association with fertility and the ancestors, it might be assumed that it had to do with the ancestor cult and the life force of the family.

Old English elven race

Scarce are remnants of Old English writings about the *ælf* as a race of supernatural as described in Norse (Eddic) sources (although some scholars attempt to reconstruct the lost picture of the benevolent elf in Anglo-Saxon culture).^[31]

There is a well-known example from *Beowulf* (Fitt I, vv. 111–14), where elves are included among "misbegotten creatures" condemned by God, and named alongside Germanic giants (ettins) and hell-devils orcs. (For further on the passage, see under orc#Old English).^{[32][33]}

Another intriguing example is a fragment of the lost *Tale of Wade*, which begins "Summe sende ylves ..", and translated by Gollancz as: "...[all creatures who fell] became elves or adders or nickors who live in pools; not one became a man except Hildebrand."^{[34][35][36]} Hildebrand mentioned here is an established character from the Cycle of Dietrich von Berne, and this scene may well have involved them as well as Wade's grandson Widia in a den of monsters, as in the Old English *Waldere* fragment, a speculation that Rickert advanced.^[37] More recently, Alaric Hall suggested "some hostile force sent *ylves* to beset Wade", though cautioning that the remnant was too short to contextualize it with certainty.^[38]

German heroic poetry

Although the mythological elf is all but absent in Middle High German texts (except as transformed into the sense of "ghostly beings" etc., cf. #etymology section above),^[39] some dwarfs (Middle High German: *getwerc*) that appear in German heroic poetry have been seen as relating to elves, especially when the dwarf's name is Alberich, construed as "Elf-king".^{[40][41]} Of Alberich, Grimm thinks this name echoes the notion of the king of the nation of elves or dwarfs.^[42] The Alberich in the epic *Ornit* is a dwarf of childlike-stature who turns out to be the real father of the titular character, having ravished his mother. There is an incubus motif here,^[43] that recurs in the *Thidrekssaga* version of the parentage of Hagen (ON Högni), who was the product of his mother Oda being impregnated by an elf (ON álf) while she lay in bed.^[44]

Superstition

The elf as a spirit playing tricks

In Christian folklore, the elves began to be described as spirit that could afflict cattle and people with various conditions. In Old English, compound as *ælfadl* "nightmare", *ælfsoġoða* "hiccup", afflictions apparently thought to be caused by elves.

Elf shot

The "elf-shot" refers to a large number of affliction produced in humans and beasts purportedly caused by elves firing shots, recorded since the Anglo-Saxon period.^[45] A projectile from an elves or *ése* (pagan deities) or witches (*gif hit wære esa gescot oððe hit wære ylfa gescot oððe hit wære hægtessan gescot*) was responsible for sudden pain (such as rheumatism), whose remedy was offered in the Metrical Charm "Against A Sudden Stitch" (*Wið færstice*) from the late 10th century medical text *Lacnunga*. The related *Bald's Leechbook* from the mid-10th century prescribes for the case "If a horse be *ofscoten*" the remedy of inscribing Christ's mark on the horse. The operative word *ofscoten* here, conventionally construed as "elf-shot" has been challenged by A. Hall who proposes "badly pained". Still, the fact remains the medieval formula concludes by saying the cure should be effective should it be the work of elves (Old English: *Sy þæt ylfa þe him*).^[1]

The modern form *Elf-shot* (or *elf-bolt* or *elf-arrow*) from Scotland and Northern England was first attested in a manuscript of about the last quarter of the 16th century, and originally was used in the sense of a 'sharp pain caused by elves'. Later, the word also denoted Neolithic flint arrow-heads, which by the 17th century seem to have been attributed in the region to elvish folk, and which were used in healing rituals, and alleged to be used by witches (and perhaps elves) to injure people and cattle.^[46] Compare with the following excerpt from an 1750 ode by Willam Collins:

*There every herd, by sad experience, knows
How, winged with fate, their elf-shot arrows fly,
When the sick ewe her summer food forgoes,
Or, stretched on earth, the heart-smit heifers lie.*^[47]

German alp

In early medieval sources, the German *alp* would be described as "cheating" or "deceiving" (Middle High German: *trieben*, German: *trüben*) its victims.^{[48][49]} In particular, Germans of the medieval age ascribed incidents of nightmare to the *alp*,^[14] and the idea stuck so that by the early modern age, the *alp* became known primarily as a spirit causing nightmares. (Hence the word for "nightmare" in German is *Alptraum* "elf dream", archaic form *Alpdruck* "elf pressure.") It was believed that nightmares are a result of an elf sitting on the dreamer's chest (incubi). This aspect of German elf-belief largely corresponds to the Scandinavian belief in the *mara*.

Elf-lock

A tangle in the hair was called an *elf-lock*, as being caused by the mischief of the elves, but the OED gives no example of the terms use prior to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1592), where the fairy responsible for traveling over people's face unnoticed and matting up their hair is called Queen Mab)^[50]

The German counterparts of the "elf-lock" are *alpzopf*, *drutenzopf*, *wichtelzopf*, *weichelzopf*, *mahrenlocke*, *elfklatte*, etc. (witness the forms alluding to alp, drude, mare, and wight), as listed by Grimm, who also remarks on the similarity to Frau Holle who entangles hair and herself has matted hair.^[51]

Modern folklore

Scandinavian Folklore



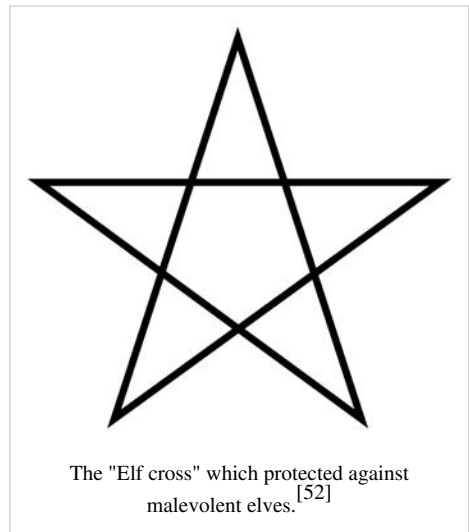
Little älvor, playing with Tomtebobarnen. From *Children of the Forest* (1910) by Swedish author and illustrator Elsa Beskow.

In Scandinavian folklore, which is a later blend of Norse mythology and elements of Christian mythology, an *elf* is called *elver* in Danish, *alv* in Norwegian, and *alv* or *älva* in Swedish (the first is masculine, the second feminine). The Norwegian expressions seldom appear in genuine folklore, and when they do, they are always used synonymous to *huldrefolk* or *vetter*, a category of earth-dwelling beings generally held to be more related to Norse dwarves than elves which is comparable to the Icelandic *huldufólk* (hidden people).

In Denmark and Sweden, the elves appear as beings distinct from the *vetter*, even though the border between them is diffuse. The insect-winged fairies in British folklore are often called "älvor" in modern Swedish or "alfer" in Danish, although the correct translation

is "feer". In a similar vein, the *alf* found in the fairy tale *The Elf of the Rose* by Danish author H. C. Andersen is so tiny that he can have a rose blossom for home, and has "wings that reached from his shoulders to his feet". Yet, Andersen also wrote about *elvere* in *The Elfin Hill*. The elves in this story are more alike those of traditional Danish folklore, who were beautiful females, living in hills and boulders, capable of dancing a man to death. Like the *huldra* in Norway and Sweden, they are hollow when seen from the back.

The elves of Norse mythology have survived into folklore mainly as females, living in hills and mounds of stones.^[53] The Swedish *älvor*.^[54] (sing. *älva*) were stunningly beautiful girls who lived in the forest with an elven king. They were long-lived and light-hearted in nature. The elves are typically pictured as fair-haired, white-clad, and (like most creatures in the Scandinavian folklore) nasty when offended. In the stories, they often play the role of disease-spirits. The most common, though also most harmless case was various irritating skin rashes, which were called *älvablåst* (elven blow) and could be cured by a forceful counter-blow (a handy pair of bellows was most useful for this purpose). *Skålgropar*, a particular kind of petroglyph found in Scandinavia, were known in older times as *älvkvarnar* (elven mills), pointing to their believed usage. One could appease the elves by offering them a treat (preferably butter) placed into an elven mill – perhaps a custom with roots in the Old Norse *älfablót*.



In order to protect themselves against malevolent elves, Scandinavians could use a so-called Elf cross (*Alfkors*, *Älvkors* or *Ellakors*), which was carved into buildings or other objects.^[52] It existed in two shapes, one was a pentagram and it was still frequently used in early 20th century Sweden as painted or carved onto doors, walls and household utensils in order to protect against elves.^[52] As the name suggests, the elves were perceived as a potential danger against people and livestock.^[52] The second form was an ordinary cross carved onto a round or oblong silver plate.^[52] This second kind of elf cross one was worn as a pendant in a necklace and in order to have sufficient magic it had to be forged during three evenings with silver from nine different sources of inherited silver.^[52] In some locations it also had to be on the altar of a church during three consecutive Sundays.^[52]

The elves could be seen dancing over meadows, particularly at night and on misty mornings. They left a kind of circle where they had danced, which were called *älvdanser* (elf dances) or *älvringar* (elf circles), and to urinate in one was thought to cause venereal diseases. Typically, elf circles were fairy rings consisting of a ring of small mushrooms, but there was also another kind of elf circle:

On lake shores, where the forest met the lake, you could find elf circles. They were round places where the grass had been flattened like a floor. Elves had danced there. By Lake Tisaren,^[55] I have seen one of those. It could be dangerous and one could become ill if one had trodden over such a place or if one destroyed anything there.^[53]



Älvalek, "Elf Play" by August Malmström (1866).

If a human watched the dance of the elves, he would discover that even though only a few hours seemed to have passed, many years had passed in the real world. (This time phenomenon is retold in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* when the Fellowship pass into both Rivendell and Lothlórien, where time seems almost to stand still. It also has a remote parallel in the Irish *sídh*.) In a song from the late Middle Ages about Olaf Liljekrans, the elven queen invites him to dance. He refuses, he knows what will happen if he joins the dance and he is on his way home to his own wedding. The queen offers him gifts, but he declines. She threatens to kill him if he does not join, but he rides off and dies of the disease she sent upon him, and his young bride dies of a broken heart.^[56]

However, the elves were not exclusively young and beautiful. In the Swedish folktale *Little Rosa and Long Leda*, an elvish woman (*älvakvinna*) arrives in the end and saves the heroine, Little Rose, on condition that the king's cattle no longer graze on her hill. She is described as a beautiful old woman and by her aspect people saw that she belonged to the *subterraneans*.^[57]

Icelandic

Expression of belief in *huldufólk* or "hidden folk", the elves that dwell in rock formations, is common in Iceland. If the natives do not explicitly express their belief, they are often reluctant to express disbelief.^[58] A 2006 and 2007 study on superstition by the University of Iceland's Faculty of Social Sciences supervised by Terry Gunnell (associate folklore professor), reveal that natives would not rule out the existence of elves and ghosts (similar results of a 1974 survey by Professor Erlendur Haraldsson, *Fréttablaðið* reports). Gunnell stated: "Icelanders seem much more open to phenomena like dreaming the future, forebodings, ghosts and elves than other nations." His results were consistent with a similar study conducted in 1974.^[59]

German

An elven king occasionally appears among the predominantly female elves as in Denmark and Sweden. In the German middle-age epic the *Nibelungenlied*, a dwarf named *Alberich* plays an important role. *Alberich* literally translates as "elf-sovereign", further contributing to the elf–dwarf confusion observed already in the Younger Edda. Via the French *Alberon*, the same name has entered English as *Oberon* – king of elves and fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see below).

The legend of *Der Erlikönig* appears to have originated in fairly recent times in Denmark and Goethe based his poem on "Erlkönigs Tochter" ("Erlkönig's Daughter"), a Danish work translated into German by Johann Gottfried Herder.



Illustrations to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. By Arthur Rackham.

The Erlkönig's nature has been the subject of some debate. The name translates literally from the German as "Alder King" rather than its common English translation, "Elf King" (which would be rendered as *Elfenkönig* in German). It has often been suggested that *Erlkönig* is a mistranslation from the original Danish *ellerkonge* or *elverkonge*, which *does* mean "elf king".

According to German and Danish folklore, the Erlkönig appears as an omen of death, much like the banshee in Irish mythology. Unlike the banshee, however, the Erlkönig will appear only to the person about to die. His form and expression also tell the person what sort of death they will have: a pained expression means a painful death, a peaceful expression means a peaceful death. This aspect of the legend was immortalised by Goethe in his poem *Der Erlkönig*, later set to music by Schubert.

In the first story of the Brothers Grimm fairy tale *Die Wichtelmänner*, the title protagonists are two naked mannequins, which help a shoemaker in his work. When he rewards their work with little clothes, they are so delighted, that they run away and are never seen again. Even though *Wichtelmänner* are akin to beings such as kobolds, dwarves and brownies, the tale has been translated into English as *The Elves and the Shoemaker*, and is echoed in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter stories (see House-elf).

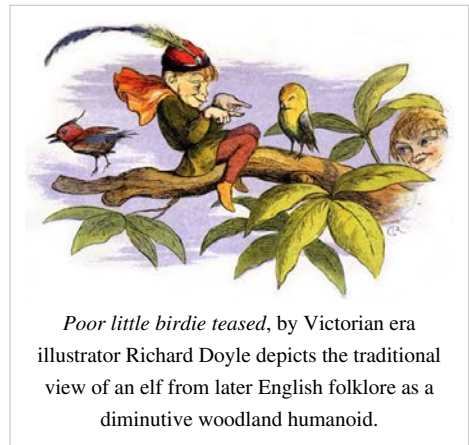
Variations of the German elf in folklore include the moss people^[60] and the *weisse frauen* ("white women"). On the latter Jacob Grimm does not make a direct association to the elves, but other researchers see a possible connection to the shining light elves of Old Norse.^[61]

English and Lowland Scottish

The elf makes many appearances in ballads of English and Scottish origin, as well as folk tales, many involving trips to Elphame or Elfland (the *Álfheim* of Norse mythology), a mystical realm which is sometimes an eerie and unpleasant place. The elf is occasionally portrayed in a positive light, such as the Queen of Elphame in the ballad *Thomas the Rhymer*, but many examples exist of elves of sinister character, frequently bent on rape and murder, as in the *Tale of Childe Rowland*, or the ballad *Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight*, in which the Elf-Knight bears away Isabel to murder her. Most instances of elves in ballads are male; the only commonly encountered female elf is the Queen of Elfland, who appears in *Thomas the Rhymer* and *The Queen of Elfland's Nourice*, in which a woman is abducted to be a wet-nurse to the queen's baby, but promised that she may return home once the child is weaned. In none of these cases is the elf a spritely character with pixie-like qualities.

English folktales of the early modern period commonly portray elves as small, elusive people with mischievous personalities. They are often portrayed as children with Williams syndrome (which was not recognised as a medical condition but some specialist believe that people were enchanted with their character and appearance that they believed to be magical),^[62] usually with fair hair. They are not evil but might annoy humans or interfere in their affairs. They are sometimes said to be invisible. In this tradition, elves became similar to the concept of fairies. As people from the English countryside immigrated to America, they brought elements of English folklore with them, and this particular depiction of elves then evolved in America into the Christmas elves of pop culture.

Successively, the word *elf*, as well as literary term *fairy*, evolved to a general denotation of various nature spirits like *Puck*, *hobgoblins*, *Robin Goodfellow*, the English and Scots *brownie*, the Northumbrian English hob and so forth. These terms, like their relatives in other European languages, are no longer clearly distinguished in popular folklore. Significant for the distancing of the concept of elves from its mythological origins was the influence from literature. In Elizabethan England, William Shakespeare imagined elves as little people. He apparently considered elves and



Poor little birdie teased, by Victorian era illustrator Richard Doyle depicts the traditional view of an elf from later English folklore as a diminutive woodland humanoid.

fairies to be the same race. In *Henry IV, part 1*, act II, scene iv, he has Falstaff call Prince Henry, "you starveling, you elfskin!", and in his *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, his elves are almost as small as insects. Wikipedia:Disputed statement On the other hand, Edmund Spenser applies *elf* to full-sized beings in *The Faerie Queene*.

The influence of Shakespeare and Michael Drayton made the use of *elf* and *fairy* for very small beings the norm. In Victorian literature, elves usually appeared in illustrations as tiny men and women with pointed ears and stocking caps. An example is Andrew Lang's fairy tale *Princess Nobody* (1884), illustrated by Richard Doyle, where fairies are tiny people with butterfly wings, whereas elves are tiny people with red stocking caps. There were exceptions to this rule however, such as the full-sized elves who appear in Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter* as well as Northern English and Scottish Lowlands folklore (as seen in such tales as The Queen of Elfan's Nourice and other local variants).

Christmas elf

In the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland the modern children's folklore of Santa Claus typically includes green-clad elves with pointy ears, long noses, and pointy hats as Santa's helpers or hired workers. They make the toys in a workshop located in the North Pole. In this portrayal, elves slightly resemble nimble and delicate versions of the elves in English folktales in the Victorian period from which they derived. The role of elves as Santa's helpers has continued to be popular, as evidenced by the success of the popular Christmas movie *Elf*.

Fantasy fiction

The fantasy genre in the 20th century grows out of 19th century Romanticism. 19th century scholars such as Andrew Lang and the Grimm brothers collected "fairy-stories" from popular folklore and in some cases retold them freely. A pioneering work of the genre was *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, a 1924 novel by Lord Dunsany. *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien (1937) is seminal, predating the lecture *On Fairy-Stories* by the same author by a few years. In the 1939 lecture, Tolkien introduced the term "fantasy" in a sense of "higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent". Elves played a central role in Tolkien's legendarium, notably *The Silmarillion*. Tolkien's writing has such popularity that in the 1960s and afterwards, elves speaking an elvish language similar to those in Tolkien's novels (like Quenya, and Sindarin) became staple non-human characters in high fantasy works and in fantasy role-playing games.

Post-Tolkien fantasy elves (popularized by the *Dungeons & Dragons* role-playing game) tend to be more beautiful and wiser than humans, with sharper senses and perceptions. They are said to be gifted in magic, mentally sharp and lovers of nature, art, and song. They are often skilled archers. A hallmark of many fantasy elves is their pointed ears.



Typical illustration of a female elf in the high fantasy style (Kathrin "Kitty" Polikeit 2011).

Footnotes

Explanatory notes

- [1] Lass 1994, p. 205
- [2] Lindow 2002, p. 110
- [3] Neusner 1992, p. 172
- [4] Fulbrook 2004, p. 93
- [5] The English word *oaf* (earlier form *auff(e)*), used since the 1620s, derive from *elf*, and denoted an "elf child" or a changeling left by the fairies, thus by extension referring to any "misbegotten, deformed, or idiot child".
- [6] The Middle High German *alp* could also be used in the sense of "fool" (German: *thor, narr*). UNIQ-ref-0-09fe7ab4264d1311-QINU
- [7] Marshall Jones Company (1930). *Mythology of All Races Series, Volume 2 Eddic*, Great Britain: Marshall Jones Company, 1930, pp. 220.
- [8] IE root **albh-*, in *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language 2000*. bartleby.com (<http://www.bartleby.com/61/roots/IE13.html>)
- [9] , "Zu diesen rbhu, alba.. stellt sich nun aber entschieden das ahd. alp, ags. älf, altn . âlfr"
- [10] in *K. Z.*, p.110,
- [11] Kuhn, UNIQ-ref-1-09fe7ab4264d1311-QINU ThunLass 1994, p. 205 and numerous references.
- [12] ; online query (<http://woerterbuchnetz.de/Lexer/?sigle=Lexen&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=LA00984>) ()
- [14] as illustrated in the 14th century incantation, the *Münchener nachtsegen*. ,
- [15] (p.378) "*Elves* and cognate words in Old Germanic languages are used for supernatural beings of widely different kinds..the corresponding German *Alb (Alp), Alf, Olf*, in most cases a nightmare, sometimes a spirit of disease or even a devil. (The plural *Elben, Elber* is not common.) Our knowledge of these creatures is largely derived from folk tales and similar sources., citing M. Hofler, *Deutsches Krankheitsnamenbuch* (1899)
- [16] (Stallybrass tr.) , "With us the word *alp* still survives in the sense of the night-hag, night-mare, in addition to which our writers of the last century introduced the Engl. *elf*, a form untrue to our dialect; before that.. the correct pl. *elbe* or *elben*. Followed by comparison of elf to aesir gods and dwarfs.
- [17] Although J. R. R. Tolkien attributed the loan of *Elf* into German to Wieland's 1764 translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The same claim was also given in Kluge's dictionary in the 19th century p.99, note 3, in: (orig. pub. *Dublin Review* 1947)
- [18] "Die aufnahme des Wortes knüpft an Wielands Übersetzung von Shakespeares Sommernachtstraum 1764 und and Herders Vokslieder 1774 (Werke 25, 42) an;
- [19] The fact that cognates exist (such as the German *elbinne*) could suggest a West Germanic **alb(i)innjo*, but this is uncertain, as the examples may be simply a transference to the weak declension common in Southern and Western forms of Middle English. The Middle English forms with this weak declension were *aluen(e)* and *eluen(e)*.
- [20] "I show that by the eleventh century, ælf could also denote otherworldly, nymph-like females." (thesis).
- [21] OED
- [25] (Stallybrass tr.) and Supplement:
- [26] (Stallybrass tr.)
- [27] Sturluson, Snorri. *The Younger (or Prose) Edda*, Rasmus B. Anderson translation (1897) (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose2/index.php>). Chapter 7.
- [28] *The Saga of Thorstein, Viking's Son* (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/viking/001_02.php) (Old Norse original: *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (<http://www.snerpa.is/net/forn/thorstei.htm>)). Chapter 1.
- [29] *Setr Skuld hér til inn mesta seið at vinna Hrólfr konung, bróður sinn, svá at í fylgd er með henni álfar ok normir ok annat ótöluligt illþýði, svá at mannlig náttúra má eigi slíkt standast.* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/fornaldersagaene/hrolfsagakraka.php>)
- [30] *The Life and Death of Cormac the Skald* (<http://www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/lit/epics/LifeandDeathofCormactheSkald/Chap1.html>) (Old Norse original: *Kormáks saga* (<http://www.snerpa.is/net/isl/kormaks.htm>)). Chapter 22.
- [31] () attempts the reconstruction based on onomastics and phraseology, e.g., the compound *ælfsciene* ("elf-beautiful"), used of seductively beautiful Biblical women in the Old English poems *Judith* and *Genesis A*, is seen by him as an echo of the Norse description of the elf as beings as beautiful as the sun.
- [32] , "þanon untydras ealle onwocon / eotenas ond ylfe ond orneas / swylce gigantas þa wið gode wunnon / lange þrage he him ðæs lean forgeald"
- [34] MS. 255 in the Library of Peterhouse, Cambridge. Israel Gollancz read a paper to the Philological Society in 1896, summarized in:
- [36] Alternatively translated "Some are elves, some are adders, / and some are nickers that (dwell near water?). /There is no man except Hildebrand alone." by Wentersdorf
- [37] , cited in
- [39] , "The form *Alp*.. not.. met with in any document previous to the thirteenth century; without doubt, merely because there was no occasion to make mention of a heathen nothion despised by the learned"; "The middle high German poets sometimes use this expression, though in general very rarely."
- [41] MHG *alp* 'elf', *rîche* "powerful", cf. Goth. *reiks* 'ruler' can be appropriately interpreted as "ruler of supernatural beings" name="Gillespie-alberich">

- [42] (Stallybrass tr.)
- [43] , citing
- [44] Thidrekksaga. ; Hayme's tr., ch. 169
- [45] Singer, British Academy lecture of 1919, 'Early English Magic and Medicine' (1919–20, 357) quoted in
- [47] Collins, William. 1775. *An Ode On The Popular Superstitions Of The Highlands Of Scotland, Considered As The Subject Of Poetry* (<http://poetry.poetryx.com/poems/1850/>).
- [48] (Stallybrass tr.)
- [49] In Lexer's Middle High German dictionary under *alp*, *alb* (<http://woerterbuchnetz.de/Lexer/?sigle=Lexer&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=LA00984>) is an example: Pf. arzb. 2 14b= (): "Swen der alp triuget, rouchet er sich mit der verbena, ime enwirret als pald niht;" meaning: 'When an *alp* deceives you, fumigate yourself with verbena and the confusion will soon be gone'. The editor glosses *alp* here as "malicious, teasing spirit" ()
- [51] (Stallybrass tr.)
- [52] The article *Alfkors* (<http://runeberg.org/nfba/0313.html>) in *Nordisk familjebok* (1904).
- [53] An account given in 1926,
- [54] For the Swedish belief in *älvor* see mainly A more summary description in English is provided by , esp. chapter *Scandinavia: Elves* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/tfm/tfm017.htm>).
- [56] provides two translated versions of the song: *Sir Olof in Elve-Dance* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/tfm/tfm018.htm>) and The Elf-Woman and Sir Olof (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/tfm/tfm019.htm>).
- [60] Thistelton-Dyer, T.F. The Folk-lore of Plants, 1889 (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10118/10118-8.txt>). Available online by Project Gutenberg. File retrieved 3-05-07.
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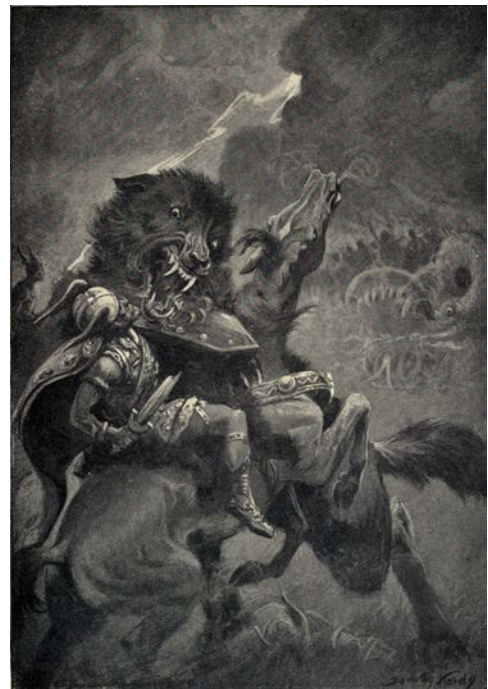
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Fenrir

In Norse mythology, **Fenrir** (Old Norse: "fen-dweller"),^[1] **Fenrisúlfr** (Old Norse: "Fenris wolf"),^[2] **Hróðvitnir** (Old Norse: "fame-wolf"),^[3] or **Vánagandr** (Old Norse: "the monster of the river Ván")^[4] is a monstrous wolf. Fenrir is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In both the *Poetic Edda* and *Prose Edda*, Fenrir is the father of the wolves Sköll and Hati Hróðvitnisson, is a son of Loki, and is foretold to kill the god Odin during the events of Ragnarök, but will in turn be killed by Odin's son Víðarr.

In the *Prose Edda*, additional information is given about Fenrir, including that, due to the gods' knowledge of prophecies foretelling great trouble from Fenrir and his rapid growth, the gods bound him, and as a result Fenrir bit off the right hand of the god Týr. Depictions of Fenrir have been identified on various objects, and scholarly theories have been proposed regarding Fenrir's relation to other canine beings in Norse mythology. Fenrir has been the subject of artistic depictions, and he appears in literature.



Odin and Fenris (1909) by Dorothy Hardy

Attestations

Poetic Edda

Fenrir is mentioned in three stanzas of the poem *Völuspá*, and in two stanzas of the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*. In stanza 40 of the poem *Völuspá*, a völva divulges to Odin that, in the east, an old woman sat in the forest Járnvíðr, "and bred there the broods of Fenrir. There will come from them all one of that number to be a moon-snatcher in troll's skin."^[5] Further into the poem, the völva foretells that Odin will be consumed by Fenrir at Ragnarök:

Then is fulfilled Hlín's
second sorrow,
when Óðinn goes



Fenrir and Odin (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

to fight with the wolf,
and Beli's slayer,
bright, against Surtr.
Then shall Frigg's
sweet friend fall.

In the stanza that follows, the *völva* describes that Odin's "tall child of Triumph's Sire" (Odin's son Víðarr) will then come to "strike at the beast of slaughter," and with his hands, he will drive a sword **onto** the heart of "Hveðrungr's son," avenging the death of his father.^[6]

In the first of two stanzas mentioning Fenrir in *Vafþrúðnismál*, Odin poses a question to the wise jötunn Vafþrúðnir:

"Much I have travelled, much have I tried out,
much have I tested the Powers;
from where will a sun come into the smooth heaven
when Fenrir has assailed this one?"

In the stanza that follows, Vafþrúðnir responds that Sól (here referred to as *Álfröðull*), will bear a daughter before Fenrir attacks her, and that this daughter shall continue the paths of her deceased mother through the heavens.^[7]

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda*, Fenrir is mentioned in three books: *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal*.

Gylfaginning chapters 13 and 25

In chapter 13 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, Fenrir is first mentioned in a stanza quoted from *Völuspá*.^[8] Fenrir is first mentioned in prose in chapter 25, where the enthroned figure of High tells Gangleri (described as King Gylfi in disguise) about the god Týr. High says that one example of Týr's bravery is that when the Æsir were luring Fenrir (referred to here as *Fenrisúlfr*) to place the fetter Gleipnir on the wolf, Týr placed his hand within the wolf's mouth as a pledge. This was done at Fenrir's own request because he did not trust that the Æsir would let him go. As a result, when the Æsir refused to release him, he bit off Týr's hand at a location "now called the wolf-joint" (the wrist), causing Týr to be one-handed and "not considered to be a promoter of settlements between people."^[9]

Gylfaginning chapter 34

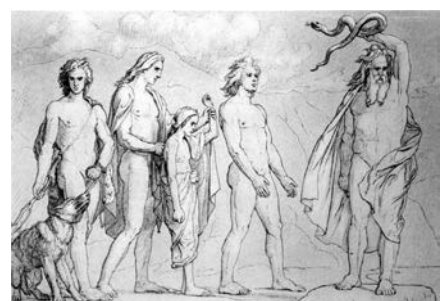
In chapter 34, High describes Loki, and says that Loki had three children with a female jötunn named Angrboða located in the land of Jötunheimr; Fenrisúlfr, the serpent Jörmungandr, and the female being Hel. High continues that, once the gods found that these three children



An illustration of Víðarr stabbing Fenrir while holding his jaws apart (1908) by W. G. Collingwood, inspired by the Gosforth Cross



Loki's Brood (1905) by Emil Doepler



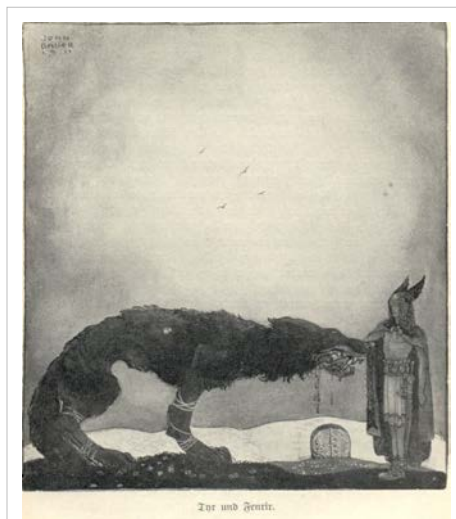
Loki's Children (1906) by Lorenz Frølich

were being brought up in the land of Jötunheimr, and when the gods "traced prophecies that from these siblings great mischief and disaster would arise for them" the gods expected a lot of trouble from the three children, partially due to the nature of the mother of the children, yet worse so due to the nature of their father.^[10]

High says that Odin sent the gods to gather the children and bring them to him. Upon their arrival, Odin threw Jörmungandr into "that deep sea that lies round all lands", and then threw Hel into Niflheim, and bestowed upon her authority over nine worlds. However, the Æsir brought up the wolf "at home", and only Týr had the courage to approach Fenrir, and give Fenrir food. The gods noticed that Fenrir was growing rapidly every day, and since all prophecies foretold that Fenrir was destined to cause them harm, the gods formed a plan. The gods prepared three fetters: The first, greatly strong, was called Leyding. They brought Leyding to Fenrir and suggested that the wolf try his strength with it. Fenrir judged that it was not beyond his strength, and so let the gods do what they wanted with it. At Fenrir's first kick the bind snapped, and Fenrir loosened himself from Leyding. The gods made a second fetter, twice as strong, and named it Dromi. The gods asked Fenrir to try the new fetter, and that should he break this feat of engineering, Fenrir would achieve great fame for his strength. Fenrir considered that the fetter was very strong, yet also that his strength had grown since he broke Leyding, yet that he would have to take some risks if he were to become famous. Fenrir allowed them to place the fetter.^[11]

When the Æsir exclaimed that they were ready, Fenrir shook himself, knocked the fetter to ground, strained hard, and kicking with his feet, snapped the fetter – breaking it into pieces that flew far into the distance. High says that, as a result, to "loose from Leyding" or to "strike out of Dromi" have become sayings for when something is achieved with great effort. The Æsir started to fear that they would not be able to bind Fenrir, and so Odin sent Freyr's messenger Skírnir down into the land of Svartálfaheimr to "some dwarfs" and had them make a fetter called Gleipnir. The dwarves constructed Gleipnir from six mythical ingredients. After an exchange between Gangleri and High, High continues that the fetter was smooth and soft as a silken ribbon, yet strong and firm. The messenger brought the ribbon to the Æsir, and they thanked him heartily for completing the task.^[12]

The Æsir went out on to the lake Amsvartnir sent for Fenrir to accompany them, and continued to the island Lyngvi (Old Norse "a place overgrown with heather").^[13] The gods showed Fenrir the silken fetter Gleipnir, told him to tear it, stated that it was much stronger than it appeared, passed it among themselves, used their hands to pull it, and yet it did not tear. However, they said that Fenrir would be able to tear it, to which Fenrir replied:



Týr and Fenrir (1911) by John Bauer

"It looks to me that with this ribbon as though I will gain no fame from it if I do tear apart such a slender band, but if it is made with art and trickery, then even if it does look thin, this band is not going on my legs."^[12]

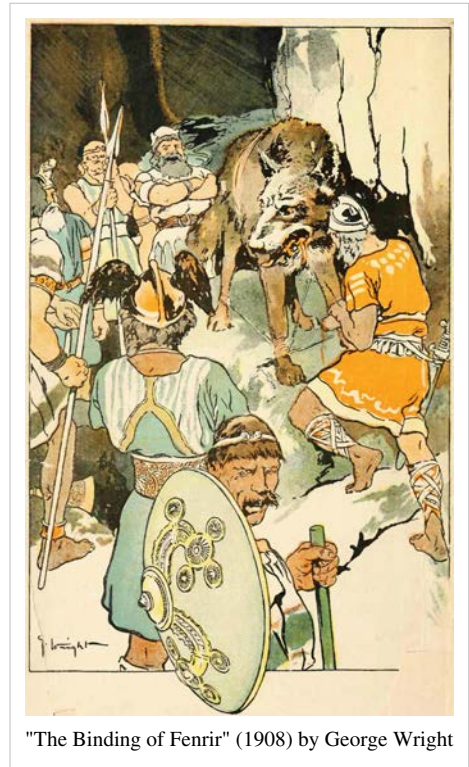
The Æsir said Fenrir would quickly tear apart a thin silken strip, noting that Fenrir earlier broke great iron binds, and added that if Fenrir wasn't able to break slender Gleipnir then Fenrir is nothing for the gods to fear, and as a result would be freed. Fenrir responded:

"If you bind me so that I am unable to release myself, then you will be standing by in such a way that I should have to wait a long time before I got any help from you. I am reluctant to have this band put on me. But rather than that you question my courage, let someone put his hand in my mouth as a pledge that this is done in good faith."^[12]

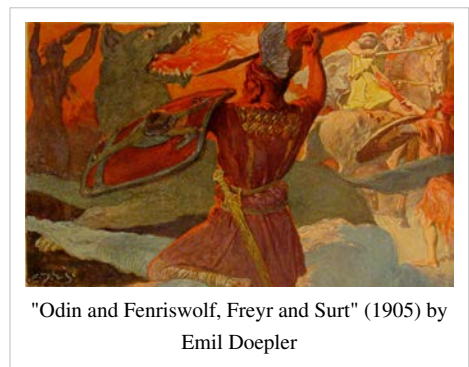
With this statement, all of the Æsir look to one another, finding themselves in a dilemma. Everyone refused to place their hand in Fenrir's mouth until Týr put out his right hand and placed it into the wolf's jaws. When Fenrir kicked, Gleipnir caught tightly, and the more Fenrir struggled, the stronger the band grew. At this, everyone laughed, except Týr, who there lost his right hand. When the gods knew that Fenrir was fully bound, they took a cord called Gelgja (Old Norse "fetter")^[14] hanging from Gleipnir, inserted the cord through a large stone slab called Gjöll (Old Norse "scream"),^[15] and the gods fastened the stone slab deep into the ground. After, the gods took a great rock called Thviti (Old Norse "hitter, batterer"),^[16] and thrust it even further into the ground as an anchoring peg. Fenrir reacted violently; he opened his jaws very widely, and tried to bite the gods. The gods thrust "a certain sword" into Fenrir's mouth, the hilt of the sword on Fenrir's lower gums and the point his upper gums. Fenrir "howled horribly," saliva ran from his mouth, and this saliva formed the river Ván (Old Norse "hope").^[17] There Fenrir will lie until Ragnarök. Gangleri comments that Loki created a "pretty terrible family" though important, and asks why the Æsir did not just kill Fenrir there since they expected great malice from him. High replies that "so greatly did the gods respect their holy places and places of sanctuary that they did not want to defile them with the wolf's blood even though the prophecies say that he will be the death of Odin."^[18]

***Gylfaginning* chapters 38 and 51**

In chapter 38, High says that there are many men in Valhalla, and many more who will arrive, yet they will "seem too few when the wolf comes."^[19] In chapter 51, High foretells that as part of the events of Ragnarök, after Fenrir's son Sköll has swallowed the sun and his other son Hati Hróðvitnisson has swallowed the moon, the stars will disappear from the sky. The earth will shake violently, trees will be uprooted, mountains will fall, and all binds will snap – Fenrisúlfr will be free. Fenrisúlfr will go forth with his mouth opened wide, his upper jaw touching the sky and his lower jaw the earth, and flames will burn from his eyes and nostrils.^[20] Later, Fenrisúlfr will arrive at the field Vígríðr with his brother Jörmungandr. With the forces assembled there, an immense battle will take place. During this, Odin will ride to fight Fenrisúlfr. During the battle, Fenrisúlfr will eventually swallow Odin, killing him, and Odin's son Víðarr will move forward and kick one



"The Binding of Fenrir" (1908) by George Wright

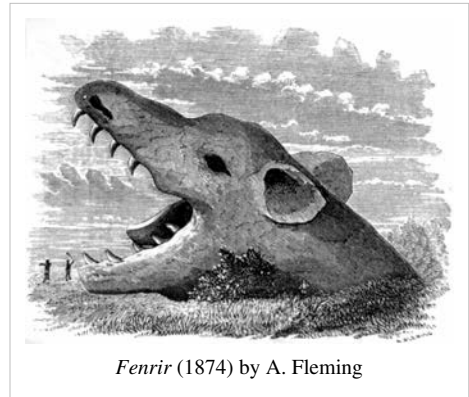


"Odin and Fenriswolf, Freyr and Surt" (1905) by Emil Doepler

foot into the lower jaw of the wolf. This foot will bear a legendary shoe "for which the material has been collected throughout all time." With one hand, Víðarr will take hold of the wolf's upper jaw and tear apart his mouth, killing Fenrisúlfr.^[21] High follows this prose description by citing various quotes from *Völuspá* in support, some of which mention Fenrir.^[22]

Skáldskaparmál and Háttatal

In the Epilogue section of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, a euhemerized monologue equates Fenrisúlfr to Pyrrhus^[23], attempting to rationalize that "it killed Odin, and Pyrrhus could be said to be a wolf according to their religion, for he paid no respect to places of sanctuary when he killed the king in the temple in front of Thor's altar."^[24] In chapter 2, "wolf's enemy" is cited as a kenning for Odin as used by the 10th century skald Egill Skallagrímsson.^[25] In chapter 9, "feeder of the wolf" is given as a kenning for Týr and, in chapter 11, "slayer of Fenrisúlfr" is presented as a kenning for Víðarr.^[26] In chapter 50, a section of *Ragnarsdrápa* by the 9th century skald Bragi Boddason is quoted that refers to Hel, the being, as "the monstrous wolf's sister."^[27] In chapter 75, names for wargs and wolves are listed, including both "Hróðvitnir" and "Fenrir."^[28] "Fenrir" appears twice in verse as a common noun for a "wolf" or "warg" in chapter 58 of *Skáldskaparmál*, and in chapter 56 of the book *Háttatal*.^[29] Additionally, the name "Fenrir" can be found among a list of jötnar in chapter 75 of *Skáldskaparmál*.^[30]

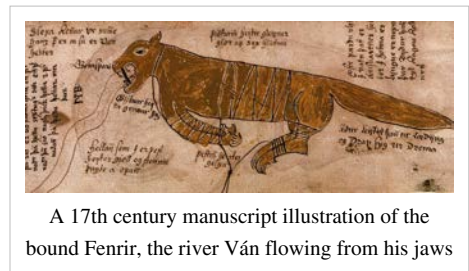


Fenrir (1874) by A. Fleming

Heimskringla

At the end of the *Heimskringla* saga *Hákonar saga góða*, the poem *Hákonarmál* by the 10th century skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir is presented. The poem is about the fall of King Haakon I of Norway; although he is Christian, he is taken by two valkyries to Valhalla, and is there received as one of the Einherjar. Towards the end of the poem, a stanza relates sooner will the bonds of Fenrir snap than as good a king as Haakon shall stand in his place:

Unfettered will fare the Fenris Wolf
and ravaged the realm of men,
ere that cometh a kingly prince
as good, to stand in his stead.^[31]



A 17th century manuscript illustration of the bound Fenrir, the river Ván flowing from his jaws

Archaeological record

Thorwald's Cross

Thorwald's Cross, a partially surviving runestone erected at Kirk Andreas on the Isle of Man, depicts a bearded human holding a spear downward at a wolf, his right foot in its mouth, while a large bird sits at his shoulder.^[32] Rundata dates it to 940,^[33] while Pluskowski dates it to the 11th century.^[32] This depiction has been interpreted as Odin, with a raven or eagle at his shoulder, being consumed by Fenrir at Ragnarök.^{[32][34]} On the reverse of the stone is another image parallel to it that has been described as Christ triumphing over Satan.^[35] These combined elements have led to the cross as being described as "syncretic art"; a mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs.^[32]



Thorwald's Cross at Kirk Andreas, Isle of Man

Gosforth Cross

The mid-11th century Gosforth Cross, located in Cumbria, England, has been described as depicting a combination of scenes from the Christian Judgement Day and the pagan Ragnarök.^[32] The cross features various figures depicted in Borre style, including a man with a spear facing a monstrous head, one of whose feet is thrust into the beast's forked tongue and on its lower jaw, while a hand is placed against its upper jaw, a scene interpreted as Víðarr fighting Fenrir.^[32] This depiction has been theorized as a metaphor for Christ's defeat of Satan.^[36]



The Ledberg stone in Sweden

Ledberg stone

The 11th century Ledberg stone in Sweden, similarly to Thorwald's Cross, features a figure with his foot at the mouth of a four-legged beast, and this may also be a depiction of Odin being devoured by Fenrir at Ragnarök.^[34] Below the beast and the man is a depiction of a legless, helmeted man, with his arms in a prostrate position.^[34] The Younger Futhark inscription on the stone bears a commonly seen memorial dedication, but is followed by an encoded runic sequence that has been described as "mysterious,"^[37] and "an interesting magic formula which is known from all over the ancient Norse world."^[34]

Other

If the images on the Tullstorp Runestone are correctly identified as depicting Ragnarök, then Fenrir is shown above the ship Naglfar.^[38]

Meyer Schapiro theorizes a connection between the "Hell Mouth" that appears in medieval Christian iconography and Fenrir. According to Schapiro, "the Anglo-Saxon taste for the Hell Mouth was perhaps influenced by the northern pagan myth of the Crack of Doom and the battle with the wolf, who devoured Odin."^[39]

Theories

In reference to Fenrir's presentation in the *Prose Edda*, Andy Orchard theorizes that "the hound (or wolf)" Garmr, Sköll, and Hati Hróðvitrnisson were originally simply all Fenrir, stating that "Snorri, characteristically, is careful to make distinctions, naming the wolves who devour the sun and moon as Sköll and Hati Hróðvitrnisson respectively, and describing an encounter between Garm and Týr (who, one would have thought, might like to get his hand on Fenrir) at Ragnarök."^[40]

John Lindow says that it is unclear why the gods decide to raise Fenrir as opposed to his siblings Hel and Jörmungandr in *Gylfaginning* chapter 35, theorizing that it may be "because Odin had a connection with wolves? Because Loki was Odin's blood brother?" Referring to the same chapter, Lindow comments that neither of the phrases that Fenrir's binding result in have left any other traces. Lindow compares Fenrir's role to his father Loki and Fenrir's brother Jörmungandr, in that they all spend time with the gods, are bound or cast out by them, return "at the end of the current mythic order to destroy them, only to be destroyed himself as a younger generation of gods, one of them his slayer, survives into the new world order."^[41]

Indo-European parallels have been proposed between myths of Fenrir and the Persian demon Ahriman. The Yashts refer to a story where Taxma Urupi rode Angra Mainyu as a horse for thirty years. An elaboration of this allusion is found only in a late Parsi commentary. The ruler Taxmoruw (Taxma Urupi) managed to lasso Ahriman (Angra Mainyu) and keep him tied up while taking him for a ride three times a day. After thirty years Ahriman outwitted and swallowed Taxmoruw. In a sexual encounter with Ahriman, Jamshid, Taxmoruw's brother, inserted his hand into Ahriman's anus and pulled out his brother's corpse. His hand withered from contact with the diabolic innards. The suggested parallels with Fenrir myths are the binding of an evil being by a ruler figure and the subsequent swallowing of the ruler figure by the evil being (Odin and Fenrir), trickery involving the thrusting of a hand into a monster's orifice and the affliction of the inserted limb (Týr and Fenrir).^[42]

Ethologist Dr. Valerius Geist of the University of Calgary, Alberta wrote that Fenrir's maiming and ultimate killing of Odin, who had previously nurtured him, was likely based on true experiences of wolf-behaviour, seeing as wolves are genetically encoded to rise up the pack hierarchy and have on occasion been recorded to rebel against and kill their parents. Geist states that "apparently, even the ancients knew that wolves may turn on their parents and siblings and kill them."^[1]

Modern influence

Fenrir has been depicted in the artwork "Odin and Fenris" (1909) and "The Binding of Fenris" (around 1900) by Dorothy Hardy, "Odin und Fenriswolf" and "Fesselung des Fenriswolfe" (1901) by Emil Doepler, and is the subject of the metal sculpture "Fenrir" by A. V. Gunnerud located on the island of Askøy, Norway.^[2]

Fenrir appears in modern literature in the poem "Om Fenrisulven og Tyr" (1819) by Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger (collected in *Nordens Guder*), the novel *Der Fenriswolf* by K. H. Strobl, and *Til kamp mod dødbideriet* (1974) by E. K. Reich and E. Larsen.^[2]



Fenrir bites off the hand of a sword-wielding Týr in an illustration on an 18th century Icelandic manuscript

Notes


- [1] Orchard (1997:42).
- [2] Simek (2007:81).
- [3] Simek (2007:160).
- [4] Simek (2007:350).
- [5] Dronke (1997:17).
- [6] Dronke (1997:21–22).
- [7] Larrington (1999:47).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:15).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:25).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:26–27).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:27).
- [12] Faulkes (1995:28).
- [13] Simek (2007:198).
- [14] Orchard (1997:54).
- [15] Orchard (1997:57).
- [16] Simek (2007:334).
- [17] Simek (2007:350).
- [18] Faulkes (1995:29).
- [19] Faulkes (1995:32).
- [20] Faulkes (1995:53).
- [21] Faulkes (1995:54).
- [22] Faulkes (1995:55–57).
- [23] http://toolsserver.org/%7Edispenser/cgi-bin/dab_solver.py?page=Fenrir&editintro=Template:Disambiguation_needed/editintro&client=Template:Dn
- [24] Faulkes (1995:65–66).
- [25] Faulkes (1995:68).
- [26] Faulkes (1995:76).
- [27] Faulkes (1995:123).
- [28] Faulkes (1995:164).
- [29] Faulkes (1995:136 and 199).
- [30] Faulkes (1995:157).
- [31] Hollander (2007:127).
- [32] Pluskowski (2004:158).
- [33] Entry Br Olsen;185A in Rundata 2.0
- [34] Jansson (1987:152)
- [35] Richards (1999:200).
- [36] Schapiro (1980:264, note 66).
- [37] MacLeod, Mees (2006:145).
- [38] Merrony (2004:136); Crumlin-Pedersen & Thye (1995:170).
- [39] Schapiro (1942:211).
- [40] Orchard (1997:43).
- [41] Lindow (2001:111–114).
- [42] Puhvel (1988:118–119).

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External links

-  Media related to Fenrir at Wikimedia Commons

Hel (being)

In Norse mythology, **Hel** is a being who presides over a realm of the same name, where she receives a portion of the dead. Hel is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In addition, she is mentioned in poems recorded in *Heimskringla* and *Egils saga* that date from the 9th and 10th centuries, respectively. An episode in the Latin work *Gesta Danorum*, written in the 12th century by Saxo Grammaticus, is generally considered to refer to Hel, and Hel may appear on various Migration Period bracteates.

In the *Poetic Edda*, *Prose Edda*, and *Heimskringla*, Hel is referred to as a daughter of Loki, and to "go to Hel" is to die. In the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, Hel is described as having been appointed by the god Odin as ruler of a realm of the same name, located in Niflheim. In the same source, her appearance is described as half black and half flesh-coloured and further as having a gloomy, downcast appearance. The *Prose Edda* details that Hel rules over vast mansions, her servants in her underworld realm, and as playing a key role in the attempted resurrection of the god Baldr.



Hel (1889) by Johannes Gehrts.

Scholarly theories have been proposed about Hel's potential connections to figures appearing in the 11th century *Old English Gospel of Nicodemus* and Old Norse *Bartholomeus saga postola*, potential Indo-European parallels to Bhavani, Kali, and Mahakali, and her origins.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

The *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, features various poems that mention Hel. In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, Hel's realm is referred to as the "Halls of Hel."^[1] In *Grímnismál*, Hel is listed as living beneath one of three roots growing from the world tree Yggdrasil.^[2] In *Fáfnismál*, the hero Sigurd stands before the mortally wounded body of the dragon Fáfnir, and states that Fáfnir lies in pieces, where "Hel can take" him.^[3] In *Atlamál*, the phrases "Hel has half of us" and "sent off to Hel" are used in reference to death.^[4] In stanza 4 of *Baldrs draumar*, Odin rides towards the "high hall of Hel."^[5]

Prose Edda

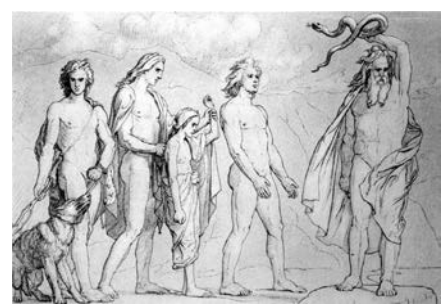
Hel is referenced in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, various times. In chapter 34 of the book *Gylfaginning*, Hel is listed by High as one of the three children of Loki and Angrboða; the wolf Fenrir, the serpent Jörmungandr, and Hel. High continues that, once the gods found that these three children are being brought up in the land of Jötunheimr, and when the gods "traced prophecies that from these siblings great mischief and disaster would arise for them" then the gods expected a lot of trouble from the three children, partially due to the nature of the mother of the children, yet worse so due to the nature of their father.^[6]

High says that Odin sent the gods to gather the children and bring them to him. Upon their arrival, Odin threw Jörmungandr into "that deep sea that lies round all lands," Odin threw Hel into Niflheim, and bestowed upon her authority over nine worlds, in that she must "administer board and lodging to those sent to her, and that is those who die of sickness or old age." High details that in this realm Hel has "great Mansions" with extremely high walls and immense gates, a hall called Éljúðnir, a dish called "Hunger," a knife called "Famine," the servant Ganglati (Old Norse "lazy walker"^[7]), the serving-maid Ganglöt (also "lazy walker"^[7]), the entrance threshold "Stumbling-block," the bed "Sick-bed," and the curtains "Gleaming-bale." High describes Hel as "half black and half flesh-coloured," adding that this makes her easily recognizable, and furthermore that Hel is "rather downcast and fierce-looking."^[8]

In chapter 49, High describes the events surrounding the death of the god Baldr. The goddess Frigg asks who among the Æsir will earn "all her love and favour" by riding to Hel, the location, to try to find Baldr, and offer Hel herself a ransom. The god Hermóðr volunteers and sets off upon the eight-legged horse Sleipnir to Hel. Hermóðr arrives in Hel's hall, finds his brother Baldr there, and stays the night. The next morning, Hermóðr begs Hel to allow Baldr to ride home with him, and tells her about the great weeping the Æsir have done upon Baldr's death.^[9] Hel says the love people have for Baldr that Hermóðr has claimed must be tested, stating:

"If all things in the world, alive or dead, weep for him, then he will be allowed to return to the Æsir. If anyone speaks against him or refuses to cry, then he will remain with Hel."^[10]

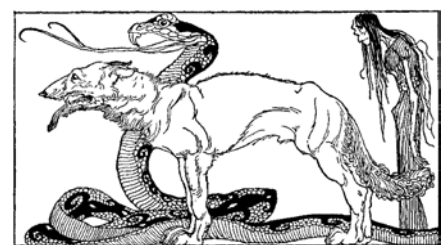
Later in the chapter, after the female jötunn Þökk refuses to weep for the dead Baldr, she responds in verse, ending with "let Hel hold what she has."^[11] In chapter 51, High describes the events of Ragnarök, and details that when Loki arrives at the field Vígríðr "all of Hel's people" will arrive with him.^[12]



A depiction of a young Hel (center) being led to the assignment of her realm, while her brother Fenrir is led forward (left) and Jörmungandr (right) is about to be cast by Odin (1906) by Lorenz Frølich.



"Hermod before Hela" (1909) by John Charles Dollman.



"The children of Loki" (1920) by Willy Pogany.

In chapter 5 of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, Hel is mentioned in a kenning for Baldr ("Hel's companion").^[13] In chapter 16, "Hel's [...] relative or father" is given as a kenning for Loki.^[14] In chapter 50, Hel is referenced ("to join the company of the quite monstrous wolf's sister") in the skaldic poem *Ragnarsdrápa*.^[15]

Heimskringla

In the *Heimskringla* book *Ynglinga saga*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, Hel is referred to, though never by name. In chapter 17, the king Dyggvi dies of sickness. A poem from the 9th century *Ynglingatal* that forms the basis of *Ynglinga saga* is then quoted that describes Hel's taking of Dyggvi:

I doubt not
 but Dyggvi's corpse
 Hel does hold
 to whore with him;
 for Ulf's sib
 a scion of kings
 by right should
 caress in death:
 to love lured
 Loki's sister
 Yngvi's heir
 o'er all Sweden.^[16]

In chapter 45, a section from *Ynglingatal* is given which refers to Hel as "howes'-warder" (meaning "guardian of the graves") and as taking King Halfdan Hvitbeinn from life.^[17] In chapter 46, King Eystein Halfdansson dies by being knocked overboard by a sail yard. A section from *Ynglingatal* follows, describing that Eystein "fared to" Hel (referred to as "Býleistr's-brother's-daughter").^[18] In chapter 47, the deceased Eystein's son King Halfdan dies of an illness, and the excerpt provided in the chapter describes his fate thereafter, a portion of which references Hel:

Loki's child
 from life summoned
 to her thing
 the third liege-lord,
 when Halfdan
 of Holtar farm
 left the life
 allotted to him.^[19]

In a stanza from *Ynglingatal* recorded in chapter 72 of the *Heimskringla* book *Saga of Harald Sigurdsson*, "given to Hel" is again used as a phrase to referring to death.^[20]



"Loki's Brood" (1905) by Emil Doepler.

Egils saga

The Icelanders' saga *Egils saga* contains the poem *Sonatorrek*. The saga attributes the poem to 10th century skald Egill Skallagrímsson, and writes that it was composed by Egill after the death of his son Gunnar. The final stanza of the poem contains a mention of Hel, though not by name:

Now my course is tough:
Death, close sister
of Odin's enemy
stands on the ness:
with resolution
and without remorse
I will gladly
await my own.^[21]

Gesta Danorum

In the account of Baldr's death in Saxo Grammaticus' early 13th century work *Gesta Danorum*, the dying Baldr has a dream visitation from Proserpina (here translated as "the goddess of death"):

The following night the goddess of death appeared to him in a dream standing at his side, and declared that in three days time she would clasp him in her arms. It was no idle vision, for after three days the acute pain of his injury brought his end.^[22]

Scholars have assumed that Saxo used Proserpina as a goddess equivalent to the Norse Hel.^[23]

Archaeological record

It has been suggested that several Migration Period imitation medallions and bracteates feature depictions of Hel. In particular the bracteates IK 14 and IK 124 depict a rider traveling down a slope and coming upon a female being holding a scepter or a staff. The downward slope may indicate that the rider is traveling towards the realm of the dead and the woman with the scepter may be a female ruler of that realm, corresponding to Hel.^[24]

Some B-class bracteates showing three godly figures have been interpreted as depicting Baldr's death, the best known of these is the Fakse bracteate. Two of the figures are understood to be Baldr and Odin while both Loki and Hel have been proposed as candidates for the third figure. If it is Hel she is presumably greeting the dying Baldr as he comes to her realm.^[25]

Theories

Seo Hell

The *Old English Gospel of Nicodemus*, preserved in two manuscripts from the 11th century, contains a female figure referred to as *Seo hell* who engages in flying with Satan and tells him to leave her dwelling (Old English *ut of mynre onwununge*). Regarding Seo Hell in the *Old English Gospel of Nicodemus*, Michael Bell states that "her vivid personification in a dramatically excellent scene suggests that her gender is more than grammatical, and invites comparison with the Old Norse underworld goddess Hel and the Frau Holle of German folklore, to say nothing of underworld goddesses in other cultures" yet adds that "the possibility that these genders *are* merely grammatical is strengthened by the fact that an Old Norse version of Nicodemus, possibly translated under English influence, personifies Hell in the neuter (Old Norse *þat helviti*)."^[26]

Bartholomeus saga postola

The Old Norse *Bartholomeus saga postola*, an account of the life of Saint Bartholomew dating from the 13th century, mentions a "Queen Hel." In the story, a devil is hiding within a pagan idol, and bound by Bartholomew's spiritual powers to acknowledge himself and confess, the devil refers to Jesus as the one which "made war on Hel our queen" (Old Norse *heriaði a Hel drottning vara*). "Queen Hel" is not mentioned elsewhere in the saga.^[26]

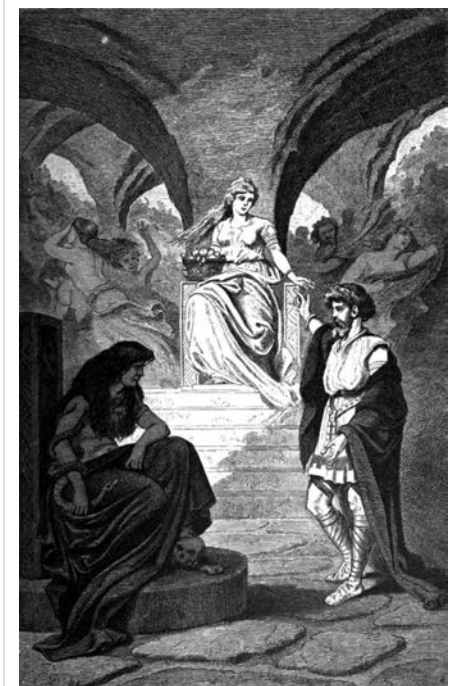
Michael Bell says that while Hel "might at first appear to be identical with the well-known pagan goddess of the Norse underworld" as described in chapter 34 of *Gylfaginning*, "in the combined light of the Old English and Old Norse versions of *Nicodemus* she casts quite a different a shadow," and that in *Bartholomeus saga postola* "she is clearly the queen of the Christian, not pagan, underworld."^[27]

Origins and development

Jacob Grimm theorized that Hel (whom he refers to here as *Halja*, the theorized Proto-Germanic form of the term) is essentially an "image of a greedy, unrestoring, female deity" and that "the higher we are allowed to penetrate into our antiquities, the less hellish and more godlike may *Halja* appear. Of this we have a particularly strong guarantee in her affinity to the Indian Bhavani, who travels about and bathes like Nerthus and Holda, but is likewise called *Kali* or *Mahakali*, the great *black* goddess. In the underworld she is supposed to sit in judgment on souls. This office, the similar name and the black hue [...] make her exceedingly like *Halja*. And *Halja* is one of the oldest and commonest conceptions of our heathenism."^[28]



An 18th century *Prose Edda* manuscript illustration featuring Hermóðr upon Sleipnir (left), Baldr (upper right), and Hel (lower right). Details include Hel's dish "hunger" and the knife "famine".



"Heimdallr desires Idunn's return from the Underworld" (1881) by Carl Emil Doepler.

Grimm theorizes that the Helhest, a three legged-horse that roams the countryside "as a harbinger of plague and pestilence" in Danish folklore, was originally the steed of the goddess Hel, and that on this steed Hel roamed the land "picking up the dead that were her due." In addition, Grimm says that a wagon was once ascribed to Hel, with which Hel made journeys.^[29] Grimm says that Hel is an example of a "half-goddess;" "one who cannot be shown to be either wife or daughter of a god, and who stands in a dependent relation to higher divinities" and that "half-goddesses" stand higher than "half-gods" in Germanic mythology.^[30]

Hilda Ellis Davidson (1948) states that Hel "as a goddess" in surviving sources seems to belong to a genre of literary personification, that the word *hel* is generally "used simply to signify death or the grave," and that the word often appears as the equivalent to the English 'death,' which Davidson states "naturally lends itself to personification by poets." Davidson explains that "whether this personification has originally been based on a belief in a goddess of death called Hel is another question," but that she does not believe that the surviving sources give any reason to believe so. Davidson adds that, on the other hand, various other examples of "certain supernatural women" connected with death are to be found in sources for Norse mythology, that they "seem to have been closely connected with the world of death, and were pictured as welcoming dead warriors," and that the depiction of Hel "as a goddess" in *Gylfaginning* "might well owe something to these."^[31]

In a later work (1998), Davidson states that the description of Hel found in chapter 33 of *Gylfaginning* "hardly suggests a goddess." Davidson adds that "yet this is not the impression given in the account of Hermod's ride to Hel later in *Gylfaginning* (49)" and points out that here Hel "[speaks] with authority as ruler of the underworld" and that from her realm "gifts are sent back to Frigg and Fulla by Balder's wife Nanna as from a friendly kingdom." Davidson posits that Snorri may have "earlier turned the goddess of death into an allegorical figure, just as he made Hel, the underworld of shades, a place 'where wicked men go,' like the Christian Hell (*Gylfaginning* 3)." Davidson continues that:

"On the other hand, a goddess of death who represents the horrors of slaughter and decay is something well known elsewhere; the figure of Kali in India is an outstanding example. Like Snorri's Hel, she is terrifying to in appearance, black or dark in colour, usually naked, adorned with severed heads or arms or the corpses of children, her lips smeared with blood. She haunts the battlefield or cremation ground and squats on corpses. Yet for all this she is 'the recipient of ardent devotion from countless devotees who approach her as their mother' [...]."^[32]

Davidson further compares to early attestations of the Irish goddesses Badb (Davidson points to the description of Badb from *The Destruction of Da Choca's Hostel* where Badb is wearing a dusky mantle, has a large mouth, is dark in color, and has gray hair falling over her shoulders, or, alternatively, "as a red figure on the edge of the ford, washing the chariot of a king doomed to die") and The Morrígan. Davidson concludes that, in these examples, "here we have the fierce destructive side of death, with a strong emphasis on its physical horrors, so perhaps we should not assume that the gruesome figure of Hel is wholly Snorri's literary invention."^[33]

John Lindow states that most details about Hel, as a figure, are not found outside of Snorri's writing in *Gylfaginning*, and says that when older skaldic poetry "says that people are 'in' rather than 'with' Hel, we are clearly dealing with a place rather than a person, and this is assumed to be the older conception," that the noun and place *Hel* likely originally simply meant "grave," and that "the personification came later."^[34] Rudolf Simek theorizes that the figure of Hel is "probably a very late personification of the underworld Hel," and says that "the first kennings using the goddess Hel are found at the end of the 10th and in the 11th centuries." Simek states that the allegorical description of Hel's house in *Gylfaginning* "clearly stands in the Christian tradition," and that "on the whole nothing speaks in favour of there being a belief in Hel in pre-Christian times."^[35] However, Simek also cites Hel as possibly appearing as one of three figures appearing together on Migration Period B-bracteates.^[36]

Notes

- [1] Larrington (1999:9).
- [2] Larrington (1999:56).
- [3] Larrington (1999:61).
- [4] Larrington (1999:225 and 232).
- [5] Larrington (1999:243).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:26–27).
- [7] Orchard (1997:79).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:27).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:49–50).
- [10] Byock (2005:68).
- [11] Byock (2005:69).
- [12] Faulkes (1995:54).
- [13] Faulkes (1995:74).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:76).
- [15] Faulkes (1995:123).
- [16] Hollander (2007:20).
- [17] Hollander (2007:46).
- [18] Hollander (2007:47).
- [19] Hollander (2007:20–21).
- [20] Hollander (2007:638).
- [21] Scudder (2001:159).
- [22] Fisher (1999:175).
- [23] Davidson (1999:II 356); Grimm (2004:314).
- [24] Pesch (2002:67).
- [25] Simek (2007:44); Pesch (2002:70); Bonnetain (2006:327).
- [26] Bell (1983:263).
- [27] Bell (1983:265).
- [28] Grimm (1882:315).
- [29] Grimm (1882:314).
- [30] Grimm (1882:397).
- [31] Ellis (1968:84).
- [32] Davidson (1998:178) quoting 'the recipient ...' from Kinsley (1989:116).
- [33] Davidson (1998:179).
- [34] Lindow (1997:172).
- [35] Simek (2007:138).
- [36] Simek (2007:44).

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Jörmungandr

In Norse mythology, **Jörmungandr** (Old Norse: *Jormungandr*, pronounced [ˈjœrmuŋɡandr]), often written **Jormungand**, or **Jörmungand** and also known as the **Midgard Serpent** (Old Norse: *Midgarðsormr*), or **World Serpent**, is a sea serpent, the middle child of the giantess Angrboða and the god Loki. According to the *Prose Edda*, Odin took Loki's three children by Angrboða, the wolf Fenrir, Hel and Jörmungandr, and tossed Jörmungandr into the great ocean that encircles Midgard.^[1] The serpent grew so large that he was able to surround the earth and grasp his own tail.^[1] As a result, he received the name of the Midgard Serpent or World Serpent. When he lets go, the world will end. Jörmungandr's arch-enemy is the god Thor.

Sources

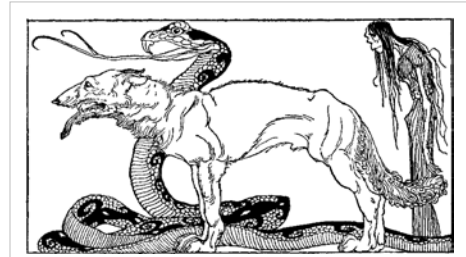
The major sources for myths about Jörmungandr are the *Prose Edda*, the skaldic poem *Húsdrápa*, and the Eddic poems *Hymiskviða* and *Völuspá*. Less important sources include kennings in other skaldic poems. For example in *Þórsdrápa*, *faðir lögseims*, "father of the sea-thread", is used as a kenning for Loki. There are also image stones from ancient times depicting the story of Thor fishing for Jörmungandr.



"Thor in Hymir's boat battling the Midgard Serpent" (1788) by Henry Fuseli.

Stories

There are three preserved myths detailing Thor's encounters with Jörmungandr:



"The children of Loki" (1920) by Willy Pogany.

Lifting the cat

In one, Thor encounters the serpent in the form of a colossal cat, disguised by the magic of the giant king Útgarða-Loki, who challenges the god to lift the cat as a test of strength. Thor is unable to lift such a monstrous creature as Jörmungandr, but does manage to raise it far enough that it lets go of the ground with one of its four feet.^[2] When Útgarða-Loki later explains his deception, he describes Thor's lifting of the cat as an impressive deed.^[2]

Thor's fishing trip

Another encounter comes when Thor goes fishing with the giant Hymir. When Hymir refuses to provide Thor with bait, Thor strikes the head off Hymir's largest ox to use as his bait.^[3] They row to a point where Hymir often sat and caught flat fish, where he drew up two whales, but Thor demands to go further out to sea, and does so despite Hymir's warnings.

Thor then prepares a strong line and a large hook and baits it with the ox head, which Jörmungandr bites. Thor pulls the serpent from the water, and the two face one another, Jörmungandr dribbling poison and blood.^[3] Hymir goes pale with fear, and as Thor grabs his hammer to kill the serpent, the giant cuts the line, leaving the serpent to sink beneath the waves.^[3]

This encounter with Thor seems to have been one of the most popular motifs in Norse art. Four picture stones that have been linked with the myth are the Altuna Runestone, Ardre VIII image stone, the Hørdum stone, and the Gosforth Cross.^[4] A stone slab that may be a portion of a second cross at Gosforth also shows a fishing scene using an ox head.^[5] Of these, the Ardre VIII stone is the most interesting, with a man entering a house where an ox is standing, and another scene showing two men using a spear to fish.^[6] The image on this stone is dated to the 8th^[4] or 9th century. If the stone is correctly interpreted as depicting this myth, it demonstrates that the myth was in a stable form for a period of about 500 years to the recording of the myth in the *Prose Edda* around the year 1220.^[6]



Thor goes fishing for the Midgard Serpent in this picture from an 18th-century Icelandic manuscript.

The final battle

The last meeting between the serpent and Thor is predicted to occur at Ragnarök, when Jörmungandr will come out of the ocean and poison the sky.^[7] Thor will kill Jörmungandr and then walk nine paces before falling dead, having been poisoned by the serpent's venom.^[7]

Notes

- [1] Sturluson, *Gylfaginning* ch. xxxiv, 2008:37.
- [2] Sturluson, *Gylfaginning* ch. xlvi, xlvii, 2008:52, 54.
- [3] Sturluson, *Gylfaginning* ch. xlviii, 2008:54-56.
- [4] Sørensen 2002:122-123.
- [5] Fee & Leeming 2001:36.
- [6] Sørensen 2002:130.
- [7] Sturluson, *Gylfaginning* ch. li, 2008:61-62.

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Jötunn

The **jötnar** (anglicized **jotunn** or **jotun**, plural **jötnar**; /ˈjoʊtən/, /ˈjoʊtʊn/, or /ˈjɔːtʊn/; Icelandic: [ˈjœːtʏn]; from Old Norse **jötunn** /ˈjɔtunː/; often glossed as *giant* or *ettin*) can be seen throughout Norse mythology. The Jötnar are a mythological race that live in Jötunheimr, one of the nine worlds of Norse cosmology, separated from Midgard, the world of humans. They were banished there by the Æsir who refuse them entry to their world, Asgard. The giants frequently interact with the Æsir, as well as the Vanir. They are usually in opposition to, or in competition with, them but also interact with them in a non-hostile manner. Some Jötnar even intermarry with the Æsir and Vanir. This very complex relationship between these two comparable races develops most notably in the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda.

Etymology

In Old Norse, the beings were called **jötnar** (singular *jötunn*, the regular reflex of the stem *jɔtun-* and the nominative singular ending *-r*), or **risar** (singular *risi*), in particular *bergrisar* ('mountain-risar'), or **pursar** (singular *purs*), in particular *hrímpursar* ('rime-thurs'). Giantesses could also be known as **gýgjar** (singular *gýgr*) or **íviðjur** (singular *íviðja*).

Jotunn (Proto-Germanic **etunaz*) might have the same root as "eat" (Proto-Germanic **etan*) and accordingly had the original meaning of "glutton" or "man-eater", probably due to their enormous diet because of their size.^[1] Following the same logic, *purs* might be derivative of "thirst" or "blood-thirst." *Risi* is probably akin to "rise," and so means "towering person" (akin to German *Riese*, Dutch *reus*, archaic Swedish *rese*, giant). The word "jotun" survives in modern Norwegian as giant (though more commonly called trolls), and has evolved into *jätte* and *jætte* in modern Swedish and Danish, while in Faroese they are called *jatnir* [jaˈtnɪr]/[jaˈknɪr] (Singular: *jotun* [jøːtʊn]). In modern Icelandic *jötunn* has kept its original meaning. In Old English, the cognate to *jötunn* is *eoten*, whence modern English *ettin*.

The Elder Futhark rune ᚱ, called Thurs (from Proto-Germanic **Þurisaz*), later evolved into the letter Þ. It is associated with dark magic, which could be why the jötnar have a negative connotation, or vice versa.^[2] In Scandinavian folklore, the Norwegian name tusse for a kind of troll or nisse, derives from Old Norse Þurs. Old English also has the cognate *þyrs* of the same meaning.



The jötnar Fafner and Fasolt seize Freyja in Arthur Rackham's illustration to Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

Norse jötnar

Origins

The first living being formed in the primeval chaos known as Ginnungagap was a giant of monumental size, called Ymir. When the icy mists of Niflheimr met with the heat of Múspellsheimr Ymir was born out of the joining of these two extreme forces from either world in the great void. Contained within Snorri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning*, Ymir's creation is recounted:

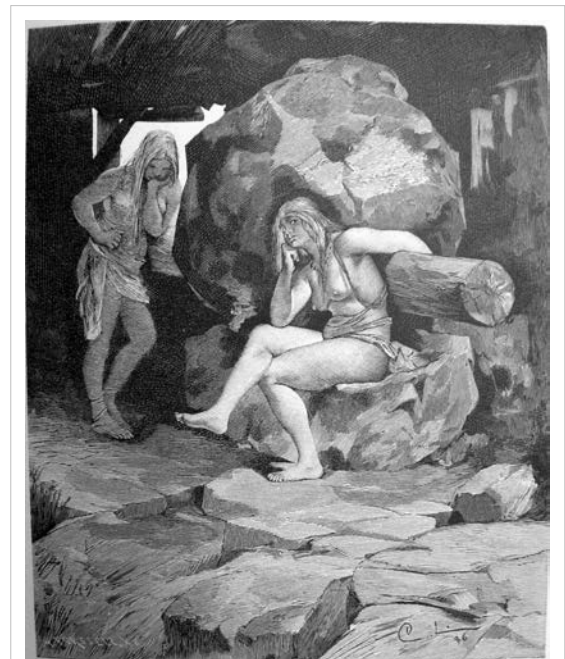
Just as from Niflheim there arose coldness and all things grim, so what was facing close to Muspell was hot and bright, but Ginnungagap was as mild as a windless sky. And when the rime and the blowing of the warmth met so that it thawed and dripped, there was a quickening from these flowing drops due to the power of the source of the heat, and it became the form of a man, and he was given the name Ymir.^[3]

When he slept a jötunn son and a jötunn daughter grew from his armpits, and his two feet procreated and gave birth to a son, a monster with six heads. These three beings gave rise to the race of *hrímþursar* (*rime thurs*, frost giants), who populated Niflheim. The gods instead claim their origin from a certain Búri. When the giant Ymir subsequently was slain by Odin, Vili and Vé (the grandsons of Búri), his blood (i.e. water) deluged Niflheim and killed all of the jötnar, apart from one known as Bergelmir and his spouse, who then repopulated their kind. It is mentioned in *Vafþrúðnismál* From Ymir's flesh the earth was formed, and the rocks from out of his bones; the sky from the skull of the ice-cold giant, and the sea from his blood."^[4]

Character of the jötnar

Some of the jötnar are attributed with hideous appearances – claws, fangs, and deformed features, apart from a generally hideous size. Some of them may even have many heads, such as Þrivaldi who had nine of them, or an overall non-humanoid shape; so were Jörmungandr and Fenrir, two of the children of Loki.

Yet when jötnar are named and more closely described, they are often given the opposite characteristics. Many of the jötnar are described as beautiful, Skaði being described as the "bright bride of the gods".^[5] Although some jötnar are said to have been of considerable size, many were of no difference in size than that of the Æsir or Vanir.^[6] The Jötunn do appear to have some shared characteristics between a few of them, "according to well established skaldic precedents, any figure that lives on, in or among rocks may be assumed to be a giant".^[7] This is most likely due to their association with the creation of the earth. The Jötunn are an ancient race, being the first beings created, they carry wisdom from bygone times. It is the jötnar Mímir and Vafþrúðnir Odin seeks out to gain ancient knowledge about *Fimbulvinter*, the great winter that marks the start of the end of times, Ragnarök. In *Vafþrúðnismál* Odin was wary to visit the giant's hall, as he was described by Frigg as being the most powerful giant she knows.^[8] This is a clear testament to the comparable levels of ability between this ancient race and the gods. Many Æsir claim ancestry with the giants: Odin's parents are Buri, an Æsir, and Bestla, a giantess; Loki claims ancestry from Laufey, an Æsir, and Fárbauti, a jötunn. It is often referenced in skaldic texts that the giants married or



Giantesses Fenja and Menja from an engraving by Carl Larsson (1886) for the poem *Grottasöngur*.

formed relationships with many of the Æsir and Vanir. In Snorri Sturluson's *Haustlög*, Njörðr is married to the giantess Skaði as part of the compensation provided to her by the Æsir for killing her father, Þjazi.^[9] In *Skírnismál* (also referred to as *För Skírnis*) Gerðr becomes the consort of Freyr after he becomes enamored with her.

Frey, the son of Njörðr, had seated himself on Hliðskjálf, and looked out across all the worlds. He saw into Giant's Domain and saw there a beautiful girl... From that he had great sickness of heart.^[10]

Her relationship with Freyr is noticeable in the fact that it is not consensual. Freyr's page, Skírnir, first attempted to bribe Gerðr then subsequently had to threaten Gerðr with banishment and a life devoid of pleasure in order to convince her to lie with Freyr. This shows that the Jötunn were not always acting as the aggressor in Norse mythology, but sometimes quite the opposite. Odin gains the love of Gunnlod, and even Thor, the great slayer of their kind, produces a child with Járnsaxa; Magni. As such, they appear as minor gods themselves, which can also be said about the sea giant Ægir, far more connected to the gods than to the other jötnar.

As a whole, the Æsir-Jötnar relationship is a complex one, with a deep history embedded in murder. Odin, Villi, and Ve killed Ymir, the primordial giant, and then killed the rest of the race, save Bergelmir, by spilling Ymir's blood and flooding Niflheim. Then, there are many myths of hostilities over resources, women, and valuable objects: Odin steals the mead of poetry from Suttung and Gunnlöd; the Æsir trick a giant out of his prize; Útgarda-Loki tricks Thor, Þjálfi, and Loki into losing many contests. Throughout the mythology, the Æsir subordinate the Jötnar and steal their wealth, knowledge, and women, even when the Jötnar are given some of the most important roles in the world.

Relationship with Nature

Many giants play greatly influence the natural world; they could even equate with gods of nature.^[11] Odin and his brothers used Ýmir's body to make the physical world. Hræsvelgr, a jötunn in the form of an eagle, flaps his wings to create the wind. The giantess Jörð, the mother of Thor, is the mother of animal and plant life and has fertility powers. Thor sees Gjálp, a giantess, straddling a river and urinating, raising the water level. Ægir is the sea personified in the shape of a giant. Also, summer, winter, night, the sun, and the moon all claim Jötnar heritage. In folklore, people have attributed violent weather and even land formations to giants.^[12] Stories tell that giants can move and create mountains, form lakes, move islands, and uproot trees. Half-finished buildings destroyed by harsh winds are attributed to giants blowing them over. They believed that smoke from a giant's pipe causes mist and shaking, fighting, and sneezing cause earthquakes. Jötnar are constantly described as less than the Æsir, but their natural powers cannot be ignored.

Ragnarök and the fire jötnar

A certain class of jötnar are the *fire jötnar* (*Múspellsmegir*, "sons of Muspell", or *eldjötnar*), said to reside in Muspelheim, the world of heat and fire, ruled by the fire jötunn Surtr ("the black one"). The main role of the fire jötnar in Norse mythology is to wreak the final destruction of the world by setting fire to the world at the end of Ragnarök, when the jötnar of Jotunheim and the forces of Hel shall launch an attack on the gods, and kill all but a few of them.



The giantess Skaði

In popular culture

Jötnar, along with many other elements of Norse mythology associated with the superhero Thor, exist in the Marvel Universe in publications by Marvel Comics. Frost giants are featured in the 2011 Marvel Studios film *Thor*, as well as several animated films, television series and video games.

Jötnar and various other "species" of trolls appear in the 2010 Norwegian fantasy film *Trollhunter*. The Jötnar live in Jotunheimen, making their homes inside the mountains.

Frost giants play a major part in the plot of the third volume of *the Iron Druid Chronicles*, *Hammered*.

There are also several varieties of jötnar enemy NPCs (Non-Player Characters) in the Guild Wars (GW) MMORPG family. In the original Guild Wars game set, they are accessible with the Eye of the North expansion pack, which introduces the Norn, themselves a giantish, human like race clearly modeled on Norse and other Scandinavian motifs (see Norns). There, as in Guild Wars 2 (where they are again seen in the Norn areas), the Jötun are portrayed as somewhat dim-witted, but highly aggressive and dangerous giants who often travel in groups of three or more. In the GW mythos, the jötnar (who are very distinct from other giant-like races, such as the ettins) inhabit ancient jötun dwellings that strongly suggest that in the past, the jötnar enjoyed a much more civilized form of life. It is indicated that these ways were lost as a consequence of the greed of its decadent leaders, which led to civil wars, anarchy, and ultimately a regression to a far more primitive and barbaric existence.

The Swedish melodic death metal band In Flames made a song called "Jotun," which appears on their third album *Whoracle* from 1997.


The titans from the manga and the anime *Attack on Titan* seem to be based on Jötnar with many names from related Norse myths being mentioned in relation to them.

In the PVP game "Smite", currently in beta, Ýmir makes an appearance as one of the Gods battling for total power.

Notes

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-  This article contains content from the Owl Edition of *Nordisk familjebok*, a Swedish encyclopedia published between 1904 and 1926, now in the public domain.

Níðhöggr

In Norse mythology, **Níðhöggr** (*Malice Striker*, often anglicized **Nidhogg**^[1]) is a dragon who gnaws at a root of the World Tree, Yggdrasil.

Prose Edda

According to the *Gylfaginning* part of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, Níðhöggr is a being

which gnaws one of the three roots of Yggdrasil. It is sometimes believed that the roots are trapping the beast from the world. This root is placed over Niflheimr and Níðhöggr gnaws it from beneath. The same source also says that "[t]he squirrel called Ratatoskr runs up and down the length of the Ash, bearing envious words between the eagle and Níðhöggr [the snake]."^[2]

In the *Skáldskaparmál* section of the *Prose Edda* Snorri specifies Níðhöggr as a serpent in a list of names of such creatures:

These are names for serpents: dragon, Fafnir, Iormungand, adder, Nidhogg, snake, viper, Goin, Moin, Grafvitnir, Grabak, Ofnir, Svafnir, masked one. (Faulkes translation, p.137)

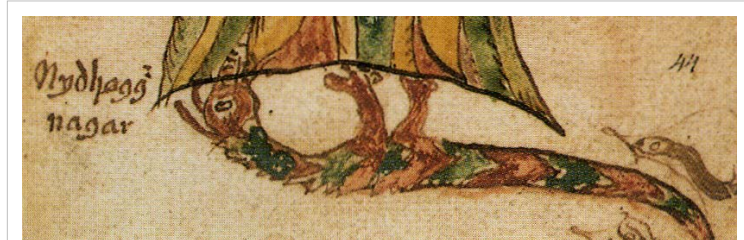
Snorri's knowledge of Níðhöggr seems to come from two of the Eddic poems: *Grímnismál* and *Völuspá*.

Later in *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri includes Níðhöggr in a list of various terms and names for swords.^[3]

Poetic Edda

The poem *Grímnismál* identifies a number of beings which live in Yggdrasil. The tree suffers great hardship from all the creatures which live on it. The poem identifies Níðhöggr as tearing at the tree from beneath and also mentions Ratatoskr as carrying messages between Níðhöggr and the eagle who lives at the top of the tree. Snorri Sturluson often quotes *Grímnismál* and clearly used it as his source for this information.

The poem *Völuspá* mentions Níðhöggr twice. The first instance is in its description of Náströnd.



Níðhöggr gnaws the roots of Yggdrasil in this illustration from a 17th-century Icelandic manuscript.

Eysteinn Björnsson's edition ^[11]

Bellows' translation ^[4]

Dronke's translation

Sal sá hon standa	A hall I saw,	A hall she saw standing
sólu fjarri	far from the sun,	remote from the sun
Náströndu á,	On Nastrond it stands,	on Dead Body Shore.
norðr horfa dyrr.	and the doors face north,	Its door looks north.
Fellu eitrdropar	Venom drops	There fell drops of venom
inn um ljóra,	through the smoke-vent down,	in through the roof vent.
sá er undinn salr	For around the walls	That hall is woven
orma hryggjum.	do serpents wind.	of serpents' spines.
Sá hon þar vaða	I there saw wading	She saw there wading
þunga strauma	through rivers wild	onerous streams
menn meinsvara	treacherous men	men perjured
ok morðvarga	and murderers too,	and wolfish murderers
ok þanns annars glepr	And workers of ill	and the one who seduces
eyrarúnu.	with the wives of men;	another's close-trusted wife.
Þar saug Níðhöggr	There Nithhogg sucked	There Malice Striker sucked
nái framgengna,	the blood of the slain,	corpses of the dead,
sleit vargr vera -	And the wolf tore men;	the wolf tore men.
vítuð ér enn, eða hvat ?	would you know yet more?	Do you still seek to know? And what?

Níðhöggr is also mentioned at the end of *Völuspá*, where he is identified as a dragon and a serpent.

Eysteinn Björnsson's edition ^[11]	Bellows' translation ^[5]	Dronke's translation
Þar kœmr inn dimmi	From below the dragon	There comes the shadowy
dreki fljúgandi,	dark comes forth,	dragon flying,
naðr fránn, neðan	Nithhogg flying	glittering serpent, up
frá Niðafjöllum.	from Nithafjoll;	from Dark of the Moon Hills.
Berr sér í fjöðrum	The bodies of men	He carries in his pinions
- flýgr völl yfir -	on his wings he bears,	—he flies over the field—
Níðhöggr nái -	The serpent bright:	Malice Striker, corpses.
nú mun hon sökkvask.	but now must I sink.	Now will she sink.

The context and meaning of this stanza is disputed. The most prevalent opinion is that the arrival of Níðhöggr heralds Ragnarök and thus that the poem ends on a tone of ominous warning.

Níðhöggr is not mentioned elsewhere in any ancient source.

Níðhöggr's name

In the standardized Old Norse orthography the name is spelled *Níðhogg* or *Niðhogg* but the letter 'q' is frequently replaced with the Modern Icelandic 'ö' for reasons of familiarity or technical expediency.

The name can be represented in English texts as *Nidhogg*, *Nidhoggr*, *Nithhogg*, *Nidhögg*, *Nidhöggr*, *Nithhöggr*, *Nidhöggr*, *Nithhöggr*, *Nidhhogg*, *Níðhögg*, *Niðhoggr*, *Níðhoggr*, *Nídhögg*, *Hidhaegg*, or *Nidhhoggr*. The Modern Icelandic forms *Níðhöggur* and *Niðhöggur* are also sometimes seen and anglicized as *Nidhoggur*. The Danish form *Nidhug* or "Nidhøg" can also be encountered.

Notes

- [1] While the suffix of the name, *-höggr*, clearly means "striker" the prefix is not as clear. In particular the length of the first vowel is not determined in the original sources. Some scholars prefer the reading **Níðhöggr** (*Striker in the Dark*).
- [2] *Gylfaginning* XVI, Brodeur's translation.
- [3] Faulkes translation, p.159
- [4] <http://www.voluspa.org/voluspa36-40.htm>
- [5] <http://www.voluspa.org/voluspa61-66.htm>

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Sigurd

Sigurd (Old Norse: **Sigurðr**) is a legendary hero of Norse mythology, as well as the central character in the *Völsunga saga*. The earliest extant representations for his legend come in pictorial form from seven runestones in Sweden^[1] and most notably the Ramsund carving (c. 1000) and the Gök Runestone (11th century).

As **Siegfried**, he is one of the heroes in the German *Nibelungenlied*, and Richard Wagner's operas *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*.

As **Sivard Snarensven(d)** he was the hero of several medieval Scandinavian ballads.

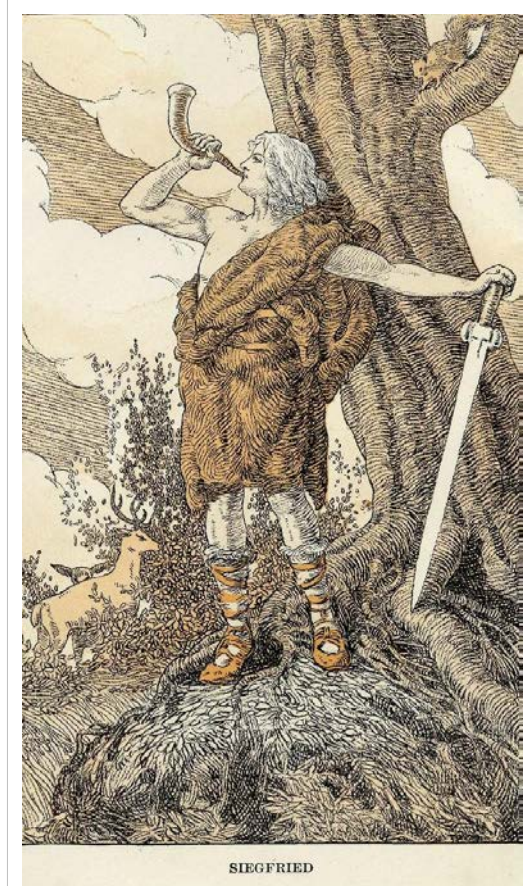
The name *Sigurðr* is not the same name as the German *Siegfried*. The Old Norse form would have been *Sigrubr*, a form which appears in the Ramsund carving that depicts the legend.^[2] *Sivard* is another variant name of *Sigurðr*; these name forms all share the first element *Sig-*, which means victory.

Völsunga saga

In the *Völsunga saga*, Sigurd was supposedly the posthumous son of Sigmund and his second wife, Hiordis. Sigmund dies in battle when he attacks Odin (who is in disguise), and Odin shatters Sigmund's sword. Dying, Sigmund tells Hiordis of her pregnancy and bequeaths the fragments of his sword to his unborn son.

Hiordis marries King Alf, and then Alf decides to send Sigurd to Regin as a foster. Regin tempts Sigurd to greed and violence by first asking Sigurd if he has control over Sigmund's gold. When Sigurd says that Alf and his family control the gold and will give him anything he desires, Regin asks Sigurd why he consents to a lowly position at court. Sigurd replies that he is treated as an equal by the kings and can get anything he desires. Then Regin asks Sigurd why he acts as stableboy to the kings and has no horse of his own. Sigurd then goes to get a horse. An old man (Odin in disguise) advises Sigurd on choice of horse, and in this way Sigurd gets Grani, a horse derived from Odin's own Sleipnir.

Finally, Regin tries to tempt Sigurd by telling him the story of the Otter's Gold. Regin's father was Hreidmar, and his two brothers were Ótr and Fafnir. Regin was a natural at smithing,



Siegfried blows his horn (1911) by Arthur Rackham, from *Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods* by Richard Wagner



"Sigurd proofs the sword Gram" (1901) by Johannes Gehrts.

and Ótr was natural at swimming. Ótr used to swim at Andvari's waterfall, where the dwarf Andvari lived. Andvari often assumed the form of a pike and swam in the pool.

One day, the Æsir saw Ótr with a fish on the banks, thought him an otter, and Loki killed him. They took the carcass to the nearby home of Hreidmar to display their catch. Hreidmar, Fafnir, and Regin seized the Æsir and demanded compensation for the death of Ótr. The compensation was to stuff the body with gold and cover the skin with fine treasures. Loki got the net from the sea giantess Rán, caught Andvari (as a pike), and demanded all of the dwarf's gold. Andvari gave the gold, except for a ring. Loki took this ring, too, although it carried a curse of death on its bearer. The Æsir used this gold to stuff Ótr's body with, and covered his skin in gold. They then covered the last exposed place (a whisker) with the ring of Andvari. Afterwards, Fafnir killed Hreidmar and took the gold.



Siegfried's Departure from Kriemhild, by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, ca. 1843

Sigurd agrees to kill Fafnir, who has turned himself into a dragon in order to be better able to guard the gold. Sigurd has Regin make him a sword, which he tests by striking the anvil. The sword shatters, so he has Regin make another. This also shatters. Finally, Sigurd has Regin make a sword out of the fragments that had been left to him by Sigmund. The resulting sword, Gram, cuts through the anvil. To kill Fafnir the dragon, Regin advises him to dig a pit, wait for Fafnir to walk over it, and then stab the dragon. Odin, posing as an old man, advises Sigurd to dig trenches also to drain the blood, and to bathe in it after killing the dragon; bathing in Fafnir's blood confers invulnerability. Sigurd does so and kills Fafnir; Regin then asked Sigurd to give him Fafnir's heart for himself. Sigurd drinks some of Fafnir's blood and gains the ability to understand the language of birds. Birds advise him to kill Regin, since Regin is plotting Sigurd's death. Sigurd beheads Regin, roasts Fafnir's heart and consumes part of it. This gives him the gift of "wisdom" (prophecy).

Sigurd met Brynhildr, a "shieldmaiden," after killing Fafnir. She pledges herself to him but also prophesies his doom and marriage to another. (In *Völsunga saga*, it is not clear that Brynhild is a Valkyrie or in any way supernatural.)

Sigurd went to the court of Heimar, who was married to Bekkhild, sister of Brynhild, and then to the court of Gjúki, where he came to live. Gjuki had three sons and one daughter by his wife, Grimhild. The sons were Gunnar, Hogni and Guttorm, and the daughter was Gudrun. Grimhild made an "Ale of Forgetfulness" to force Sigurd to forget Brynhild, so he could marry Gudrun. Later, Gunnar wanted to court Brynhild. Brynhild's bower was surrounded by flames, and she promised herself only to the man daring enough to go through them. Only Grani, Sigurd's horse, would do it, and only with Sigurd on it. Sigurd exchanged shapes with Gunnar, rode through the flames, and won Brynhild for Gunnar.

Some time later, Brynhild taunted Gudrun for having a better husband, and Gudrun explained all that had passed to Brynhild and explained the deception. For having been deceived and cheated of the husband she had desired, Brynhild plots revenge. First, she refuses to speak to anyone and withdraws. Eventually, Sigurd was sent by Gunnar to see what was wrong, and Brynhild accuses Sigurd of taking liberties with her. Gunnar and Hogni plot Sigurd's death and enchant their brother, Guttorm, to a frenzy to accomplish the deed. Guttorm kills Sigurd in bed, and Brynhild kills Sigurd's three year old son Sigmund (named for Sigurd's father). Brynhild then wills herself to die, and builds a funeral pyre for Sigurd, Sigurd's son, Guttorm (killed by Sigurd) and herself. Sigurd and Brynhild had the daughter Aslaug who married Ragnar Lodbrok.

Sigurd and Gudrun are parents to the twins Sigmund (named after Sigurd's father) and Svanhild.

Piðrekssaga

The Old Norse Piðrekssaga (chapters 152-168) relates a slightly different tale, with Regin as the dragon and Mimir as Regin's brother and foster-father to Sigurd. In this version, King Sigmund returns home from travel and hears that his wife Sisibe has been accused of illicit relations with a thrall. Although the accusation is a lie told by two of his noblemen whose lustful advances Sisibe rejected, Sigmund believes it and orders the noblemen to take her into the forest and kill her. One is moved by pity for her, and the two fight. As they fight, Sisibe gives birth to a child (Sigmund's) and places it in a crystal vessel, which is kicked into a river and travels downstream. Sisibe dies; the vessel is found by a doe, which nurses the infant. Later, the young child is found by a wise smith of the forest, Mimir who names him Sigurd (although a few times the saga calls him Sigfred) and takes him as his own. When the child grows large and willful, Mimir asks his brother, Regin, a dragon, to kill Sigurd. But Sigurd slays the dragon and then kills his disloyal foster-father.^{[3][4]}

In chapters 225-230, Sigurd marries Gunnar's sister Grimhild, despite having promised to marry Brynhild. Later, Gunnar marries Brynhild, but she resists his attempts to consummate the marriage because she loves only Sigurd. As a favor to his brother-in-law, Sigurd sleeps with Brynhild, who is thereafter unable to resist Gunnar, as her strength came from her virginity.^{[5][6]}

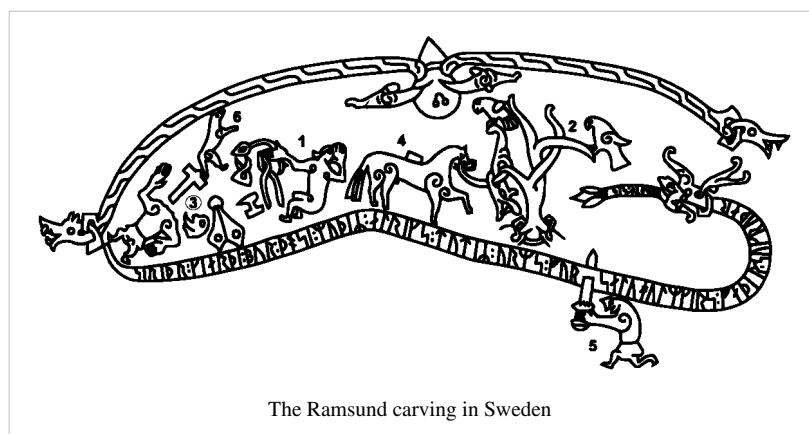
Nibelungenlied

In the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, Sifrit (Siegfried) is a prince of Xanten who is later revealed to have a heroic background including killing a dragon and winning lands and an immense fortune from a pair of brothers. From bathing in the dragon's blood, he is invulnerable except for a spot on his back where a leaf adhered to his skin. Determined to marry Kriemhild, the sister of King Gunther of the Burgundians, he assists Gunther in wooing Brünhild, queen of Iceland, using his cloak of invisibility to enable Gunther to beat the phenomenally strong queen at javelin throwing, boulder tossing, and the long jump. He also single-handedly conquers Nibelungenland to provide troops in case Brünhild tries to kill Gunther and his kin. Finally married to Kriemhild, he then wrestles Brünhild into submission, again invisible, so that Gunther can consummate his marriage. He gives Kriemhild Brünhild's ring and belt. After some years, the two queens quarrel over precedence and Kriemhild shows Brünhild the ring and belt and calls her Siegfried's concubine. Siegfried and Gunther make peace but Gunther's courtier Hagen von Tronje plots to kill Siegfried and Gunther and his brothers go along with the plan. Hagen has Kriemhild place a cross on the spot on Siegfried's back where he is vulnerable, and spears him when he is drinking from a stream on a hunting trip, thus fulfilling a prophecy that whomever Kriemhild marries will die violently. He throws Siegfried's treasure into the Rhine so that Kriemhild cannot raise an army. The second half of the epic concerns her revenge.

Archaeological record

The Ramsund carving depicts

1. how Sigurd is sitting naked in front of the fire preparing the dragon heart, from Fafnir, for his foster-father Regin, who is Fafnir's brother. The heart is not yet fully roasted, and when Sigurd touches it, he burns himself and sticks his finger into his mouth. As he has tasted dragon blood (some blood was on the heart), he starts to understand the birds' song.



The Ramsund carving in Sweden

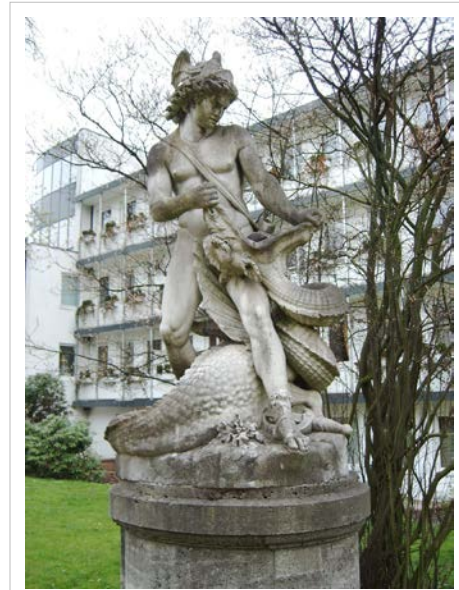
2. The birds say that Regin will not keep his promise of reconciliation and will try to kill Sigurd, which causes Sigurd to cut off Regin's head.
3. Regin is dead beside his own head, his smithing tools with which he reforged Sigurd's sword Gram are scattered around him, and
4. Regin's horse is laden with the dragon's treasure.
5. is the previous event when Sigurd killed Fafnir, and
6. Ótr from the saga's beginning.

Other aspects of the legend are shown on the various Sigurd stones and the door portals from the Hylestad stave church.

Parallels in other legends

There are parallels in several European myths and legends.

The sword Sigmund draws from Barnstock is similar to the sword drawn by King Arthur from the stone.



A sculpture of Sigurd fighting Fafnir by Constantin Dausch in Bremen, Germany.

The story of Fafnir and Sigurd's battle with Fafnir are similar to the story of Beowulf and the dragon.

The story of Sigurd eating the heart of the dragon is very similar to the Irish story of Fionn mac Cumhail eating the Salmon of Wisdom he had been preparing for his mentor, Finn Eces.

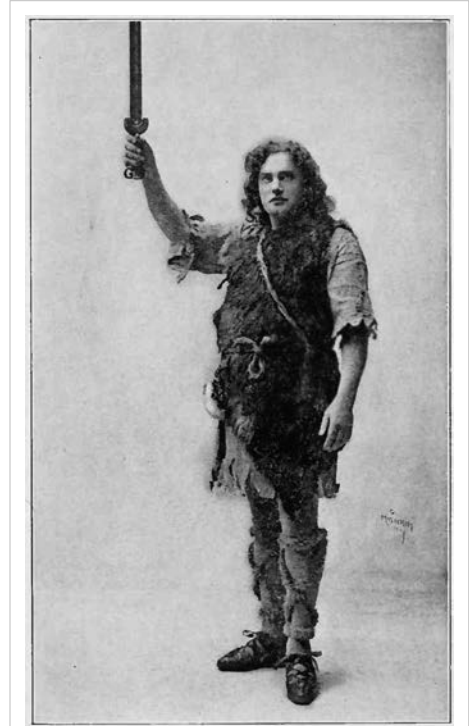
Sigurd's invulnerability and his weak point (in the Nibelungenlied) are similar to those of the Greek hero Achilles, the Persian hero Esfandiyar, and the Duryodhana story of India's Mahabharata epic.

Cultural impact

Because dragons were seen as symbols of Satan in medieval typologies, the story of Sigurd slaying Fafnir was often depicted in Christian churches in Scandinavia.

Adaptations of the legend

- The best-known adaptation of the Sigurd legend is Richard Wagner's cycle of music dramas *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (written between 1848 and 1874). The Sigurd legend is the basis of *Siegfried* and contributes the stories of *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*.
- William Morris's epic poem *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876) is a major retelling of the story in English verse.
- In 1884 the French composer Ernest Reyer wrote the lesser-known opera *Sigurd*, which has the benefit of condensing the story into one evening, with equally stirring music.
- The illustrator Arthur Rackham drew 70 vibrant renderings of the story for the book *Siegfried & The Twilight of the Gods*, translated by Margaret Armour (1910).
- Arthur Peterson published a translation of the myth of Sigurd titled *Andvari's Ring*, in 1916.
- Fritz Lang and his then-wife Thea von Harbou adapted the story of Sigurd (called Siegfried) for the first part of their 1924 pair of silent films *Die Nibelungen*.
- This legend was also adapted into a movie, *Dark Kingdom: The Dragon King* (2004) (SyFy miniseries in 2006).
- Fantasy author Diana L. Paxson retold the story in her trilogy *Wodan's Children: The Wolf and the Raven* (1993), *The Dragons of the Rhine* (1995), and *The Lord of Horses* (1996).
- Stephan Grundy retold the story in his novel *Rhinegold* (1995).
- The Faroese viking/folk metal band Týr, has a song named "Regin Smiður", which is based on the a Faroese kvæði in three parts, *Sjúrdarkvæðið*, which chronicles the life of Sigurd (Faroese: *Sjúrdur*).
- An adaptation of the legend written in verse by Oxford philology professor and fantasy author J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, was released in May, 2009.
- Sigurd is a recurring character in various songs of the album *Buch der Balladen* by the German pagan folk band Faun.
- Anders Breivik cited Sigurd as his code name in "Knights Templar" during his trial for murder in Norway, April 2012.
- The Siegfried legend plays a role in Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*. The character Django is a Siegfried-like character who fights to set free his beloved Broomhilda (the spelling of the character's name), a slave held by a plantation owner.



"Siegfried and the Famous Sword Balmung" from 1914.

Notes

- [1] An article at the Museum of Foteviken, Sweden (<http://www.foteviken.se/sweden/gastrik/arsunda/arsunda2.htm>), retrieved January 19, 2007.
- [2] Brate, Erik (1922). *Sveriges Runinskrifter* (<http://www.runor.se/bra/bra63.htm>). p. 126.
- [3] Rank, Otto. The Myth of the Birth of the Hero. New York: Vintage, 1932, pp. 56-59. Haymes, Edward R., trans. The Saga of Thidrek of Bern. New York: Garland, 1988.
- [4] summary of the Thiðrekssaga at Timeless Myths (<http://www.timelessmyths.com/norse/thidrek.htm>)
- [5] Two marriage episodes from The Saga of Thidrek of Bern (<http://homertomrabet.blogspot.com/2006/12/two-marriage-episodes-from-saga-of.html>), retrieved April 19, 2009.
- [6] summary of the Thiðrekssaga at Timeless Myths (<http://www.timelessmyths.com/norse/thidrek.htm>)

Vættir

Vættir (Old Norse; singular **Vættr**) or **wights** are nature spirits in the Norse religion. These nature spirits are divided up into 'families', including the Álfar (elves), Dvergar (dwarves), Jötnar (giants), and even gods, the Æsir and Vanir, who are understood to be prominent families among them. The term 'families' (*ættir*) is often translated as 'clans' or 'races'. These families sometimes intermarried with each other, and sometimes with humans. **Sjövættir** (sea spirits) are guardians of the specific waters. The *tomte* or *nisse* is a solitary vätte, living on the farmstead. He is usually benevolent and helpful, which can not be said about a mischievous *illvätte*. However he can cause a lot of damage if he is angry, such as killing livestock.

Etymology

The Old Norse term *vættir* and its English cognate *wights* literally mean 'beings' and relate etymologically to other forms of the verb *to be*, like *was* and *were*. *Vættir* and *wights* normally refer to supernatural 'beings', especially *landvættir* (land spirits), but can refer to any creature. The Norwegian *vetter* is used much in the same way as the Old Norse *vættir*, whereas the corresponding word in Swedish or Danish is *väsen* or *væsen* (being), also akin to *was* and *were*.

Viking Age

Landvættir (land spirits) are chthonic guardians of specific grounds, such as wild places or farms. When Norse seafarers approached land, they reportedly removed their carved dragon heads from the bows of their longships, so as not to frighten and thus provoke the *landvættir* to attack, thereby incur bad luck from them. Icelandic culture continues to celebrate the supernatural protection over the island, and four *landvættr* can still be seen in the Icelandic coat-of-arms: a troll-bull, troll-eagle, dragon, and handsome giant. The troll-animals are actually Jötnar who shapeshifted into the form (and mentality) of an animal, and such animals are supernaturally strong. Even the dragon is generally a troll-snake: compare the Jötunn Loki whose children include a wolf, a serpent, and a horse.

Christianization, folklore and modern survivals

Christian concepts influenced Norse concepts but Scandinavian animistic beliefs remain strong. In modern Iceland, work crews building new roads sometimes divert the road around particular boulders which are thought to be the homes of Huldafólk. People continue to report sightings of Trollir, Álfafólk, sea serpents, and so on.

Scandinavian folklore features a class of beings similar to the Old Norse *landvættir*. They are known by many names, although the most common are *vättar* in southern Sweden (singular: vätte), *vittra* in northern Sweden and *huldrefolk* in Norway (although the singular *vittra* and *huldra*, respectively, refer to a solitary and quite different being).

During the 19th century, Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe compiled the folk tales among Norwegians, as part of the emotive, nationalistic and anti-rational values of the Romantic Era. These stories reflected the animistic 'folk belief' that preserved earlier elements deriving from the Viking Era but strongly influenced by the medieval Christian cosmology of Germany, Britain and France. Prominent are stories that reflect later views of the Vættir, usually called the Huldrefolk (from Old Norse Huldufólk), meaning 'concealed people' and referring to their otherworldliness or their power of invisibility.

Notes

Sources

- *Folktales of Norway*, ed. Reidar Th. Christiansen, 1964.
- *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, Reimund Kvideland & Henning K. Sehmsdorf, 1988.
- *Norske Folke-Eventyr* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=xJkQAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>) (Norwegian Folktales), by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen & Jørgen Engebretsen Moe, 1843, 1844, 1871, 1876.

External sources

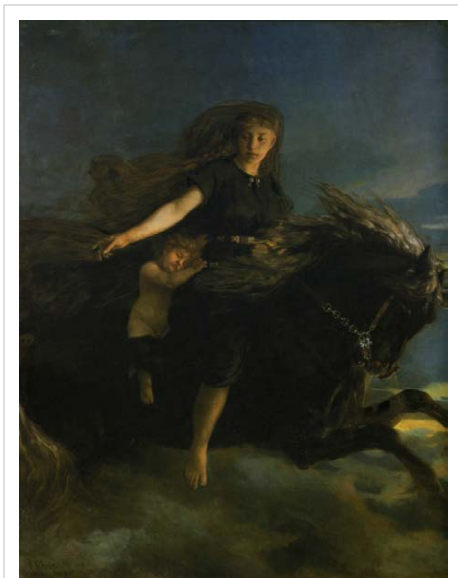
Scandinavian Folklore, compiled by Scott Trimble (<http://www.ststlocations.com/Archives/Scandinavian/Folklore/>) - a scholarly outline of prominent themes in Scandinavian folklore.

Skinfaxi and Hrímfaxi

In Norse mythology, **Skinfaxi** and **Hrímfaxi** are the horses of Dagr (day) and Nótt (night). The names Skinfaxi and Hrímfaxi are bahuvrihis, meaning "shining mane" and "rime mane" (or "frost mane"), respectively. Skinfaxi pulled Dagr's chariot across the sky every day and his mane lit up the sky and the earth below.

A general problem with the Nordic mythology is the lack of written and reliable sources. Scandinavia is an area with huge impact of geological transformations with leadet to many chances in settlement structure. The artefact of Tundholm is one of the strongest proof for the mythology of Skinfaxi.

The myth of Skinfaxi is believed to originate in Nordic Bronze Age religion, for which there is strong evidence of beliefs involving a horse pulling the sun across the sky. The Trundholm sun chariot is drawn by a single horse, and was possibly imagined to be pulled back across the sky west to east by a second horse. Related are Arvak and Alsvid, the horses of the chariot of Sól, now a team of two horses pulling a single chariot.



"Nótt" by Peter Nicolai Arbo.



"Dagr" (1874) by Peter Nicolai Arbo.

Artifacts

Brísingamen

In Norse mythology, *Brísingamen* (from Old Norse *brisinga* "flaming, glowing" and *men* "jewellery, ornament")^[1] is the necklace of the goddess Freyja.^[2]

Attestations

Beowulf

Brísingamen is referred to in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* as *Brosinga mene*. The brief mention in *Beowulf* is as follows (trans. by Howell Chickering, 1977):

...since Hama bore off
to the shining city the Brosings' necklace,
Gem-figured filigree. He gained the hatred
Of Eormanric the Goth, chose eternal reward.

This seems to confuse two different stories as the *Beowulf* poet is clearly referring to the *Dietrich Cycle*. The *Piðrekssaga* tells that the warrior Heime (*Hama* in Old English) takes sides against Eormanric, king of the Goths, and has to flee his kingdom after robbing him; later in life, Hama enters a monastery and gives them all his stolen treasure. However, this saga makes no mention of the great necklace. Possibly the *Beowulf* poet was confused, or invented the addition of the necklace to give him an excuse to drag in a mention of Eormanric. In any case, the necklace given to Beowulf in the story is not the Brísingamen itself; it is only being compared to it.

Poetic Edda

In the poem *Brymskviða* of the *Poetic Edda*, Thrymr, the King of the jötuns, steals Thor's hammer, Mjöllnir. Freyja lends Loki her falcon cloak to search for it; but upon returning, Loki tells Freyja that Thrymr has hidden the hammer and demanded to marry her in return. Freyja is so wrathful that all the Æsir's halls beneath her are shaken and the necklace Brísingamen breaks off from her neck. Later Thor borrows Brísingamen when he dresses up as Freyja to go to the wedding at Jötunheim.

This myth is also recorded in an 18th-century Swedish folksong called *Hammar-Hemtningen* (the taking of the hammer), where Freyja is called Miss Frojenborg, "den väna solen" (the fair sun).^[3]



Heimdall returns Brisingamen to Freyja, in an anachronistic painting centuries after the era of the myth's popularity

Prose Edda

Húsdrápa, a skaldic poem partially preserved in the *Prose Edda*, relates the story of the theft of Brísingamen by Loki. One day when Freyja wakes up and finds Brísingamen missing, she enlists the help of Heimdall to help her search for it. Eventually they find the thief, who turns out to be Loki who has transformed himself into a seal. Heimdall turns into a seal as well and fights Loki. After a lengthy battle at Singasteinn, Heimdall wins and returns Brísingamen to Freyja.

Snorri Sturluson quoted this old poem in *Skáldskaparmál*, saying that because of this legend Heimdall is called "Seeker of Freyja's Necklace" (*Skáldskaparmál*, section 8) and Loki is called "Thief of Brísingamen" (*Skáldskaparmál*, section 16). A similar story appears in the later *Sörla þáttur*, where Heimdall does not appear.

Sörla þáttur

Sörla þáttur is a short story in the later and extended version of the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*^[4] in the manuscript of the *Flateyjarbók*, which was written and compiled by two Christian priests, Jon Thordson and Magnus Thorhalson, in the late 14th century.^[5] In the end of the story, the arrival of Christianity dissolves the old curse that traditionally was to endure until Ragnarök.

Freyja was a human in Asia and was the favorite concubine of Odin, King of Asialand. When this woman wanted to buy a golden necklace (no name given) forged by four dwarves (named Dvalinn, Alfrik, Berling, and Greer), she offered them gold and silver but they replied that they would only sell it to her if she would lie a night by each of them. She came home afterward with the necklace and kept silent as if nothing happened. But a man called Loki somehow knew it, and came to tell Odin. King Odin commanded Loki to steal the necklace, so Loki turned into a fly to sneak into Freyja's bower and stole it. When Freyja found her necklace missing, she came to ask king Odin. In exchange for it, Odin ordered her to make two kings, each served by twenty kings, fight forever unless some christened men so brave would dare to enter the battle and slay them. She said yes, and got that necklace back. Under the spell, king Högni and king Heðinn battled for one hundred and forty-three years, as soon as they fell down they had to stand up again and fight on. But in the end, the Christian lord Olaf Tryggvason, who has a great fate and luck, arrived with his christened men, and whoever slain by a Christian would stay dead. Thus the pagan curse was finally dissolved by the arrival of Christianity. After that, the noble man, king Olaf, went back to his realm.^[6]

The battle of Högni and Heðinn is recorded in several medieval sources, including the skaldic poem *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Skáldskaparmál* (section 49), and *Gesta Danorum*: king Högni's daughter, Hildir, is kidnapped by king Heðinn. When Högni comes to fight Heðinn on an island, Hildir comes to offer her father a necklace on behalf of Heðinn for peace; but the two kings still battle, and Hildir resurrects the fallen to make them fight until Ragnarök.^[7] None of these earlier sources mentions Freyja or king Olaf Tryggvason, the historical figure who Christianized Norway and Iceland in the 10th Century.

Archaeological record

In c. 1000, a pagan völva was buried with considerable splendour in Hagebyhöga in Östergötland. In addition to being buried with her wand, she had received great riches which included horses, a wagon and an Arabian bronze pitcher. There was also a silver pendant, which represents a woman with a broad necklace around her neck. This kind of necklace was only worn by the most prominent women during the Iron Age and some have interpreted it as Freyja's necklace Brísingamen. The pendant may represent Freyja herself.^[8]



The pendant, in the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm.

Modern influence

Alan Garner wrote a children's fantasy novel called *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* about an enchanted teardrop bracelet.

Diana Paxson's novel *Brisingamen* features Freyja and her bracelet.

Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab has a perfumed oil scent named Brisingamen.

Freyja's necklace Brisingamen features prominently in Betsy Tobin's novel *Iceland*, where the necklace is seen to have significant protective powers.

In Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle*, the word "brisingr" means fire. This is probably a distillation of the word *brisinga*.

Brisingamen is represented as a card in the Yu-Gi-Oh Trading Card Game, "Nordic Relic Brisingamen".

References

- [1] Onsell, Birgitta. 'Världens vackraste smycke.' in *Jordens moder i Norden*. Stockholm: Carlssons, 1994. p. 111-2.
- [2] Bellows, Henry Adams (Trans.) *The Poetic Edda*, Princeton University Press, 1936. p. 158.
- [3] Hammar-Hemtningen (Swedish) (http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Hammar-Hemtningen_II)
- [4] *The Younger Edda*. Rasmus B. Anderson transl. (1897) Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co. (1901).
- [5] Rasmus B. Anderson, Introduction to the *The Flatey Book*. Norroena Society, London (1908). "*The priest Jon Thordson wrote the story of Erik Vidforle and both the Olaf Sagas; but the priest Magnus Thorhalson wrote what follows and also what goes before, and revised the whole, thus dedicating the work: "May God Almighty and the Virgin Mary bless both the one that wrote and the one that dictated!"*"
- [6] This short story is also known as "The Saga of Högni and Hedinn". English translation can be found at Northvegr: Three Northern Love Stories and Other Tales. (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/love/00401.php>)
- [7] Brodeur, Arthur Gilchrist. (Trans.) *The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson* (1916) Online at Google Books (http://books.google.com/books?id=_T1cAAAAMAAJ).
- [8] Harrison, D. & Svensson, K. (2007). *Vikingaliv*. Fälth & Hässler, Värnamo. ISBN 978-91-27-35725-9 p.58

Draupnir

In Norse mythology, **Draupnir** (Old Norse "the dripper"^[1]) is a gold ring possessed by the god Odin with the ability to multiply itself: Every ninth night eight new rings 'drip' from Draupnir, each one of the same size and weight as the original.

Draupnir was forged by the dwarven brothers Brokkr and Eitri (or Sindri). Brokkr and Eitri made this ring as one of a set of three gifts which included Mjöllnir and Gullinbursti. They made these gifts in accordance with a wager Loki made saying that Brokk and Eitri could not make better gifts than the three made by the Sons of Ivaldi. In the end Mjöllnir, Thor's hammer, won the contest for Brokkr and Eitri. Loki used a loophole to get out of the wager for his head (the wager was for Loki's head only, but he argued that, to remove his head, they would have to injure his neck, which was not in the bargain) and Brokkr punished him by sealing his lips shut with wire.

The ring was placed by Odin on the funeral pyre of his son Baldr:

Odin laid upon the pyre the gold ring called Draupnir; this quality attended it: that every ninth night there fell from it eight gold rings of equal weight. (from the *Gylfaginning*).

The ring was subsequently retrieved by Hermóðr. It was offered as a gift by Freyr's servant Skírnir in the wooing of Gerðr, which is described in the poem *Skírnismál*.

Draupnir in popular culture

DRAUPNIR was revealed as the password to a website that Neal Caffrey and Mozzie used to view their stolen Nazi U-boat treasure in "Taking Account", the seventh episode of the third season of *White Collar*.

Draupnir is represented as a card in the Yu-Gi-Oh Trading Card Game. It has an effect that mimics the multiplication ability of the mythological version. If it destroyed by another cards effect, you may add another "Nordic Relic" card to your hand. The art represents it as an arm brace, with another brace seemingly growing from it, once again mimicking the story.

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:34).

References

- Orchard, Andy (1997). *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*. Cassell. ISBN 0-304-34520-2



The third gift — an enormous hammer (1902) by Elmer Boyd Smith. The ring Draupnir is visible among other creations by the Sons of Ivaldi.

Eitr

Eitr is a mythical substance in Norse mythology. This liquid substance is the origin of all living things: the first giant Ymir was conceived from eitr. The substance is supposed to be very poisonous and is also produced by Jörmungandr (the Midgard serpent) and other serpents.

Etymology

The word **eitr** exists in most North Germanic languages (all derived from the Old Norse language) in Icelandic/Faroese *eitur*, in Danish *edder*, in Swedish *etter*. Cognates also exist in Dutch *etter* (pus), in German *Eiter* (pus), in Old Saxon *ēttar*, in Old English *ǣttor*. The word is broadly translated: *poisonous, evil, bad, angry, sinister* etc.^[1]

The word is used in common Scandinavian folklore as a synonym for snake poison.^[2]

Ymir

In *Vafþrúðnismál* Odin asks the Giant Vafþrúðnir about the origin of Ymir. Vafþrúðnir answers:

Ór Élivagom
 stukko eitrdropar,
 svá óx, unz varð ór iötunn;
 þar órar ættir
 kómu allar saman,
 því er þat æ allt til atalt.

Rough translation:

From Éliwaves
 Eitrdrops splashed
 that grew into a giant
 who begat all families
 from which all [giants] come
 that is why we are easily angered

The last line of the stanza in *Vafþrúðnismál* where Vafþrúðnir says "that is why we are easily angered", is a word-play with the meaning of the word *eitr*, as it also means *anger/angry* (similar to "poison a relationship").^[1]

References

[1] Svenska Akademiens Ordbok, entry for *Etter* (<http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/show.phtml?filenr=1/64/16260.html>)

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eitr#endnote_

External links

- Snorra-Edda: Gylfaginning (<http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/gg/ggtpar01.html>)
-

Gjallarhorn

In Norse mythology, **Gjallarhorn** (Old Norse "yelling horn"^[1] or "the loud sounding horn"^[2]) is a mystical horn blown at the onset of Ragnarök associated with the god Heimdallr and the wise being Mímir. Gjallarhorn is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional material, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson.

Attestations

Gjallarhorn is attested once by name in the *Poetic Edda* while it receives three mentions in the *Prose Edda*:

Poetic Edda

The single mention of Gjallarhorn by name occurs in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, wherein a völva foresees the events of Ragnarök and the role in which Heimdallr and Gjallarhorn will play at its onset; Heimdallr will raise his horn and blow loudly. Due to manuscript differences, translations of the stanza vary:



Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Mim's sons dance,
but the central tree takes fire,
at the resounding Gjallar-horn.
Loud blows Heimdall,
his horn is raised; Odin speaks with Mim's head.^[3]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Fast move the sons of Mim and fate
Is heard in the note of the Gjallarhorn;
Loud blows Heimdall, the horn is aloft,
In fear quake all who on Hel-roads are.^[4]

Regarding this stanza, scholar Andy Orchard comments that the name *Gjallarhorn* may here mean "horn of the river Gjöll" as "Gjöll is the name of one of the rivers of the Underworld, whence much wisdom is held to derive", but notes that in the poem *Grímnismál*, Heimdallr is said to drink fine mead in his heavenly home Himinbjörg.^[1]

Earlier in the same poem, the völva mentions a scenario involving the hearing or horn (depending on translation of the Old Norse noun *hljóð*—bolded below for the purpose of illustration) of the god Heimdallr:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

She knows that **Heimdall's horn** is hidden
under the heaven-bright holy tree.
A river she sees flow, with foamy fall,
from Valfather's pledge.
Understand ye yet, or what?^[5]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

I know of the **horn of Heimdall**, hidden
Under the high-reaching holy tree;
On it there pours from Valfather's pledge
A mighty stream: would you know yet more?^[6]

Carolyne Larrington translation:

She knows that **Heimdall's hearing** is hidden
under the radiant, sacred tree;
she sees, pouring down, the muddy torrent
from the wager of Father of the Slain; do you understand yet, or what more?^[7]

Scholar Paul Schach comments that the stanzas in this section of *Voluspá* are "all very mysterious and obscure, as it was perhaps meant to be". Schach details that "*Heimdallar hljóð* has aroused much speculation. Snorri seems to have confused this word with *gjallarhorn*, but there is otherwise no attestation of the use of *hljóð* in the sense of 'horn' in Icelandic. Various scholars have read this as "hearing" rather than "horn".^[8]

Scholar Carolyne Larrington comments that if "hearing" rather than "horn" is understood to appear in this stanza, the stanza indicates that Heimdall, like Odin, has left a body part in the well; his ear. Larrington says that "Odin exchanged one of his eyes for wisdom from Mimir, guardian of the well, while Heimdall seems to have forfeited his ear."^[9]

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda*, Gjallarhorn is mentioned thrice, and all three mentions occur in *Gylfaginning*. In chapter 14, the enthroned figure Just-As-High tells the disguised Gangleri about the cosmological tree Yggdrasil. Just-As-High says that one of the three roots of Yggdrasil reaches to the well Mímisbrunnr, which belongs to Mímir, and contains much wisdom and intelligence. Using Gjallarhorn, Heimdallr drinks from the well and thus is himself wise.^[10]

In chapter 25 of *Gylfaginning*, High tells Gangleri about Heimdallr. High mentions that Heimdallr is the owner of the "trumpet" (see footnote) Gjallarhorn and that "its blast can be heard in all worlds".^[11] In chapter 51, High foretells the events of Ragnarök. After the enemies of the gods will gather at the plain Vígríðr, Heimdallr will stand and mightily blow into Gjallarhorn. The gods will awake and assemble together at the thing.^[12]

Archaeological record

A figure holding a large horn to his lips and clasping a sword on his hip appears on a stone cross from the Isle of Man. Some scholars have theorized that this figure is a depiction of Heimdallr with Gjallarhorn.^[13]

A 9th or 10th century Gosforth Cross in Cumbria, England depicts a figure holding a horn and a sword standing defiantly before two open-mouthed beasts. This figure has been oft theorized as depicting Heimdallr with Gjallarhorn.^[14]



The Gosforth Cross panel often held to depict Heimdallr with Gjallarhorn

Theories and interpretations

Scholar Rudolf Simek comments that the use of a horn as both a musical instrument and a drinking vessel is not particularly odd, and that the concept is also employed with tales of the legendary Old French hero Roland's horn, Olifant. Simek notes that the horn is among the most ancient of Germanic musical instruments, along with lurs, and, citing archaeological finds (such as the 5th century Golden Horns of Gallehus from Denmark), comments that there appears to have been sacral horns kept purely for religious purposes among the Germanic peoples, understood as earthly versions of Heimdallr's Gjallarhorn, reaching back to the early Germanic Iron Age.^[15]



Detail of a copy of one of the two Golden Horns of Gallehus

In popular culture

Since 2007, a Gjallarhorn has been used to announce the arrival of the Minnesota Vikings on the field at their home games. The honor of sounding this Gjallarhorn is traditionally given to famous Minnesota athletes and other state celebrities.

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:57).
- [2] Simek (2007:110).
- [3] Thorpe (1866:9).
- [4] Bellows (1923:20). See connected footnote for information on manuscript and editing variations.
- [5] Thorpe (1866:7).
- [6] Bellows (1932:12).
- [7] Larrington (1999:7).
- [8] Schach (1985:93).
- [9] Larrington (1999:265).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:17).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:25). Lindow (2002:143) comments that the Old Norse term employed for the instrument refers to "a long brass instrument that would answer today to an unvalved trumpet".
- [12] Faulkes (1995:54).
- [13] Lindow (2002:168).
- [14] Bailey (1996:86-90).
- [15] Simek (2007:110—111).

References

- Bellows, Henry Adams (1923). *The Poetic Edda*. American-Scandinavian Foundation.
- Faulkes, Anthony (Trans.) (1995). *Edda*. Everyman. ISBN 0-460-87616-3
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- Simek, Rudolf (2007) translated by Angela Hall. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=Zni8GwAACAAJ>). D.S. Brewer ISBN 0-85991-513-1

Gleipnir

In Norse mythology, **Gleipnir** (Old Norse "open one"^[1]) is the binding that holds the mighty wolf Fenrisulfr (as attested in chapter 34 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*). The Gods had attempted to bind Fenrir twice before with huge chains of metal, but Fenrir was able to break free both times. Therefore, they commissioned the dwarves to forge a chain that was impossible to break. To create a chain to achieve the impossible, the dwarves fashioned the chain out of six impossible things:

- The sound of a cat's footfall
- The beard of a woman
- The roots of a mountain
- The sinews of a bear
- The breath of a fish
- The spittle of a bird

Therefore, even though Gleipnir is as thin as a silken ribbon, it is stronger than any iron chain. It was forged by the dwarves in their underground realm of Svartálfaheim.

Gleipnir, having bound the Fenrisúlfur securely, was the cause of Týr's lost hand, for the Fenrisulfr bit it off when he was not freed. Gleipnir is said to hold until Ragnarök, when it will break and Fenrir will devour Odin.

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:58).

References

- Orchard, Andy (1997). *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*. Cassell. ISBN 0-304-34520-2
-

Gram (mythology)

In Norse mythology, **Gram** (Old Norse "wrath")^[1] is the name of the sword that Sigurd used to kill the dragon Fafnir.^[1]

Description

Gram was forged by Wayland the Smith and originally belonged to Sigurd's father, Sigmund, who received it in the hall of the Völsung after pulling it out of the tree Barnstokkr into which Odin had stuck it where no one else could pull it out. The sword was destroyed in battle when Sigmund struck the spear of an enemy soldier dressed in a wide brimmed hat and a black hooded cloak. Before he died, Sigmund instructed his wife to keep the pieces so that it might be reforged for the their unborn son (Sigurd), whom she was carrying. The sword was eventually reforged by Regin for Sigurd's use. After it was reforged, it could cleave an anvil in twain.

In the *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 13th century), Siegfried discards Gram after receiving a legendary sword called **Balmung**; in Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle* (1848–1874), it is called **Nothung**. Here the God Wotan claims only one who knows no fear can reforge the sword, this is his grandson Siegfried. Nothung later breaks Wotan's spear, the symbol of his power, after which Wotan is no longer seen. Some sources refer to the sword as **Balmus**.^{[2][3]}

Gram is depicted on several of the Sigurd stones. The depiction of Sigurd slaying the dragon by striking with the sword from below is one of the iconography used to identify those Viking Age images which depict the Sigurd legend.^[4]

References

- [1] *Sigurd—ein Held des Mittelalters* (Edgar Haimerl) (<http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~alvismal/2sigurd.pdf>)



Sigmund's Sword
Johannes Gehrts (1889)



Sigurd proofs the sword Gram Johannes Gehrts
(1901)

Gullinbursti

Gullinbursti (meaning "Gold Mane or Golden Bristles") is a boar in Norse mythology.

When Loki had Sif's hair, Freyr's ship *Skíðblaðnir* and Odin's spear *Gungnir* fashioned by the Sons of Ivaldi, he bet his own head with Brokkr that his brother Eitri (Sindri) wouldn't have been able to make items to match the quality of those mentioned above.

So to make gifts to Freyr, Eitri threw a pig's skin into a furnace as Brokkr worked on the bellows, and together they manufactured the boar *Gullinbursti* which had bristles in its mane that glowed in the dark.

The story of *Gullinbursti*'s creation is related in the *Skáldskaparmál* section of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*.



"The third gift — an enormous hammer" (1902)
by Elmer Boyd Smith.



Gullinbursti and Frey, 1901 painting by Johannes Gehrts.

[P]á lagði Sindri svínskinn í aflinn ok bað blása Brokk ok létta eigi fyrr en hann tæki þat ór aflinum, er hann hafði í lagt. En þegar er hann var genginn ór smiðjunni, en hinn blés, þá settist fluga ein á hönd honum ok kroppaði, en hann blés sem áðr, þar til er smiðrinn tók ór aflinum, ok var þat göltr, ok var burstin ór gulli. ... Þá bar fram Brokk sína gripi ... En Frey gaf hann göltinn ok sagði, at hann mátti renna loft ok lög nótt ok dag meira en hvern hestr ok aldri varð svá myrkt af nótt eða í myrkheimum, at eigi væri ærit ljós, þar er hann fór; svá lýsti af burstinni. - Skáldskaparmál ch. 44 [8]

"Sindri laid a pigskin in the hearth and bade Brokk blow, and did not cease work until he took out of the hearth that which he had laid therein. But when he went out of the smithy, while the other dwarf was blowing, straightway a fly settled upon his hand and stung; yet he blew on as before, until the smith took the work out of the hearth; and it was a boar, with mane and bristles of gold. ... Then Brokk brought forward his gifts: ... to Freyr he gave the boar, saying that it could run through air and water better than any horse, and it could never become so dark with night or gloom of the Murky Regions that there should not be sufficient light where he went, such was the glow from its mane and bristles." - Translation ^[1] by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

According to *Húsdrápa*, Freyr rode Gullinbursti to Baldr's funeral, while in *Gylfaginning*, Snorri states that Freyr rode to the funeral in a chariot pulled by the boar.

The boar is also known as **Slíðrugtanni** (sometimes Anglicized to "Slidrugtanni").

References

[1] <http://www.voluspa.org/skaldskaparmal41-50.htm>

Gungnir

In Norse mythology, **Gungnir** (Old Norse "swaying one"^[1]) is the spear of the god Odin.

Attestations

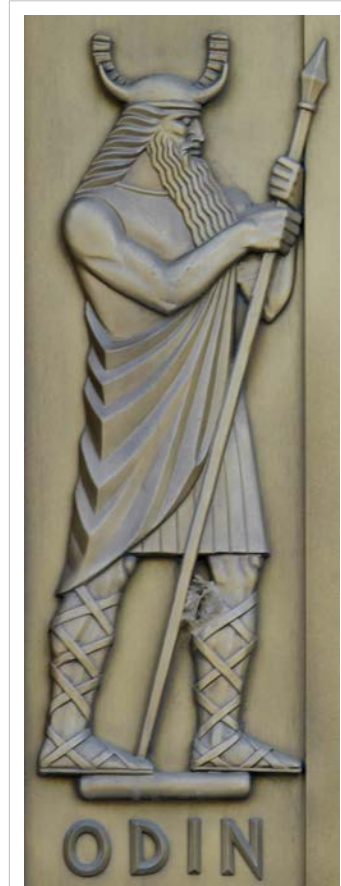
Poetic Edda

In the Poetic Edda poem *Völuspá*, the Æsir-Vanir War is described as officially starting when Odin throws a spear over the heads of an assembly of Vanir gods. Whether or not this was specifically Gungnir is, however, unstated. In *Sigrdrífumál*, the valkyrie Sigrdrífa advises Sigurd on the magical application of Runes. She gives Sigurd advice and shares with him lore, including that runes were carved on the tip of Gungnir.

Prose Edda

According to chapter 51 of the Prose Edda book *Gylfaginning*, Odin will ride in front of the Einherjar while advancing on to the battle field at Ragnarök wearing a gold helmet, an impressive cloak of mail and carrying Gungnir. He will then attack the wolf Fenrir with it.

In *Skáldskaparmál*, more information regarding the spear is presented. the spear was fashioned by the dwarfs known as the Sons of Ivaldi under the mastery of the blacksmith dwarf Dvalin. The spear was obtained from the dwarfs by Loki, the results of a scheme he concocted as a partial reparation for his cutting of the goddess Sif's hair. The spear is described as being so well balanced that it could strike any target, no matter the skill or strength of the wielder.



Lee Lawrie, *Odin* (1939). Library of Congress John Adams Building, Washington, D.C.

Archaeological record

If the rider on horseback on the image on the Böksta Runestone has been correctly identified as Odin, then Odin is shown carrying Gungnir while hunting an elk.^[2]

In The Ring of the Nibelung

In Wagner's opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Wotan's (Odin's) spear is made from the wood of the world tree Yggdrasil and engraved with the contracts from which Wotan's power derives. When he tries to bar the eponymous hero of the opera *Siegfried* from awakening Brünnhilde from her magic sleep, Siegfried breaks the spear in two and Wotan flees. It is implied that this is also the end of Wotan's power and he never appears onstage again.

In Popular Culture

- "Gungnir: Inferno of the Demon Lance and the War of Heroes" (グングニル -魔槍の軍神と英雄 闘争- *Gunguniru: Masou no Gunjin to Eiyuu Sensou*), is a tactical role-playing game for the PlayStation Portable.^{[3][4]}

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:67).

[2] Silén (1993:88–91).

References

- Orchard, Andy (1997). *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*. Cassell. ISBN 0-304-34520-2
- Silén, Lars (1983). "Några Reflektioner Angående Bilderna på Balingsta-Stenen i Uppland" (http://fornvannen.se/pdf/1980talet/1983_088.pdf). *Fornvännen* (Swedish National Heritage Board) **78**: 88–91. ISSN 1404-9430 (<http://www.worldcat.org/issn/1404-9430>). Retrieved 2010-01-28.

Mjölfnir

In Norse mythology, **Mjölfnir** (/ˈmjɔlnɪr/ or /ˈmjɔlnər/ *MYOL-n(ee)r*; also **Mjöllnir**, **Mjöllnir**, **Mjölner** or **Mjølnir**) is the hammer of Thor, the Norse god of thunder. Distinctively shaped, Mjölfnir is depicted in Norse mythology as one of the most fearsome weapons, capable of leveling mountains. Though generally recognized and depicted as a hammer, Mjölfnir is actually an axe or club but misconceived as a hammer.^[1] In the 13th century Prose Edda, Snorri Sturluson relates that the Svartálfar Sindri, the brother of Brokkr, made Mjölfnir while in a contest with Loki to see who could make the most wonderful and useful items for the Gods and Goddesses in Asgard.

The *Prose Edda* gives a summary of Mjölfnir's special qualities in that, with Mjölfnir, Thor:

... would be able to strike as firmly as he wanted, whatever his aim, and the hammer would never fail, and if he threw it at something, it would never miss and never fly so far from his hand that it would not find its way back, and when he wanted, it would be so small that it could be carried inside his tunic.^[1]



Drawing of a 4.6 cm gold-plated silver Mjölfnir pendant found at Bredsättra in Öland, Sweden. The original is housed at the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities.^[1]

Etymology

Mjölfnir simply means "crusher", referring to its pulverizing effect. *Mjölfnir* might be related to the Russian word *молния* (*molniya*) and the Welsh word *mellt* (both words being translated as "lightning"). This second theory parallels with the idea that Thor, being a god of thunder, therefore might have used lightning as his weapon.^[2] It is related to words such as the Icelandic verbs *mölva* ("to crush") and *mala* ("to grind"), and Swedish noun *mjöl* ("flour"), all related to English *meal*, *mill*, and *miller*. Similar words, all stemming from the Proto-Indo-European root **melə*, can be found in almost all European languages, e.g. the Slavic *melevo* ("grain to be ground") and *molot* ("hammer"), the Greek *μύλος* (*mylos*—"mill"), and the Latin *malleus* "hammer", from which English *mallet* derives.

Attestations

Prose Edda

The most popular version of the creation of Mjölfnir myth, found in *Skáldskaparmál* from Snorri's Edda,^[3] is as follows. In one story Loki sends up to the dwarves called the Sons of Ivaldi that create precious items for the gods: Odin's spear Gungnir, and Freyr's foldable boat *Skíðblaðnir*. Then Loki bets his head that the two Dwarves, Sindri (or Eitri) and his brother Brokkr would never succeed in making items more beautiful than those of Ivaldi's sons. The bet is accepted and the two



"The third gift—an enormous hammer" (1902) by Elmer Boyd Smith.

brothers begin working. Thus Eitri puts a pig's skin in the forge and tells his brother (Brokkr) never to stop blowing until he comes and takes out what he put in.

Loki, in disguise as a fly, comes and bites Brokkr on the arm but he continues to blow. Then Eitri takes out Gullinbursti which is Freyr's boar with shining bristles. Then Eitri puts some gold in the furnace and gives Brokkr the same order. Loki in the fly guise comes again and bites Brokkr's neck twice as hard. But as before nothing happens and Eitri takes out Draupnir, Odin's ring, having duplicates falling from itself every ninth night.

Eitri then puts iron in the forge and tells Brokkr to never stop blowing. Loki comes again and bites Brokkr on the eyelid much harder than before and the blood makes him stop blowing for a short while. When Eitri comes and takes out Mjöllnir, the handle is shorter than was anticipated and so the hammer can only be wielded with one hand. Eitri and Brokkr win the bet, which was Loki's head. However, the bet cannot be honored since they need to cut the neck as well, which was not part of the deal. Thus, Brokkr sews Loki's mouth shut to teach him a lesson.

Poetic Edda

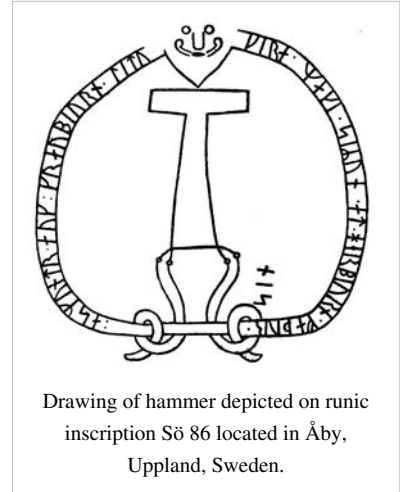
Thor possessed a formidable chariot, which is drawn by two goats, Tanngrisnir and Tanngrjóstr. A belt, Megingjörð, and iron gloves, Járngreipr, were used to lift Mjöllnir. Mjöllnir is the focal point of some of Thor's adventures.

This is clearly illustrated in a poem found in the Poetic Edda titled *Þrymskviða*. The myth relates that the giant, Þrymr, steals Mjöllnir from Thor and then demands the goddess Freyja in exchange. Loki, the god notorious for his duplicity, conspires with the other Æsir to recover Mjöllnir by disguising Thor as Freyja and presenting him as the "goddess" to Þrymr.

At a banquet Þrymr holds in honor of the impending union, Þrymr takes the bait. Unable to contain his passion for his new maiden with long, blond locks (and broad shoulders), as Þrymr approaches the bride by placing Mjöllnir on "her" lap, Thor rips off his disguise and destroys Þrymr and his giant cohorts.

Archaeological record

Emblematic pendants



Drawing of hammer depicted on runic inscription Sö 86 located in Åby, Uppland, Sweden.

Myths, artifacts, and institutions revolving around Thor indicate his prominent place in the mind of medieval Scandinavians. His following ranged in influence, but the Viking warrior aristocracy were particularly inspired by Thor's ferocity in battle. In the medieval legal arena, according to Joseph Campbell, "And at the Icelandic Things (court assemblies) the god invoked in testimony of oaths, as 'the Almighty God,' was Thor."^[4]

Emblematic of their devotion were the appearance of miniature replicas of Mjöllnir, widely popular in Scandinavia.

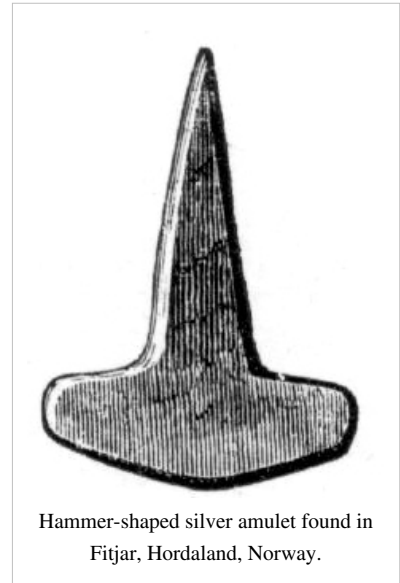
Many of these replicas were also found in graves and tended to be furnished with a loop, allowing them to be worn. Mjöllnir amulets were most widely discovered in areas with a strong Christian influence including southern Norway, south-eastern Sweden, and Denmark.^[5] Due to the similarity of equal-armed, square crosses featuring figures of Christ on them at around the same time, the wearing of Thor's hammers as pendants may have come into fashion in defiance of the square amulets worn by newly converted Christians in the regions.^[6]

The shape taken by these pendants varied by region. The Icelandic variant was cross-shaped, while Swedish and Norwegian variants tended to be arrow or T-shaped. About 50 specimens of such hammers were found widely dispersed throughout Scandinavia, dating from the 9th to 11th centuries. A few such examples were also found in England. An iron Thor's hammer pendant excavated in Yorkshire, dating to ca. AD 1000 bears an uncial inscription preceded and followed by a cross, interpreted as indicating a Christian owner syncretizing pagan and Christian symbolism.^[7]

A 10th-century soapstone mold found at Trendgården, Jutland, Denmark is notable for allowing the casting of both crucifix and Thor's hammer pendants.^[8] A silver specimen found near Fossi, Iceland (now in the National Museum of Iceland) can be interpreted as either a Christian cross or a Thor's hammer. Unusually, the elongated limb of the cross ends in a beast's (perhaps a wolf's) head.

A precedent of these Viking Age Thor's hammer amulets are recorded for the migration period Alemanni, who took to wearing Roman "Hercules' Clubs" as symbols of Donar.^[9] A possible remnant of these Donar amulets was recorded in 1897, as a custom of Unterinn (South Tyrolian Alps) of incising a T-shape above front doors for protection against evils of all kinds, especially storms.^[10]

Although not strictly Scandinavians, Iron Age Finns used similarish pendants, likely in dedication to the sky deity Ukko whose attributes also included a hammer for striking thunder called *Ukonkirves*. Pre-Christian Slavs honoured Perun with axe pendants that were of very different shape to Scandinavian and Finnish ones.



Hammer-shaped silver amulet found in Fitjar, Hordaland, Norway.

Stones

Some image stones and runestones found in Denmark and southern Sweden bear an inscription of a hammer. Runestones depicting Thor's hammer include runestones U 1161 in Altuna, Sö 86 in Åby, Sö 111 in Stenkvista, Sö 140 in Jursta, Vg 113 in Lärkegapet, Öl 1 in Karlevi, DR 26 in Laeborg, DR 48 in Hanning, DR 120 in Spentrup, and DR 331 in Gårdstånga.^{[11][1]} Other runestones included an inscription calling for Thor to safeguard the stone. For example, the stone of Virring in Denmark had the inscription *þur uiki þisi kuml*, which translates into English as "May Thor hallow this memorial." There are several examples of a similar inscription, each one asking for Thor to "hallow" or protect the specific artifact. Such inscriptions may have been in response to the Christians, who would ask for God's protection over their dead.^[12]



The Stenkvista runestone in Södermanland, Sweden, shows Thor's hammer instead of a cross.

Swastika symbol

According to some scholars, the swastika shape may have been a variant popular in Anglo-Saxon England prior to Christianization, especially in East Anglia and Kent.^[13] Wilson (1894) points out that while the swastika had been "vulgarly called in Scandinavia the hammer of Thor" (in Icelandic: *Thorshamarmarki*, mark of Thor's hammer), the symbol properly so called had a Y or T shape.^[14]

Modern usage

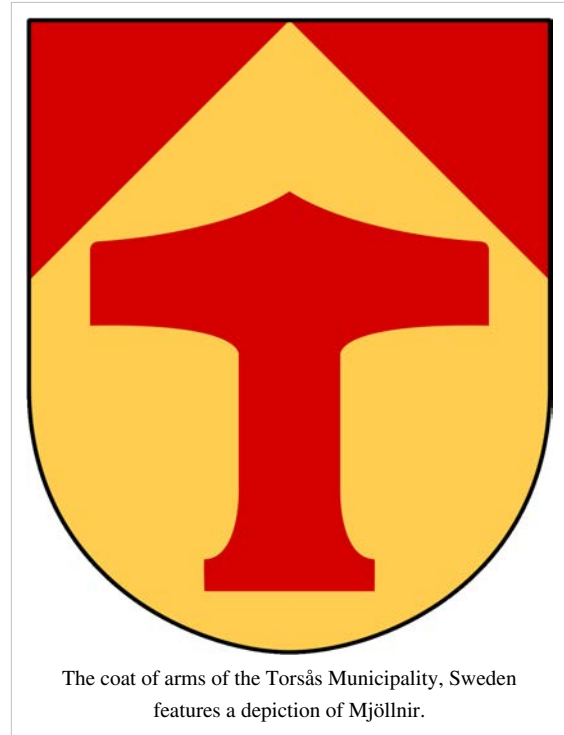
Most practitioners of Germanic Neopagan faiths wear Mjölfnir pendants as a symbol of that faith worldwide. Renditions of Mjölfnir are designed, crafted and sold by some Germanic Neopagan groups and individuals.^[15] Some controversy has occurred concerning the potential recognition of the symbol as a religious symbol by the United States government.^[16]

Outside of Germanic Neopaganism, depictions of Mjölfnir are used in Scandinavian logos and iconography, such as the Mjölfnir logo of the Bornholm Museum in Denmark and the coat of arms for Torsås Municipality, Sweden. Mjölfnir pendants are popular in general in Scandinavia and can be seen elsewhere in heavy metal (especially Black metal and Viking metal) and "Dark" subcultures, and, to a lesser extent, among Rockers and biker subcultures.

In May 2013 the "Hammer of Thor" was added to the list of United States Department of Veterans Affairs emblems for headstones and markers.^{[17][18]}



A modern Mjöllnir pendant.



The coat of arms of the Torsås Municipality, Sweden features a depiction of Mjöllnir.

Notes

- [1] Orchard (2002:255).
- [2] Turville-Petre, E.O.G. *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. London: Weidfeld and Nicolson, 1998. p81
- [3] Snorri's Edda, *Skaldskaparmal*. p. 41.
- [4] Campbell, Joseph (1986), *Occidental Mythology*, Vol. 3 of 4 of the series *The Masks of God*, Penguin (publisher), 1986, later printing. Vol. 3 first issued 1965.
- [5] Turville-Petre, E.O.G. *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964. p. 83
- [6] Ellis Davidson, H.R. (1965). *Gods And Myths Of Northern Europe*, p. 81, ISBN 0-14-013627-4
- [7] (<http://www.schoyencollection.com/religions.htm>) Schoyen Collection, MS 1708 (http://www.schoyencollection.com/religions_files/ms1708.jpg)
- [8] This has been interpreted as the property of a craftsman "hedging his bets" by catering to both a Christian and a pagan clientele. (<http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/hvitkrst.shtml>) (<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/mold801.jpg>)
- [9] Werner: Herkuleskeule und Donar-Amulett. in: Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz Nr. 11, Mainz 1966
- [10] Joh. Adolf Heyl, *Volkssagen, Bräuche und Meinungen aus Tirol* (Brixen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Kath.-polit. Pressvereins, 1897), p. 804.
- [12] Turville-Petre, E.O.G. *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964. p. 82–83.
- [13] Mayr-Harting, Henry, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=fLrdkyaKpwC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q=&f=false>) (1991), p. 3: "Many cremation pots of the early Anglo-Saxons have the swastika sign marked on them, and in some the swastikas seems to be confronted with serpents or dragons in a decorative design. This is a clear reference to the greatest of all Thor's struggles, that with the World Serpent which lay coiled round the earth." Christopher R. Fee, David Adams Leeming, *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* (2001), p. 31: "The image of Thor's weapon spinning end-over-end through the heavens is captured in art as a swastika symbol (common in Indo-European art, and indeed beyond); this symbol is—as one might expect—widespread in Scandinavia, but it also is common on Anglo-Saxon grave goods of the pagan period, notably in East Anglia and Kent."
- [14] Thomas Wilson (1894) (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/swastika/005.php>), citing Waring, *Ceramic Art in Remote Ages*, p. 12.
- [15] Examples include "Wodanesdag" (<https://wodanesdag.com/pp-hamr.html>) in Canada and "Hammers By Weylandsdöttir" (<http://www.thorshammersite.com/>) in the United States.
- [16] Hudson Jr., David L. *Va. inmate can challenge denial of Thor's Hammer* (<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/va-inmate-can-challenge-denial-of-thors-hammer>) June 6, 2007 at the firstamendmentcenter.org (<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org>) website.

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- Orchard, Andy (2002). *Norse Myth and Legend*. London: Cassell.
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External links

- A gallery of images of Mjölnir pendants from archaeological finds. (<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/hammerpix.html>)

Skíðblaðnir

Skíðblaðnir (Old Norse 'assembled from thin pieces of wood'^[1]), sometimes anglicized as **Skidbladnir** or **Skithblathnir**, is the best of ships in Norse mythology. It is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and in the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, both written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. All sources note that the ship is the finest of ships, and the *Poetic Edda* and *Prose Edda* attest that it is owned by the god Freyr, while the euhemerized account in *Heimskringla* attributes it to the magic of Odin. Both *Heimskringla* and the *Prose Edda* attribute to it the ability to be folded up—as cloth may be—into one's pocket when not needed.

Attestations

References to the ship occur in the *Poetic Edda*, the *Prose Edda*, and in *Heimskringla*. The ship is mentioned twice in the *Poetic Edda* and both incidents therein occur in the poem *Grímnismál*. In *Grímnismál*, Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*), tortured, starved, and thirsty, imparts in the young Agnar cosmological knowledge, including information about the origin of the ship Skíðblaðnir:



The third gift — an enormous hammer (1902) by Elmer Boyd Smith. The bottom right corner depicts the ship Skíðblaðnir "afloat" the goddess Sif's new hair.

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Ivaldi's sons went in days of old
 Skidbladnir to form,
 of ships the best, for the bright Frey,
 Niörd's benign son.
 Yggdrasil's ash is of all trees the most excellent,
 and of all ships, Skidbladnir.
 of the Æsir, Odin,
 and of horses, Sleipnir,
 Bifröst of bridges, and of skallds Bragi,
 Hábrök of hawks, and of dogs, Garm,
 [Brimir of swords.]^[2]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

In days of old did Ivaldi's sons
 Skithblathnir fashion fair,
 The best of ships for the bright god Freyr,
 The noble son of Njorth.
 The best of trees must Yggdrasil be,
 Skithblathnir best of boats;
 Of all the gods is Othin the greatest,
 And Sleipnir the best of steeds;
 Bilrost of bridges, Bragi of skallds,
 Hobrok of hawks, and Garm of hounds.^[3]

Skíðblaðnir is mentioned several times in the *Prose Edda*, where it appears in the books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*. The first mention of Skíðblaðnir in the *Poetic Edda* occurs in chapter 43, where the enthroned figure of High tells Gangleri (king Gylfi in disguise) that the god Odin is an important deity. High quotes the second of the above mentioned *Grímnismál* stanzas in support.^[4]

The boat is first directly addressed in chapter 43; there Gangleri asks that, if Skíðblaðnir is the best of ships, what there is to know about it, and asks if there is no other ship as good or as large as it. High responds that while Skíðblaðnir is the finest ship and the most ingeniously created, the biggest ship is in fact Naglfar, which is owned by Muspell. The Sons of Ivaldi, who High adds are dwarfs, crafted the ship and gave it to Freyr. High continues that the ship is big enough for all of the gods to travel aboard it with wargear and weapons in tow, and that, as soon as its sail is hoisted, the ship finds good wind, and goes wherever it need be. It is made up of so many parts and with such craftsmanship that, when it is not needed at sea, it may be folded up like cloth and placed into one's pocket. Gangleri comments that Skíðblaðnir sounds like a great ship, and that it must have taken a lot of magic to create something like it.^[5]

The next mention of the ship occurs in *Skáldskaparmál* where, in chapter 6, poetic ways of referring to Freyr are provided. Among other names, Freyr is referred to as "possessor of Skidbladnir and of the boar known as Gullinbursti". The first of the two *Grímnismál* stanzas mentioned above is then provided as reference.^[6]

In chapter 96, a myth explaining Skíðblaðnir's creation is provided. The chapter details that the god Loki once cut off the goddess's Sif's hair in an act of mischief. Sif's husband, Thor, enraged, found Loki, caught hold of him, and threatened to break every last bone in his body. Loki promises to have the Svartálfar make Sif a new head of hair that will grow just as any other. Loki goes to the dwarfs known as Ivaldi's sons, and they made not only Sif a new head of gold hair but also Skíðblaðnir and the spear Gungnir. As the tale continues, Loki risks his neck for the creation of the devastating hammer Mjöllnir, the multiplying ring Draupnir, and the speedy, sky-and-water traveling, bright-bristled boar Gullinbursti. In the end, Loki's wit saves him his head, but results in the stitching together of his lips. The newly created items are doled out by the dwarfs to Sif, Thor, Odin, and Freyr. Freyr is gifted both Gullinbursti and Skíðblaðnir, the latter of which is again said to receive fair wind whenever its sail was set, and that it will go wherever it needs to, and that it can be folded up much as cloth and placed in one's pocket at will.^[7]

Skíðblaðnir receives a final mention in *Skáldskaparmál* where, in chapter 75, it appears on a list of ships.^[8]

The ship gets a single mention in the *Heimskringla* book *Ynglinga saga*. In chapter 7, an euhemerized Odin is said to have had various magical abilities, including that "he was also able with mere words to extinguish fires, to calm the sea, and to turn the winds any way he pleased. He had a ship called Skíthblathnir with which he sailed over great seas. It could be folded together like a cloth."^[9]

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:289).
- [2] Thorpe (1866:25).
- [3] Bellows (1923:101).
- [4] Faulkes (1995:34).
- [5] Faulkes (1995:36—37).
- [6] Faulkes (1995:75).
- [7] Faulkes (1995:96—97).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:162).
- [9] Hollander (2007:10—11).

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- Faulkes, Anthony (Trans.) (1995). *Edda*. Everyman. ISBN 0-460-87616-3
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- Simek, Rudolf (2007) translated by Angela Hall. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. D.S. Brewer. ISBN 0-85991-513-1
- Thorpe, Benjamin (Trans.) (1866) *The Elder Edda of Saemund Sigon*. Norrœna Society.

Tyrfing

Tyrfing, **Tirfing** or **Tyrving** (The name is of uncertain origin, possibly connected to the Terwingi) was a magic sword in Norse mythology, which figures in the **Tyrfing Cycle**, which includes a poem from the *Poetic Edda* called *Hervararkviða*, and the *Hervarar saga*. The name is also used in the saga to denote the Goths. The form *Tervingi* was actually recorded by Roman sources in the 4th century.

Svafrlami was the king of Gardariki, and Odin's grandson. He managed to trap the Dwarves Dvalinn and Durin when they had left the rock where they dwelt. Then he

forced them to forge a sword with a golden hilt that would never miss a stroke, would never rust and would cut through stone and iron as easily as through clothes.

The Dwarves made the sword, and it shone and gleamed like fire. However, in revenge they cursed it so that it would kill a man every time it was drawn and that it would be the cause of three great evils. They finally cursed it so that it would also kill Svafrlami himself.

When Svafrlami heard the curses he tried to slay Dvalin, but the Dwarf disappeared into the rock and the sword was driven deep into it, though missing its victim.

Svafrlami was killed by the berserker Arngrim who took the sword in his turn. After Arngrim, it was worn by Angantyr and his eleven brothers. They were all slain at Samsø, by the Swedish champion Hjalmar, and his



Svafrlami secures the sword Tyrfing.

Norwegian sworn brother Orvar-Odd; but Hjalmar, being wounded by Tyrfing (its first evil deed), has only time to sing his death-song before he dies, and asks Orvar-Odd to bring his body to Ingeborg, daughter of Yngvi at Uppsala.

Angantyr's daughter, Hervor (by his wife Tófa) is brought up as a bond-maid, in ignorance of her parentage. When at last she learns it, she arms herself as a shieldmaiden, and goes to Munarvøe in Samsø, in quest of the dwarf-cursed weapon. She finds it and marries King Gudmund's son Höfund. They have two sons, Heidrek and Angantyr. Hervor secretly gave her son the sword Tyrfing. While Angantyr and Heidrek walked, Heidrek wanted to have a look at the sword. Since he had unsheathed it, the curse the Dwarves had put on the sword made Heidrek kill his brother Angantyr. This was the second of Tyrfing's three evil deeds.

Heidrek became king of the Goths. During a voyage, Heidrek camped at the Carpathians (Harvaða fjöllum, cf. Grimm's law). He was accompanied by eight mounted thralls, and when Heidrek slept at night, the thralls broke into his tent and took Tyrfing and slew Heidrek. This was the last one of Tyrfing's three evil deeds. Heidrek's son, also named Angantyr, caught and killed the thralls, and reclaimed the magic sword, and the curse had ceased.

Angantyr was the next king of the Goths, but his illegitimate half-Hun brother Hlod (or Hlöd, Hlöðr) wanted half of the kingdom. Angantyr refused, and Gizur called Hlod a bastard and his mother a slave-girl. Hlod and 343,200 mounted Huns invade the Goths (See The Battle of the Goths and Huns). The Huns greatly outnumber the Goths. The Goths won because Angantyr used Tyrfing. He killed his brother Hlod on the battleground. The bodies of the numerous warriors choke the rivers, causing a flood which filled the valleys with dead men and horses.

Útgarðar

In Norse mythology, **Útgarðar** (literal meaning: "Outyards"; plural of **Útgarðr**; the word can be anglicized to **Utgard**, **Utgardar** and in other ways) surrounded a stronghold of the giants. They are associated with Útgarða-Loki, a great and devious giant featured in one of the myths concerning Thor and the other Loki who compete in rigged competitions held in the Outyards. These outdoor arenas contrast with the putrid, indoor cave where Útgarða-Loki is said to dwell, when chained, in the *Gesta Danorum*. In another version of Norse mythology, Utgard is thought to be the final of the three worlds connected to Yggdrasil being the home of the demons, the other two being Asgard and Midgard. Utgard is also a town in the Inheritance cycle novels appearing in the first one

People

Aun

Ane, On, One, Auchun or **Aun the Old** (*Audhun*), English: **Edwin**, is the name of a mythical Swedish king of the House of Yngling, the ancestors of Norway's first king, Harald Fairhair. Edwin was the son of Jorund, and had ten sons, nine of which he was said to have sacrificed in order to prolong his own life.

Ruling from his seat in Uppsala, Aun was reputedly a wise king who made sacrifices to the gods. However, as he was not of a warlike disposition and preferred to live in peace. He was attacked and defeated by the Danish prince Halfdan. Aun fled to the Geats in Västergötland, where he stayed for 25 years until Halfdan died in his bed in Uppsala.

Upon Halfdan's death Aun returned to Uppsala. Aun was now 60 years old, and in an attempt to live longer he sacrificed his son to Odin, who had promised that this would mean he would live for another 60 years. After 25 years, Aun was attacked by Halfdan's cousin Ale the Strong. Aun lost several battles and had to flee a second time to Västergötland. Ale the Strong ruled in Uppsala for 25 years until he was killed by Starkad the old.

After Ale the Strong's death, Aun once again returned to Uppsala and once again sacrificed a son to Odin; this time Odin told the king that he would remain living as long as he sacrificed a son every ten years and that he had to name one of the Swedish provinces after the number of sons he sacrificed.

When Aun had sacrificed a son for the seventh time, he was so old that he could not walk but had to be carried on a chair. When he had sacrificed a son for the eighth time, he could no longer get out of his bed. When he had sacrificed his ninth son, he was so old that he had to feed, like a little child, by suckling on a horn.

After ten years he wanted to sacrifice his tenth and last son and name the province of Uppsala *The Ten Lands*. However, the Swedes refused to allow him to make this sacrifice and so he died. He was buried in a mound at Uppsala and succeeded by his last son Egil. From that day, dying in bed of old age was called *Aun's sickness* among the Scandinavians.



East royal tumulus at Old Uppsala, suggested grave of King Edwin the Old (photo: Jacob Truedson Demitz)

<i>Knátti endr</i>	In Upsal's town the cruel king
<i>at Upsölum</i>	Slaughtered his sons at Odin's shrine --
<i>ána-sótt</i>	Slaughtered his sons with cruel knife,
<i>Aun of standa,</i>	To get from Odin length of life.
<i>ok þrálífr</i>	He lived until he had to turn
<i>þiggja skyldi</i>	His toothless mouth to the deer's horn;
<i>jóðs alað</i>	And he who shed his children's blood
<i>öðru sinni.</i>	Sucked through the ox's horn his food.
<i>Ok sveiðurs</i>	At length fell Death has tracked him down,
<i>at sér hverfði</i>	Slowly, but sure, in Upsal's town. ^{[3][4]}
<i>mækis hlut</i>	
<i>enn mjávara,</i>	
<i>es okhreins</i>	
<i>óttunga hrjóðr</i>	
<i>lögðis odd</i>	
<i>liggjandi drakk;</i>	
<i>máttit hárr</i>	
<i>hjarðar mæki</i>	
<i>austrkonungr</i>	
<i>upp of halda.</i> ^{[1][2]}	

The *Historia Norwegiæ* presents a Latin summary of *Ynglingatal*, older than Snorri's quotation (continuing after Jorund):

Iste genuit Auchun, qui longo vetustatis senio IX annis ante obitum suum densæ usum alimonie postponens lac tantum de cornu ut infans suxisse fertur. Auchun vero genuit Eigil cognomento Vendilcraco [...]^[5]

He became the father of Aukun, who, in the feebleness of a protracted old age, during the nine years before his death is said to have abandoned the consumption of solid food and only sucked milk from a horn, like a babe-in-arms. Aukun's son was Egil Vendelkråke, [...]^[6]

The even earlier source *Íslendingabók* also cites the line of descent in *Ynglingatal* and it also gives Aun as the successor of Jörundr and the predecessor of Egil Vendelcrow: *xv Jörundr. xvi Aun inn gamli. xvii Egill Vendilkråka.*^[7]

Notes

[1] *Ynglinga saga* at *Norrøne Tekster og Kvad* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/heimskringla/ynlingasaga.php>)

[2] A second online presentation of *Ynglingatal* (<http://www.home.no/norron-mytologi/sgndok/kvad/ynli.htm>)

[3] Laing's translation at the Internet Sacred Text Archive (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynlga.htm>)

[4] Laing's translation at Northvegr (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/heim/001_05.php)

[5] Storm, Gustav (editor) (1880). *Monumenta historica Norwegiæ: Latinske kildeskriber til Norges historie i middelalderen*, Monumenta Historica Norwegiæ (Kristiania: Brøgger), p. 100.

[6] Ekrem, Inger (editor), Lars Boje Mortensen (editor) and Peter Fisher (translator) (2003). *Historia Norwegie*. Museum Tusulanum Press. ISBN 87-7289-813-5, p. 77.

[7] Guðni Jónsson's edition of *Íslendingabók* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/islendingesagaene/islendingabok.php>)

Primary sources

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- Historia Norwegiae

Secondary sources

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Aun House of Yngling		
Preceded by Jorund	Mythological king of Sweden <i>First reign</i>	Succeeded by Halfdan
Preceded by Halfdan	Mythological king of Sweden <i>Second reign</i>	Succeeded by Ale the Strong
Preceded by Ale the Strong	Mythological king of Sweden <i>Third reign</i>	Succeeded by Egil Ongenpeow

Berserker

Berserkers (or **berserks**) were Germanic warriors who are primarily reported in the Old Norse literature to have fought in a nearly uncontrollable, trance-like fury, a characteristic which later gave rise to the English word *berserk*. Berserkers are attested to in numerous Old Norse sources. Most historians believe that berserkers worked themselves into a rage before battle, but some think that they might have consumed drugged foods.

The *Úlfhéðnar* (singular *Úlfhéðinn*), another term associated with berserkers, mentioned in the *Vatnsdæla saga*, *Haraldskvæði* and the *Völsunga saga*, were said to wear the pelt of a wolf when they entered battle.^[1] *Úlfhéðnar* are sometimes described as Odin's special warriors: "[Odin's] men went without their mailcoats and were mad as hounds or wolves, bit their shields...they slew men, but neither fire nor iron had effect upon them. This is called 'going berserk.'^[2]" In addition, the helm-plate press from Torslunda depicts (below) a scene of Odin with a berserker—"a wolf skinned warrior with the apparently one-eyed dancer in the bird-horned helm, which is generally interpreted as showing a scene indicative of a relationship between berserkgang... and the god Odin^[3]"—with a wolf pelt and a spear as distinguishing features.^[4]

Etymology

The name *berserker* arose from their reputed habit of wearing a kind of shirt or coat (Old Norse: *serkr*) made from the pelt of a bear (Old Norse: *ber-*) during battle.

The term comes from the Old Norse *berserkr* (plural *berserkir*), meaning bear shirt and suggests the hide of the animal was worn as a robe. Notably, the element *ber-* was sometimes interpreted as *berr-*, meaning "bare", which Snorri understood to mean that the warriors went into battle bare-chested, or "without armor" as men of Odin.^[5] This view has since been largely abandoned.^[6]



Vendel era bronze plate found on Öland, Sweden.

Terminology

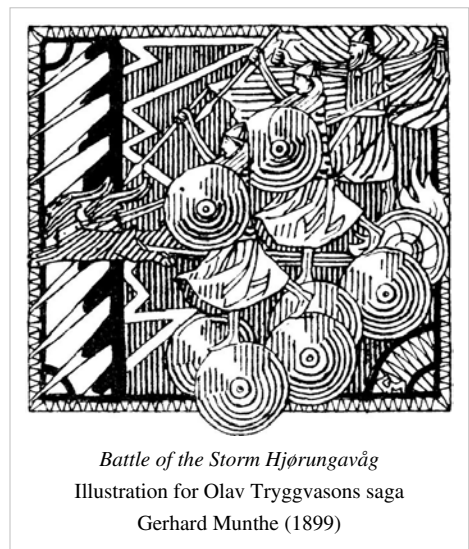
To "go berserk" was to "hamask" which translates as "change form," in this case, a with the sense "enter a state of wild fury" and one who could transform as a berserker was typically thought of as "hamrammr" or "shapestrong."^[7] For example, the band of men that go with Skallagrim in Egil's Saga to see King Harald about his brother, Thorolf's murder, they are described as, "all together there were twelve of them in the party, all the hardest of men, with a touch of the uncanny about a number of them...they [were] built and shaped more like trolls than human beings," which is generally interpreted as this band of men being hamrammr.^[8]

Attestations

Berserkers appear prominently in a multitude of other sagas and poems, many of which describe berserkers as ravenous men who loot, plunder, and kill indiscriminately. Later, by Christian interpreters, the berserk was even viewed as a "heathen devil."^[9]

The earliest surviving reference to the term "berserker" is in *Haraldskvæði*, a skaldic poem composed by Thórbjörn Hornklofi in the late 9th century in honour of King Harald Fairhair, as *ulfheðnar* ("men clad in wolf skins"). This translation from the *Haraldskvæði* saga describes Harald's berserkers:

I'll ask of the berserks, you tasters of blood, Those intrepid heroes, how are they treated,
Those who waded out into battle?
Wolf-skinned they are called. In battle
They bear bloody shields.
Red with blood are their spears when they come to fight.
They form a closed group.
The prince in his wisdom puts trust in such men
Who hack through enemy shields.^[10]



Battle of the Storm Hjörungavåg
Illustration for Olav Trygvassons saga
Gerhard Munthe (1899)

The Icelandic historian and poet Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) wrote the following description of berserkers in his *Ynglinga saga*:

His (Odin's) men rushed forwards without armour, were as mad as dogs or wolves, bit their shields, and were strong as bears or wild oxen, and killed people at a blow, but neither fire nor iron told upon them. This was

called *Berserkergang*.^[11]

King Harald Fairhair's use of berserker "shock troops" broadened his sphere of influence. Other Scandinavian kings used berserkers as part of their army of hirdmen and sometimes ranked them as equivalent to a royal bodyguard. It may be that some of those warriors only adopted the organization or rituals of berserk männerbünde, or used the name as a deterrent or claim of their ferocity.

Emphasis has been placed on the frenzied nature of the berserkers, hence the modern sense of the word 'berserk.' However, the sources describe several other characteristics that have been ignored or neglected by modern commentators. Snorri's assertion that 'neither fire nor iron told upon them' is reiterated time after time, and the sources frequently state that neither edged weapons nor fire affected the berserks, although they were not immune to clubs or other blunt instruments. For example:

men asked Halfdan to attack Hardbeen and his champions man by man; and he not only promised to fight, but assured himself the victory with most confident words. When Hardbeen heard this, a demoniacal frenzy suddenly took him; he furiously bit and devoured the edges of his shield; he kept gulping down fiery coals; he snatched live embers in his mouth and let them pass down into his entrails; he rushed through the perils of crackling fires; and at last, when he had raved through every sort of madness, he turned his sword with raging hand against the hearts of six of his champions. It is doubtful whether this madness came from thirst for battle or natural ferocity. Then with the remaining band of his champions he attacked Halfdan, who crushed him with a hammer of wondrous size, so that he lost both victory and life; paying the penalty both to Halfdan, whom he had challenged, and to the kings whose offspring he had violently ravished...^[12]

Similarly, Hrolf Kraki's champions refuse to retreat 'from fire or iron.' Another frequent motif refers to berserkers blunting their enemy's blades with spells, or a glance from their evil eyes. This appears as early as Beowulf where it is a characteristic attributed to Grendel. Both the fire eating and the immunity to edged weapons are reminiscent of tricks popularly ascribed to Hindu fakirs.

In 1015, Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson of Norway outlawed berserkers. Grágás, the medieval Icelandic law code, sentenced berserker warriors to outlawry. By the 12th century, organised berserker war-bands had disappeared.

The Lewis Chessmen, found on the Isle of Lewis (Outer Hebrides, Scotland) but thought to be of Norse manufacture, include Berserkers depicted biting their shields.

Theories

Scholar Hilda Ellis-Davidson draws a parallel between berserkers and the mention by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII (AD 905–959) in his book *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* ("Book of Ceremonies of the Byzantine court") of a "Gothic Dance" performed by members of his Varangian Guard (Norse warriors working in the service of the Byzantine Empire), who took part wearing animal skins and masks: she believes this may have been connected with berserker rites.^[13]

The actual fit of madness the berserker experienced was referred to as *berserkergang* ("going berserk"). This condition has been described as follows:

This fury, which was called *berserkergang*, occurred not only in the heat of battle, but also during laborious work. Men who were thus seized performed things which otherwise seemed impossible for human power. This condition is said to have begun with shivering, chattering of the teeth, and chill in the body, and then the face swelled and changed its colour. With this was connected a great hot-headedness, which at last gave over into a great rage, under which they howled as wild animals, bit the edge of their shields, and cut down everything they met without discriminating between friend or foe. When this condition ceased, a great dulling of the mind and feebleness followed, which could last for one or several days.^[14]

Theories about what caused berserker behaviour include ingestion of materials with psychoactive properties, psychological processes, and medical conditions.

Some scholars believe certain examples of berserker rage to have been induced voluntarily by the consumption of drugs such as the hallucinogenic mushroom *Amanita muscaria*.^[15] or massive amounts of alcohol.^[16] While such practices would fit in with ritual usages, other explanations for the berserker's madness have been put forward, including self-induced hysteria, epilepsy, mental illness or genetics.^[17]

Jonathan Shay, MD, makes an explicit connection between the berserker rage of soldiers and the hyperarousal of post-traumatic stress disorder. In *Achilles in Vietnam* he writes:

If a soldier survives the berserk state, it imparts emotional deadness and vulnerability to explosive rage to his psychology and permanent hyperarousal to his physiology — hallmarks of post-traumatic stress disorder in combat veterans. My clinical experience with Vietnam combat veterans prompts me to place the berserk state at the heart of their most severe psychological and psychophysiological injuries.^[18]

Modern context

The word "berserker" today applies to anyone who fights with reckless abandon and disregard to even his own life, a concept used during the Vietnam War and in Vietnam-inspired literature (Michael Herr's *Dispatches*) and film (Oliver Stone's *Platoon* and Adrian Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder*). "Going berserk" in this context refers to an overdose of adrenaline-induced opioids (or military-issued amphetamine for long missions) in the human body and brain leading a soldier to fight with fearless rage and indifference, a state strikingly similar to that of the 9th century berserkers.

"Going berserk" is also used colloquially to describe a person who is acting in a wild rage or in an uncontrolled and irrational manner. "Berserker" is also a well known character archetype and status in video games and other media.

In popular culture

- The character Slaine, as depicted by Simon Bisley and others in 2000AD Comics.
- Berserkers as depicted in the *Beowulf* epic are incorporated as mysterious and fearsome enemies in Michael Crichton's *Eaters of the Dead* novel (1976), and in its film adaptation *The 13th Warrior* (1999).
- The comic book superhero Wolverine is sometimes depicted going into a state called a "berserker rage", where he attacks foes with unbridled ferocity.
- In Clive Barker's 1990 film *Nightbreed*, the Berserkers are depicted as a monstrous and feral breed that were imprisoned deep in Midian due to their sheer insanity. They were released at the end of the film by Lylesburg (the leader of Midian's society) and Aaron Boone to attack the humans furiously and win the battle against them.
- In 1991 and 1992, John Nord wrestled in the World Wrestling Federation under the name *The Berserker*.
- Berserkers are depicted in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe as warriors in service to the Chaos god of blood, Khorne.
- Fred Saberhagen's *Berserker Saga* of machines bent on the eradication of all organic life in the universe is likely based on the Berserkers, as well as providing the inspiration for the *Cylons* of the *Battlestar Galactica* entertainment franchise.
- In the 1997 MMORPG created and run by Norseman Games "The Realm Online", the 'Berseker Helmet' was a rare and hard to come by collectible helmet of the game. Once the player placed the helmet on their head they lost control on the battle field fighting any enemies which appeared on screen, even ones which were not recommended to fight (i.e. enemies of a much higher level than you). When a player loses a battle, items are dropped from his/her inventory. Upon losing a battle, which happened many times due to the destructive nature of the 'Berserker Helmet', the helmet was dropped and picked up by the enemy, making it a very hard helmet to keep hold of. When wearing the helmet, the players face became somewhat crazed, giving the player a scruffy beard and cross eyes.
- In the 1999 Karen Marie Moning novel *To Tame a Highland Warrior* main character Grimm Roderick, whose real name is Gavrael McIllloch, is a berserker who discovers he is descended from a long line of the famous warriors.

- The film version of *Lord of the Rings* by Peter Jackson divides the Uruk army into four categories, including the berserker, depicted as particularly fierce and empowered by pouring human blood over their bodies.
- In the video game series *Fire Emblem*, Berserk is a staff: if a character is hit by this staff, he will attack the nearest unit, whether it is an enemy or an ally. There is also a job class named Berserker, which are depicted wielding giant axes and a high critical hit rate.
- The *Final Fantasy* video game series has incorporated a variety of abilities, job classes and status changes that are based on the concept of being in a 'berserk' state. Most of these involve the character attacking without any input from the player.
- In the RPG game *Baldur's Gate*, the character Minsc, goes into a berserk rage either deliberately, as a special power (to increase speed and strength) or when seriously wounded, during which time he will attack members of his own party. When the berserk state ends, his own health is damaged and he is exhausted, requiring rest for his full strength to return. There is also a "cursed" sword which sends the wielder into a berserk state in the presence of enemies.
- The band Black Label Society and more specifically lead singer Zakk Wylde often make reference to the term Berserker. In some instances fans of the band are referred to as Berserkers.
- In 1981 Australian band Mental As Anything released the single 'Berserk Warriors' written by their bass player Peter O'Doherty. The song interweaves Viking Berserker imagery with the relationship between Abba's Bjorn and Anna.
- In *Duel Masters*, the Berserkers are a mass-produced race of alloy pieces connected by an energy force field. They can vary in size from tanks to battleships.
- In *Kaijudo: Rise of the Duel Masters* (which is the reimaging of the *Duel Masters* franchise), the Berserkers are human-based monsters that are associated with the Fire Civilization.
- The protagonists of the comic series *Berserker*, Aaron and Farris, are both Berserkers.
- In the video game *Borderlands*, the character Brick is classed as a berserker. In the sequel *Borderlands 2*, the character Salvador is classed as a "Gunzerker"—a berserker who fights with guns.
- In the video game *Gears of War*, Berserkers are blind reckless creatures with armor-like skin.
- In the video game *World of Warcraft*, the warrior class has several berserker abilities (berserker stance, berserker rage), which grant substantial improvements to offensive moves.
- In the video game *Nox*, the warrior class has an attack ability called the 'Berserker charge'.
- In Michael Scott's Novel *The Enchantress*, the final sixth book of *The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel* series, three berserkers are sent to kill the twins in the great temple.
- Berserkers are also featured in Microsoft's *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings* and its expansion *The Conquerors* as a Viking unique unit.
- Berserkers feature fairly prominently in *Rome Total War* as a Germanic unit that has high attack and impossible to control once berserk.
- The character Olaf sings a song titled "Berserker" in the movie *Clerks*.
- In the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* anime, sometimes the Eva units, when in great danger of being destroyed enter in a "Berserker Mode".
- In the *Berserk* manga and anime, the main protagonist Guts often goes into berserker trance.
- In the book *Sabriell* the character Touchstone has the ability to go into a type of berserker state
- In the *Vinland Saga* manga, one character, Bjorn, occasionally eats a "mushroom of the Berserker" and goes into a temporary violent trance, seeming to not initially feel severe injury, and is unable or unwilling to tell friend from foe.
- *Joe Abercrombie's* first series of fantasy novels, *The First Law* trilogy, feature a major protagonist, Logen Ninefingers, who suffers from an apparently involuntary form of berserk rage that transforms him into a mad, unstoppable killing machine that refers to itself as The Bloody-Nine.
- In the online strategic game *Forge Of Empires* is the Berserker used as a soldier in High Middle Ages epoch.

- The Berserkers is also the name of John Pope's group of fighters from "Falling Skies" on TNT.


Notes

- [1] Simek (1995:435).
- [4] Simek (1995:48).
- [6] Simek (1995:47).
- [11] Laing (1889:276)
- [12] Elton (1905). See also the Online Medieval and Classical Library Release #28a (<http://omacl.org/DanishHistory/book7.html>) for full text.
- [13] Ellis-Davidson, Hilda R. (1967) *Pagan Scandinavia*, page 100. Frederick A. Praeger Publishers ASIN B0000CNQ6I
- [14] Fabing (1956:234).
- [15] Howard D. Fabing. "On Going Berserk: A Neurochemical Inquiry." *Scientific Monthly*. 83 [Nov. 1956] p. 232
- [16] Robert Wernick. *The Vikings*. Alexandria VA: Time-Life Books. 1979. p. 285
- [17] Peter G. Foote and David m. Wilson. *The Viking Achievement*. London: Sidgewick & Jackson. 1970. p. 285.

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External links

- *Berserkene – hva gikk det av dem?* (Jon Geir Høyersten: Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association) (<http://tidsskriftet.no/article/1121904>)
- *Berserkerang* (Viking Answer Lady) (<http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/berserke.htm>)
-  Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Berserker". *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Bödvar Bjarki



Bödvar Bjarki's last battle. He is in the fetch of a bear.

Hrólf Kraki Tradition
Hrólf Kraki's saga
Ynglinga saga
Lejre Chronicle
Gesta Danorum
Beowulf
People
Hrólf Kraki
Halfdan
Helgi
Yrsa
Adils
Áli
Bödvar Bjarki
Hjörvard
Roar
Locations
Lejre
Uppsala
Fyrisvellir

Bödvar Bjarki (Old Norse: Böðvar Bjarki), meaning 'Warlike Little-Bear', is the hero appearing in tales of Hrólf Kraki in the *Saga of Hrólf Kraki*, in the Latin epitome to the lost *Skjöldunga saga*, and as *Biarco* in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*. Some think he and the hero Beowulf in the Old English poem *Beowulf* were

originally the same personage, while others reject this notion.

Unlike Beowulf, Bödvar is said to have been Norwegian, which may be explained by the fact that his story was written by Icelandic authors who were mostly of Norwegian descent.

However, his brother was the king of Gautland (Geatland) and, like Beowulf, it was from Geatland that Bödvar arrived in Denmark. Moreover, upon arriving at the court of Denmark, he kills a monstrous beast that has been terrorizing the court at Yule for two years.

The famous poem *Bjarkamál* (of which only a few stanzas are preserved but which Saxo Grammaticus presents in the form of a florid Latin paraphrase) is understood as a dialogue between Bödvar Bjarki and his younger companion Hjalti which begins by Hjalti again and again urging Bödvar to awake from his sleep and fight for King Hrólfr in this last battle in which they are doomed to be defeated. As explained in the prose, this rousing was ill-done, as Bjarki was in a trance and his spirit in the form of a monstrous bear was already aiding Hrólfr far more than Bjarki could do with only his mannish strength.

Domalde

In Norse mythology, **Domalde**, *Dómaldi* or *Dómaldr* (Old Norse possibly "Power to Judge"^[1]) was a Swedish king of the House of Ynglings, cursed by his stepmother, according to Snorri Sturluson, with *ósgæssa*, "ill-luck". He was the son of Visbur.

Attestations

The luck of the king is the luck of the land,^[2] and Domalde's rule was marked by bad crops and starvation. The first autumn, the Swedes sacrificed oxen at the temple at Uppsala, but the next harvest was not better. The second autumn, they sacrificed men, but the following crops were even worse.

The third year many Swedes arrived at Gamla Uppsala at the Thing of all Swedes and the chiefs decided they had to sacrifice the king. They sprinkled the statues of the gods with his blood (see Blót) and the good harvests returned.



The sacrifice of Domalde by Halfdan Egedius.

He was succeeded by his son Domar whose reign was prosperous.

Snorri Sturluson wrote of Domalde in his *Ynglinga saga* (1225):

Dómaldi tók arf eftir föður sinn Vísbur, ok réð löndum. Á hans dögum gerðist í Svíþjóð sultr mikill ok seyra. Þá efldu Svíar blót stór at Uppsölum; hit fyrsta haust blótuðu þeir yxnum, ok batnaði ekki árferð at heldr. En annat haust hófu þeir mannblót, en árferð var söm eða verri. En hit þriðja haust kómu Svíar fjölment til Uppsala, þá er blót skyldu vera. Þá áttu höfðingjar ráðagerð sína; ok kom þat ásamt með þeim, at hallærit mundi standa af Dómalda konungi þeirra, ok þat með, at þeir skyldu honum blóta til árs sér, ok veita honum atgöngu ok drepa hann, ok rjóða stalla með blóði hans. Ok svá gerðu þeir.^[3]

Domald took the heritage after his father Visbur, and ruled over the land. As in his time there was great famine and distress, the Swedes made great offerings of sacrifice at Upsal. The first autumn they sacrificed oxen, but the succeeding season was not improved thereby. The following autumn they sacrificed men, but the succeeding year was rather worse. The third autumn, when the offer of sacrifices should begin, a great multitude of Swedes came to Upsal; and now the chiefs held consultations with each other, and all agreed that the times of scarcity were on account of their king Domald, and they resolved to offer him for good seasons, and to assault and kill him, and sprinkle the stalls of the gods with his blood. And they did so.^{[4][5]}

Snorri included a piece from *Ynglingatal* (9th century) in his account in the *Heimskringla*:



Midvinterblot (1915) by Carl Larsson portrays Domalde as a willing sacrifice.

Hitt var fyrr	It has happened oft ere now,
at fold ruðu	That foeman's weapon has laid low
sverðberendr	The crowned head, where battle plain,
sínum drótni,	Was miry red with the blood-rain.
ok landherr	But Domald dies by bloody arms,
af lífs vönum	Raised not by foes in war's alarms
dreyrug vápn	Raised by his Swedish liegemen's hand,
Dómalda bar,	To bring good seasons to the land. ^{[4][7]}
þá er árgjörn	
Jóta dolgi	
Svíá kind	
of sóa skyldi. ^{[3][6]}	

The *Historia Norwegiae* presents a Latin summary of *Ynglingatal*, older than Snorri's quotation:

Cujus [Wisbur] filium Domald Sweones suspendentes pro fertilitate frugum deae Cereri hostiam obtulerunt. Iste genuit Domar [...]^[8] His [Visbur] son Domalde was hanged by the Swedes as a sacrificial offering to Ceres to ensure the fruitfulness of the crops. Domalde begot Domar, [...]^[9]

The even earlier source *Íslendingabók* cites the line of descent in *Ynglingatal* and also gives Dómald as the successor of Visburr and the predecessor of Dómarr:^[10]

Notes

- [1] McKinnell (2005:70).
- [2] "The Danish sources, for example, tell of many kings who bore the title Frothi (wise/fruitful)" remarked John Grigsby in the context of just such 'Royal Obligations', ch. 11, *Beowulf and Grendel* 2005: 124, noting (note 3) Frothi's appearance in Saxo Grammaticus.
- [3] *Ynglinga saga* at *Norrøne Tekster og Kvad* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/heimskringla/ynlingasaga.php>)
- [4] Laing's translation at the Internet Sacred Text Archive (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynglga.htm>)
- [5] Laing's translation at Northvegr (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/heim/001_03.php)
- [6] A second online presentation of *Ynglingatal* (<http://www.home.no/norron-mytologi/sgndok/kvad/yngli.htm>)
- [7] Laing's translation at Northvegr (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/heim/001_05.php)
- [8] Storm, Gustav (editor) (1880). *Monumenta historica Norwegiae: Latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*, Monumenta Historica Norwegiae (Kristiania: Brøgger), p. 98
- [9] Ekrem, Inger (editor), Lars Boje Mortensen (editor) and Peter Fisher (translator) (2003). *Historia Norwegie*. Museum Tusulanum Press. ISBN 87-7289-813-5, p. 75.
- [10] Guðni Jónsson's edition of *Íslendingabók* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/islendingesagaene/islendingabok.php>)

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Sources

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- Ynglinga saga (part of the Heimskringla)
- Historia Norwegiae

Domalde		
House of Yngling		
Preceded by Visbur	Mythological king of Sweden	Succeeded by Domar

Domar

In Norse mythology, the Swedish king **Domar** (Old Norse *Dómarr*, "Judge"^[1]) of the House of Ynglings was the son of Domalde. He was married to Drott, the sister of Dan the Arrogant who gave his names to the Danes. Drott and Dan are in this work said to be the children of Danp son of Ríg.

His rule lasted long and after the sacrifice of his father Domalde, the crops were plentiful and peace reigned. Consequently there is not much to tell about his reign, and when he died at Uppsala, he was transported over the Fyris Wolds (Fyrisvellir) and burnt on the banks of the river, where a stone was raised over his ashes.

He was succeeded by his son Dyggvi.

Attestations

Snorri Sturluson wrote of Domar in his *Ynglinga saga* (1225):

Dómarr hét sonr Dómalda, er þar næst réð ríki; hann réð lengi fyrir löndum, ok var þá góð árferð ok friðr um hans daga. Frá honum er ekki sagt annat, en hann varð sótt dauðr at Uppsölum, ok var færðr á Fyrisvöllu ok brendr þar á árbakkanum, ok eru þar bautasteinar hans.^[2]

Domald's son, called Domar, next ruled over the land. He reigned long, and in his days were good seasons and peace. Nothing is told of him but that he died in his bed in Upsal, and was transported to the Fyrisvold, where his body was burned on the river bank, and where his standing stone still remains.^{[3][4]}

The information about Domar's marriage appears after Snorri has presented Domar's son Dyggvi (Danish tongue refers to the Old Norse language as a whole and not only to the dialect of Denmark):

Móðir Dyggva var Drótt, dóttir Danps konungs, sonar Rígs, er fyrstr var konungr kallaðr á danska tungu; hans ættmenn höfðu ávalt síðan konungsnafn fyrir hit æzta tignarnafn. Dyggvi var fyrstr konungr kallaðr sinna ættmanna; en áðr váru þeir dróttnar kallaðir, en konur þeirra dróttningar, en drótt hirðsveitin. En Yngvi eða Ynguni var kallaðr hverr þeirra ættmanna alla ævi, en Ynglingar allir saman. Drótt dróttning var systir Dans konungs hins mikilláta, er Danmörk er við kend.^[2]

Dygve's mother was Drott, a daughter of King Danp, the son of Ríg, who was first called "king" in the Danish tongue. His descendants always afterwards considered the title of king the title of highest dignity. Dygve was the first of his family to be called king, for his predecessors had been called "Drottnar", and their wives "Drottningar", and their court "Drott". Each of their race was called Yngve, or Yngune, and the whole race together Ynglinger. The Queen Drott was a sister of King Dan Mikillati, from whom Denmark took its name.^{[3][4]}

As for Domar, Snorri included a piece from *Ynglingatal* (9th century):

Ok þess opt	I have asked wise men to tell
of Yngva hrör	Where Domar rests, and they knew well.
fróða menn	Domar, on Fyrie's widespread ground,
of fregit hafðak,	Was burned, and laid on Yngve's mound. ^{[3][6]}
hvar Dómarr	
á dynjanda	
bana háalfs	
of borinn væri;	
nú þat veitk,	
at verkbitinn	
Fjöltnis niðr	
við fýri brann. ^{[2][5]}	

The *Historia Norwegiae* presents a Latin summary of *Ynglingatal*, older than Snorri's quotation:

Iste [Domald] genuit Domar qui in Swethia obiit morbo. Hujus filius Dyggui [...] ^[7]	Domalde begot Domar, who died in Sweden. Likewise Dyggve, his son, [...] ^[8]
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The even earlier source *Íslendingabók* cites the line of descent in *Ynglingatal* and also gives Dómarr as the successor of Dómaldr and the predecessor of Dyggvi: *viii Dómaldr. ix Dómarr. x Dyggvi.*^[9]

Notes

- [1] McKinnell (2005:70).
- [2] *Ynglinga saga* at *Norrøne Tekster og Kvad* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/heimskringla/ynlingasaga.php>)
- [3] Laing's translation at the Internet Sacred Text Archive (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynlga.htm>)
- [4] Laing's translation at Northvegr (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/heim/001_03.php)
- [5] A second online presentation of *Ynglingatal* (<http://www.home.no/norron-mytologi/sgndok/kvad/ynli.htm>)
- [6] Laing's translation at Northvegr (http://www.northvegr.org/lore/heim/001_05.php)
- [7] Storm, Gustav (editor) (1880). *Monumenta historica Norwegiae: Latinske kildekrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*, Monumenta Historica Norwegiae (Kristiania: Brøgger), p. 98
- [8] Ekrem, Inger (editor), Lars Boje Mortensen (editor) and Peter Fisher (translator) (2003). *Historia Norwegie*. Museum Tusulanum Press. ISBN 8772898135, p. 75.
- [9] Guðni Jónsson's edition of *Íslendingabók* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/islendingesagaene/islendingabok.php>)

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- Historia Norwegiae

Domar		
House of Yngling		
Preceded by Domalde	Mythological king of Sweden	Succeeded by Dyggvi

Dyggvi

In Norse mythology, **Dyggvi** or **Dyggve** (Old Norse "Useful, Effective"^[1]) was a Swedish king of the House of Ynglings. Dyggvi died and became the husband of Hel, Loki's daughter. Dyggvi was succeeded by his son Dag the Wise.

Attestations

Snorri Sturluson wrote of Dyggvi's father Domar in his *Ynglinga saga* (1225):

Dyggvi hét son hans, er þar næst réð löndum, ok er frá honum ekki sagt annat, en hann varð sótt dauðr.^[2]

Dygve was the name of his son, who succeeded him in ruling the land; and about him nothing is said but that he died in his bed.^[3]

About Dyggvi's mother Snorri had more to say:

Móðir Dyggva var Drótt, dóttir Danps konungs, sonar Rígs, er fyrstr var konungr kallaðr á danska tungu; hans ættmenn höfðu ávalt síðan konungsnafn fyrir hit ætta tignarnafn. Dyggvi var fyrstr konungr kallaðr sinna ættmanna; en áðr váru þeir dróttnar kallaðir, en konur þeirra dróttningar, en drótt hirðsveitin. En Yngvi eða Ynguni var kallaðr hverr þeirra ættmanna alla ævi, en Ynglingar allir saman. Drótt dróttning var systir Dans konungs hins mikilláta, er Danmörk er við kend.^[2]

Dygve's mother was Drott, a daughter of King Danp, the son of Rig, who was first called "king" in the Danish tongue. His descendants always afterwards considered the title of king the title of highest dignity. Dygve was the first of his family to be called king, for his predecessors had been called "Drottnar", and their wives "Drottningar", and their court "Drott". Each of their race was called Yngve, or Yngune, and the whole race together Ynglinger. The Queen Drott was a sister of King Dan Mikillati, from whom Denmark took its name.^[3]

In his *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson included a piece from *Ynglingatal* composed in the 9th century:

Kveðkat dul,	Dygve the Brave, the mighty king,
nema Dyggva hrör	It is no hidden secret thing,
Glitnis gná	Has gone to meet a royal mate,
at gamni hefr,	Riding upon the horse of Fate.
því at jódis	For Loke's daughter in her house
Ulfs ok Narfa	Of Yngve's race would have a spouse;
Konungmann	Therefore the fell-one snatched away
kjósa skyldi;	Brave Dygve from the light of day. ^[3]
ok allvald	
Yngva þjóðar	
Loka mær	
of leikinn hefr. ^{[2][3]}	

The *Historia Norwegiae* presents a Latin summary of *Ynglingatal*, older than Snorri's quotation:

Hujus [Domar] filius Dyggvi item in eadem regione vitæ metam inuenit. Cui successit in regnum filius ejus Dagr [...]^[4]

Likewise Dyggve, his [Domar's] son, reached the limit of his life in that same region [Sweden]. His son Dag [...]^[5]

The even earlier source *Íslendingabók* also cites the line of descent in *Ynglingatal* and it also gives Dyggvi as the successor of Dómarr and the predecessor of Dagr: *ix Dómarr. x Dyggvi. xi Dagr.*^[6]

Notes

- [1] McKinnell (2005:70).
 [2] *Ynglinga saga* at *Norrøne Tekster og Kvad* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/heimskringla/ynlingasaga.php>)
 [3] A second online presentation of *Ynglingatal* (<http://www.home.no/norron-mytologi/sgndok/kvad/yngli.htm>)
 [4] Storm, Gustav (editor) (1880). *Monumenta historica Norvegiae: Latinske kildekrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*, Monumenta Historica Norvegiae (Kristiania: Brøgger), pp. 98-99
 [5] Ekrem, Inger (editor), Lars Boje Mortensen (editor) and Peter Fisher (translator) (2003). *Historia Norvegie*. Museum Tusulanum Press. ISBN 8772898135, p. 75.
 [6] Guðni Jónsson's edition of *Íslendingabók* (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/islendingesagaene/islendingabok.php>)

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- Historia Norvegiae

Dyggvi House of Yngling		
Preceded by Domar	Mythological king of Sweden	Succeeded by Dag the Wise

Eadgils

Eadgils, *Adils*, *Aðils*, *Adillus*, *Aðisl* at *Uppsölum*, *Athisl*, *Athislus* or *Adhel* was a semi-legendary king of Sweden, who is estimated to have lived during the 6th century.^[1] *Beowulf* and Old Norse sources present him as the son of Ohthere and as belonging to the ruling Yngling (Scylfing) clan. These sources also deal with his war against Onela, which he won with foreign assistance: in *Beowulf* he gained the throne of Sweden by defeating his uncle Onela with Geatish help, and in two Scandinavian sources (*Skáldskaparmál* and *Skjöldunga saga*), he is also helped to defeat Onela in the Battle on the Ice of Lake Vänern, but with Danish help. However, Scandinavian sources mostly deal with his interaction with the legendary Danish king Hrólfr Kraki (Hroðulf), and Eadgils is mostly presented in a negative light as a rich and greedy king.



Eadgils pursuing Hrólfr Kraki on the Fyrisvellir

Name

The Norse forms are based on an older (Proto-Norse) **Aþagīslaz* (where **aþa* is short for **aþala* meaning "noble, foremost" (German 'adel') and **gīslaz* means "arrow shaft"^[2]). However, the Anglo-Saxon form is not etymologically identical. The A-S form would have been **Ædgils*, but *Eadgils* (Proto-Norse **Auða-gīslaz*, **auða*- meaning "wealth") was the only corresponding name used by the Anglo-Saxons.^[3] The name *Aðils* was so exceedingly rare even in Scandinavia that among almost 6000 Scandinavian runic inscriptions, it is only attested in three runestones (U 35, DR 221 and Br Olsen;215).^[4]



West royal tumulus at Old Uppsala, suggested grave of King Eadgils
(photo: Jacob Truedson Demitz)

Beowulf

The Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf*, which was composed sometime between the 8th century and the 11th century, is beside the Norwegian skaldic poem *Ynglingatal* (9th century) the oldest source that mentions Eadgils.

It is implied in *Beowulf* that the Swedish king Ohtere died and was succeeded by his younger brother Onela, because Ohtere's two sons, Eadgils and Eanmund had to seek refuge with Heardred, Hygelac's son and successor as king of the Geats.^[5] This caused Onela to attack the Geats, and Heardred was killed. Onela returned home and Beowulf succeeded Heardred as the king of Geatland. In the following lines, Onela is referred to as the *Scyflings helmet* and the *son of Ongenþeow*, whereas Eadgils and Eanmund are referred to as the *sons of Ohtere*:

...Hyne wræc-mæcgas
ofer sæ sohtan, suna Ohteres:
hæfdon hy forhealden helm Scyflinga,
þone selestan sæ-cyninga,
þara þe in Swio-ricc sinc brytnade,
mærne þeoden. Him þæt to mearce wearð;
he þær orfeorme feorh-wunde hleat
sweordes swengum, sunu Hygelaces;
and him eft gewat Ongenþiowes bearn
hames niosan, syððan Heardred læg;
let þone brego-stol Biowulf healdan,
Geatum wealdan: þæt wæs god cyning.^[6]

...Wandering exiles
sought him o'er seas, the sons of Ohtere,
who had spurned the sway of the Scyflings'-helmet,
the bravest and best that broke the rings,
in Swedish land, of the sea-kings' line,
haughty hero. Hence Heardred's end.
For shelter he gave them, sword-death came,
the blade's fell blow, to bairn of Hygelac;
but the son of Ongentheow sought again
house and home when Heardred fell,
leaving Beowulf lord of Geats
and gift-seat's master. — A good king he!^[7]

Later in the poem, it tells that during the battle, Eadgils' brother Eanmund was killed by Onela's champion Weohstan, Wiglaf's father. In the following lines, Eanmund also appears as the *son of Ohtere* and as a *brother's child*:

...hond rond gefeng, geolwe linde, gomel swyrd geteah, þæt wæs mid eldum Eanmundes laf, suna Ohteres, þam æt sæcce wearð wracu wine-leasum Weohstanes bana meces ecgum, and his magum ætbær brun-fagne helm, hringde byrnan, eald sword eotonisc, þæt him Onela forgeaf, his gædelinges guð-gewædu, fyrd-searo fuslic: no ymbe þa fæhðe spræc, þeah þe he his broðor bearn abredwade. ^[8]	...The linden yellow, his shield, he seized; the old sword he drew: -- as heirloom of Eanmund earth-dwellers knew it, who was slain by the sword-edge, son of Ohtere, friendless exile, erst in fray killed by Weohstan, who won for his kin brown-bright helmet, breastplate ringed, old sword of Eotens, Onela's gift, weeds of war of the warrior-thane, battle-gear brave: though a brother's child had been felled, the feud was unfelt by Onela. ^[7]
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Eadgils, however, survived and later, Beowulf helped Eadgils with weapons and warriors. Eadgils won the war and killed his uncle Onela. In the following lines, Eadgils is mentioned by name and as the *son of Ohtere*, whereas Onela is referred to as *the king*:

Se þæs leod-hryres lean gemunde uferan dogrum, Eadgilse wearð fea-scaeftum feond. Folce gesteppe ofer sæ side sunu Ohteres wigum and wæpnum: he gewræc syððan cealdum cear-siðum, cyning ealdre bineat. ^[9]	The fall of his lord he was fain to requite in after days; and to Eadgils he proved friend to the friendless, and forces sent over the sea to the son of Ohtere, weapons and warriors: well repaid he those care-paths cold ^[10] when the king he slew. ^[7]
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This event also appears in the Scandinavian sources *Skáldskaparmál* and *Skjöldunga saga*, which will be treated below.

Norwegian and Icelandic sources

The allusive manner in which Eadgils and his relatives are referred to in *Beowulf* suggests that the scop expected his audience to have sufficient background knowledge about Eadgils, Ohtere and Eanmund to understand the references. Likewise, in the roughly contemporary Norwegian *Ynglingatal*, Eadgils (Aðils) is called *Onela's enemy* (Ála^[11] dólgr), which likewise suggests that the conflict was familiar to the skald and his audience.

The tradition of Eadgils and Onela resurfaces in several Old Norse works in prose and poetry, and another matter also appears: the animosity between Eadgils and Hrólfr Kraki, who corresponds to Hroðulf in *Beowulf*.

Ynglingatal

The skaldic poem *Ynglingatal* is a poetic recital of the line of the Yngling clan. They are also called *Skilfingar* in the poem (in stanza 19), a name that appears in its Anglo-Saxon form *Scylfingas* in *Beowulf* when referring to Eadgils' clan. It is presented as composed by Þjóðólfr of Hvinir by Snorri Sturluson in the *Ynglinga saga*.

Although its age has been debated, most scholars hold to date from the 9th century.^[12] It survives in two versions: one is found in the Norwegian historical work *Historia Norvegiæ* in Latin, and the other one in Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga*, a part of his *Heimskringla*. It presents Aðils (Eadgils) as the successor of Óttarr (Ohtere) and the predecessor of Eysteinn. The stanza on Aðils refers to his accidental death when he fell from his horse:

Þat frá ek enn,	Witch-demons, I have heard men say,
at Aðils fjörvi	Have taken Adils' life away.
vitta vettr	The son of kings of Frey's great race,
um viðá skyldi,	First in the fray, the fight, the chase,
ok dáðgjarn	Fell from his steed – his clotted brains
af drasils bógum	Lie mixed with mire on Upsal's plains.
Freys áttungr	Such death (grim Fate has willed it so)
falla skyldi.	Has struck down Ole's [Onela's] deadly foe. ^[14]
Ok við aur	
ægir hjarna	
bragnings burs	
um blandinn varð;	
ok dáðsæll	
deyja skyldi	
Ála dólgr	
at Uppsölum. ^[13]	

Note that Eadgils' animosity with Onela also appears in *Ynglingatal* as Aðils is referred to as *Ole's deadly foe* (Ála dólgr). This animosity is treated in more detail in the *Skjöldunga saga* and *Skáldskaparmál*, which follow.

The *Historia Norwegiæ*, which is a terse summary in Latin of *Ynglingatal*, only states that Eadgils fell from his horse and died during the sacrifices. In this Latin translation, the Dísir are rendered as the Roman goddess Diana:

Cujus filius Adils vel Athisl ante ædem Dianæ, dum idolorum, sacrificia fugeret, equo lapsus exspiravit. Hic genuit Eustein, [...] ^[15]	His son Adils gave up the ghost after falling from his horse before the temple of Diana, while he was performing the sacrifices made to idols. He became sire to Øystein, [...] ^[16]
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The same information is found the *Swedish Chronicle* from the mid-15th century, which calls him *Adhel*. It is probably based on the *Ynglingatal* tradition and says that he fell from his horse and died while he worshipped his god.

Íslendingabók

In *Íslendingabók* from the early 12th century, Eadgils only appears as a name in the listing of the kings of the Yngling dynasty as Aðísl at Uppsala. The reason what that the author, Ari Þorgilsson, traced his ancestry from Eadgils, and its line of succession is the same as that of *Ynglingatal*.

i Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr. ii Njörðr Svíakonungr. iii Freyr. iiij Fjölnir. sá er dó at Friðfróða. v Svegðir. vi Vanlandi. vii Visburr. viii Dómaldr. ix Dómarr. x Dyggvi. xi Dagr. xii Alrekr. xiii Agni. xiiii Yngvi. xv Jörundr. xvi Aun inn gamli. xvii Egill Vendilkráka. xviii Óttarr. xix Aðísl at Uppsölum. xx Eysteinn. xxi Yngvarr. xxii Braut-Önundr. xxiii Ingjaldr inn illráði. xxiiii Óláfr trételgja...^[17]

As can be seen it agrees with the earlier *Ynglingatal* and *Beowulf* in presenting Eadgils as the successor of Óttarr (Ohthere).

Skjöldunga saga

The *Skjöldunga saga* was a Norse saga which is believed to have been written in the period 1180-1200. The original version is lost, but it survives in a Latin summary by Arngrímur Jónsson.

Arngrímur's summary relates that Eadgils, called *Adillus*, married Yrsa with whom he had the daughter Scullda. Some years later, the Danish king Helgo (Halga) attacked Sweden and captured Yrsa, not knowing that she was his own daughter, the result of Helgo raping Olava, the queen of the Saxons. Helgo raped Yrsa as well and took her back to Denmark, where she bore the son Rolfo (Hroðulf). After a few years, Yrsa's mother, queen Olava, came to visit her and told her that Helgo was her own father. In horror, Yrsa returned to Adillus, leaving her son behind. Helgo died when Rolfo was eight years old, and Rolfo succeeded him, and ruled together with his uncle Roas (Hroðgar). Not much later, Roas was killed by his half-brothers Rærecus and Frodo, whereupon Rolfo became the sole king of Denmark.

In Sweden, Yrsa and Adillus married Scullda to the king of Öland, Hiørvardus/Hiorvardus/Hevardus (Heoroweward). As her half-brother Rolfo was not consulted about this marriage, he was infuriated and he attacked Öland and made Hiørvardus and his kingdom tributary to Denmark.

After some time, there was animosity between king Adillus of Sweden and the Norwegian king Ale of Oppland. They decided to fight on the ice of Lake Vänern. Adillus won and took his helmet, chainmail and horse. Adillus won because he had requested Rolfo's aid against king Ale and Rolfo had sent him his berserkers. However, Adillus refused to pay the expected tribute for the help and so Rolfo came to Uppsala to claim his recompense. After surviving some traps, Rolfo fled with Adillus' gold, helped by his mother Yrsa. Seeing that the Swedish king and his men pursued him, Rolfo "sowed" the gold on the Fyrisvellir, so that the king's men would pick up the gold, instead of continuing the pursuit.

As can be seen, the *Skjöldunga saga* retells the story of Eadgils fighting his uncle Onela, but in this version Onela is no longer Eadgils' uncle, but a Norwegian king of Oppland. This change is generally considered to be a late confusion between the core province of the Swedes, Uppland, and its Norwegian namesake Oppland.^[18] Whereas, *Beowulf* leaves the Danish court with the suspicion that Hroðulf (Rolfo Krage, Hrólf Kraki) might claim the Danish throne for himself at the death of Hroðgar (Roas, Hróarr), it is exactly what he does in Scandinavian tradition. A notable difference is that, in *Beowulf*, Eadgils receives the help of the Geatish king Beowulf against Onela, whereas it is the Danish king Hroðulf who provides help in Scandinavian tradition.

Skáldskaparmál

Skáldskaparmál was written by Snorri Sturluson, c. 1220, in order to teach the ancient art of kennings to aspiring skalds. It presents Eadgils, called *Aðils*, in two sections.

The first section is the *Kálfsvísa* of which Snorri quotes small parts:^[19]

Ali Hrafni,	Áli rode Hrafn,
es til íss riðu,	They who rode onto the ice:
en annarr austr	But another, southward,
und Aðilsi	Under Adils,
grár hvarfaði,	A gray one, wandered,
geiri undaðr. ^[20]	Wounded with the spear. ^[21]

This is a reference to the Battle on the Ice of Lake Vänern, during which Eadgils slew Onela and which also appears in the *Skjöldunga saga*. There is also second stanza, where Eadgils is riding his horse Slöngvir, apparently a combination famous enough to be mentioned.

Björn reið Blakki,	Björn rode Blakkr,
en Biarr Kerti,	And Bjárr rode Kertr;
Atli Glaumi,	Atli rode Glaumr,
en Aðils Slöngvi,	And Adils on Slöngvir;
Högni Hólkvi,	Högni on Hólvir,
en Haraldr Fölkvi,	And Haraldr on Fölkvir;
Gunnarr Gota,	Gunnarr rode Goti,
en Grana Sigurðr. ^[20]	And Sigurdr, Grani. ^[21]

Eadgils' horse Slöngvir also appears in Snorri's later work, the *Ynglinga saga*.

Snorri also presents the story of Aðils and Hrólfr Kraki (Hroðulf) in order to explain why gold was known by the kenning *Kraki's seed*. Snorri relates that Aðils was in war with a Norwegian king named Áli (Onela), and they fought in the Battle on the Ice of Lake Vänern. Aðils was married to Yrsa, the mother of Hrólfr and so sent an embassy to Hrólfr asking him for help against Áli. He would receive three valuable gifts in recompense. Hrólfr was involved in a war against the Saxons and could not come in person but sent his twelve berserkers, including Böðvarr Bjarki. Áli died in the war, and Aðils took Áli's helmet *Battle-boar* and his horse Raven. The berserkers demanded three pounds of gold each in pay, and they demanded to choose the gifts that Aðils had promised Hrólfr, that is the two pieces of armour that nothing could pierce: the helmet battle-boar and the mailcoat *Finn's heritage*. They also wanted the famous ring Svíagris. Aðils considered the pay outrageous and refused.

When Hrólfr heard that Aðils refused to pay, he set off to Uppsala. They brought the ships to the river Fyris and rode directly to the Swedish king's hall at Uppsala with his twelve berserkers. Yrsa welcomed them and led them to their lodgings. Fires were prepared for them and they were given drinks. However, so much wood was heaped on the fires that the clothes started to burn away from their clothes. Hrólfr and his men had enough and threw the courtiers on the fire. Yrsa arrived and gave them a horn full of gold, the ring Svíagris and asked them to flee. As they rode over the Fyrisvellir, they saw Aðils and his men pursuing them. The fleeing men threw the gold on the plain so that the pursuers would stop to collect it. Aðils, however, continued the chase on his horse Slöngvir. Hrólfr then threw Svíagris and saw how Aðils stooped down to pick up the ring with his spear. Hrólfr exclaimed that he had seen the mightiest man in Sweden bend his back.

Ynglinga saga

The *Ynglinga saga* was written c. 1225 by Snorri Sturluson and he used *Skjöldunga saga* as a source when he told the story of Aðils.^[22] Snorri relates that Aðils succeeded his father Óttar (Othhere) and betook himself to pillage the Saxons, whose king was Geirþjófr and queen Alof the Great. The king and consort were not at home, and so Aðils and his men plundered their residence at ease driving cattle and captives down to the ships. One of the captives was a remarkably beautiful girl named Yrsa, and Snorri writes that everyone was soon impressed with the well-mannered, pretty and intelligent girl. Most impressed was Aðils who made her his queen.

Some years later, Helgi (Halga), who ruled in Lejre, attacked Sweden and captured Yrsa. As he did not know that Yrsa was his own daughter, he raped her, and took her back to Lejre, where she bore him the son Hrólfr kraki. When the boy was three years of age, Yrsa's mother, queen Alof of Saxony, came to visit her and told her that her husband Helgi was her own father. Horrified, Yrsa returned to Aðils, leaving her son behind, and stayed in Sweden for the rest of her life. When Hrólfr was eight years old, Helgi died during a war expedition and Hrólfr was proclaimed king. Aðils waged a war against king Áli (Onela of Oppland), and they fought in the Battle on the Ice of Lake Vänern. Áli died in this battle. Snorri writes that there was a long account of this battle in the *Skjöldunga Saga*, which also contained an account of how Hrólfr came to Uppsala and sowed gold on the Fyrisvellir.

Snorri also relates that Aðils loved good horses and had the best horses in his days (interestingly, the contemporary Gothic scholar Jordanes noted that the Swedes were famed for their good horses). One horse was named *Slöngvi* and another one *Raven*, which he had taken from Áli. From this horse he had bred a horse also



The three large royal mounds at Gamla Uppsala.

named *Raven* which he sent to king Godgest of Hålogaland, but Godgest could not manage it and fell from it and died, in Omd on the island of Andøya. Aðils himself died in a similar way at the Dísablót. Aðils was riding around the Disa shrine when Raven stumbled and fell, and the king was thrown forward and hit his skull on a stone. The Swedes called him a great king and buried him at Uppsala. He was succeeded by Eysteinn.

Hrólfr Kraki's saga

Hrólfr Kraki's saga is believed to have been written in the period c. 1230 - c. 1450.^[23] Helgi and Yrsa lived happily together as husband and wife, not knowing that Yrsa was Helgi's daughter. Yrsa's mother queen Oluf travelled to Denmark to tell her daughter the truth. Yrsa was shocked and although Helgi wanted their relationship to remain as it was, Yrsa insisted on leaving him to live alone. She was later taken by the Swedish king Aðils as his queen, which made Helgi even more unhappy. Helgi went to Uppsala to fetch her, but was killed by Aðils in battle. In Lejre, he was succeeded by his son Hrólfr Kraki.

After some time, Böðvarr Bjarki encouraged Hrólfr to go Uppsala to claim the gold that Aðils had taken from Helgi after the battle. Hrólfr departed with 120 men and his twelve berserkers and during a rest they were tested by a farmer called Hrani (Odin in disguise) who advised Hrólfr to send back all his troops but his twelve berserkers, as numbers would not help him against Aðils.

They were at first well received, but in his hall, Aðils did his best to stop Hrólfr with pit traps and hidden warriors who attacked the Danes. Finally Aðils entertained them but put them to a test where they had to endure immense heat by a fire. Hrólfr and his berserkers finally had enough and threw the courtiers, who were feeding the fire, into the fire and lept at Aðils. The Swedish king disappeared through a hollow tree trunk that stood in his hall.

Yrsa admonished Aðils for wanting to kill her son, and went to meet the Danes. She gave them a man named Vöggr to entertain them. This Vöggr remarked that Hrólfr had the thin face of a pole ladder, a *Kraki*. Happy with his new cognomen Hrólfr gave Vöggr a golden ring, and Vöggr swore to avenge Hrólfr if anyone should kill him. Hrólfr and his company were then attacked by a troll in the shape of a boar in the service of Aðils, but Hrólfr's dog Gram killed it.

They then found out that Aðils had set the hall on fire, and so they broke out of the hall, only to find themselves surrounded by heavily armed warriors in the street. After a fight, king Aðils retreated to summon reinforcements.

Yrsa then provided her son with a silver drinking horn filled with gold and jewels and a famous ring, Svíagris. Then she gave Hrólfr and his men twelve of the Swedish king's best horses, and all the armour and provisions they needed.

Hrólfr took a fond farewell of his mother and departed over the Fyrisvellir. When they saw Aðils and his warriors in pursuit, they spread the gold behind themselves. Aðils saw his precious Svíagris on the ground and stooped to pick it up with his spear, whereupon Hrólfr cut his back with his sword and screamed in triumph that he had bent the back of the most powerful man in Sweden.

Danish sources

Chronicon Lethrense and Annales Lundenses

The *Chronicon Lethrense* (and the included *Annales Lundenses*) tell that when the Danish kings Helghe (Halga) and Ro (Hroðgar) were dead, the Swedish king Hakon/Athisl^[24] forced the Daner to accept a dog as king. The dog king was succeeded by Rolf Krage (Hrólfr Kraki).

Gesta Danorum

The *Gesta Danorum* (book 2), by Saxo Grammaticus, tells that Helgo (Halga) repelled a Swedish invasion, killed the Swedish king Hothbrodd, and made the Swedes pay tribute. However, he committed suicide due to shame for his incestuous relationship with Urse (Yrsa), and his son Roluo (Hrólfr Kraki) succeeded him.

The new king of Sweden, Athislus, thought that the tribute to the Daner might be smaller if he married the Danish king's mother and so took Urse for a queen. However, after some time, Urse was so upset with the Swedish king's greediness that she thought out a ruse to run away from the king and at the same time liberate him of his wealth. She incited Athislus to rebel against Roluo, and arranged so that Roluo would be invited and promised a wealth in gifts.

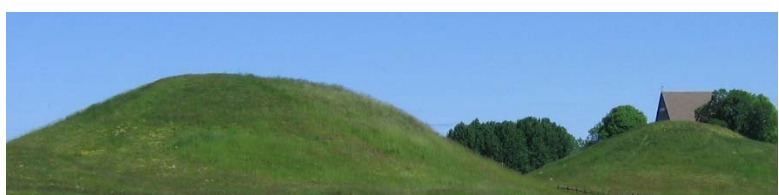
At the banquet Roluo was at first not recognised by his mother, but when their fondness was commented on by Athisl, the Swedish king and Roluo made a wager where Roluo would prove his endurance. Roluo was placed in front of a fire that exposed him to such heat that finally a maiden could suffer the sight no more and extinguished the fire. Roluo was greatly recompensed by Athisl for his endurance.

When the banquet had lasted for three days, Urse and Roluo escaped from Uppsala, early in the morning in carriages where they had put all the Swedish king's treasure. In order to lessen their burden, and to occupy any pursuing warriors they spread gold in their path (later in the work, this is referred to as "sowing the Fyrisvellir"), although there was a rumour that she only spread gilded copper. When Athislus, who was pursuing the escapers saw that a precious ring was lying on the ground, he bent down to pick it up. Roluo was pleased to see the king of Sweden bent down, and escaped in the ships with his mother.

Roluo later defeated Athislus and gave Sweden to young man named Hiartuar (Heorowearð), who also married Roluo's sister Skulde. When Athislus learnt that Hiartuar and Skulde had killed Roluo, he celebrated the occasion, but he drank so much that he killed himself.

Archaeology

According to Snorri Sturluson, Eadgils was buried in one of the royal mounds of Gamla Uppsala, and he is believed to be buried in *Adils' Mound* (also known as the *Western mound* or *Thor's mound*) one of the largest mounds at Uppsala. An excavation in this mound showed that a man was buried there c.



The mound to the left has been suggested to be the grave where Snorri Sturluson reported that Eadgils was buried. Archaeological finds are consistent with this identification.

575 on a bear skin with two dogs and rich grave offerings. There were luxurious weapons and other objects, both domestic and imported, show that the buried man was very powerful. These remains include a Frankish sword adorned with gold and garnets and a board game with Roman pawns of ivory. He was dressed in a costly suit made of Frankish cloth with golden threads, and he wore a belt with a costly buckle. There were four cameos from the Middle East which were probably part of a casket. The finds show the distant contacts of the House of Yngling in the 6th century.

Snorri's account that Adils had the best horses of his days, and Jordanes' account that the Swedes of the 6th century were famed for their horses find support in archaeology. This time was the beginning of the Vendel Age, a time characterised by the appearance of stirrups and a powerful mounted warrior elite in Sweden, which rich graves in for instance Valsgärde and Vendel.

Notes

- [1] The dating is inferred from the internal chronology of the sources and the dating of Hygelac's raid on Frisia to c. 516. It is also supported by archaeological excavations of the barrows of Eadgils and Ohthere in Sweden. For a discussion, see e.g. Birger Nerman's *Det svenska rikets uppkomst* (1925) (in Swedish). For presentations of the archaeological findings, see e.g. Elisabeth Klingmark's *Gamla Uppsala, Svenska kulturminnen 59*, Riksantikvarieämbetet (in Swedish), or this English language presentation by the Swedish National Heritage Board (http://www.raa.se/cms/extern/se_och_besoka/sevardheter/ottarshogen.html)
- [2] (Lexicon of nordic personal names before the 8th century)
- [3] Nerman (1925:104)
- [4] Samnordisk runtextdatabas (<http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>)
- [5] Lines 2380-2391
- [6] Lines 2379-2390.
- [7] *Modern English translation* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/981>) (1910) by Francis Barton Gummere
- [8] Lines 2609-2619.
- [9] Lines 2391-2396.
- [10] *Those care-paths cold* refers to his time in exile with the Geats.
- [11] Ála is the genitive case of Áli, the Old Norse form of the name Onela (see Peterson, Lena: *Lexikon över urnordiska personnamn*, PDF (http://www.sofi.se/GetDoc?meta_id=1464))
- [12] Hägerdal, Hans: Ynglingatal. Nya perspektiv på en kanske gammal text (<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/humanetten/nummer15/art0406.html>)
- [13] The Ynglinga saga in Old Norse (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/heimskringla/ynglingasaga.php>)
- [14] Laing's translation (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynglga.htm>)
- [15] Storm, Gustav (editor) (1880). *Monumenta historica Norwegiae: Latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*, Monumenta Historica Norwegiae (Kristiania: Brøgger), p. 101.
- [16] Ekrem, Inger (editor), Lars Boje Mortensen (editor) and Peter Fisher (translator) (2003). *Historia Norwegie* (http://books.google.com/books?id=gH3TUhhlvucC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false). Museum Tusulanum Press. ISBN 87-7289-813-5, pp. 77-79.
- [17] Guðni Jónsson's edition of Íslendingabók (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/islendingesagaene/islendingabok.php>)
- [18] Nerman 1925:103-104
- [19] Nerman 1925:102
- [20] heimskringla.no - Eddukvæði : Eddubrot (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/edda/eddubrot.php>)
- [21] Brodeur's translation (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/prose/209212.php>)
- [22] Nerman (1925:103)
- [23] Literary Encyclopedia entry (<http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=13133>)
- [24] *Hakon* according to *Chronicon Lethrense* proper, *Athisl* according to the included *Annals of Lund*

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Eadgils House of Yngling		
Preceded by Onela	Semi-legendary king of Sweden	Succeeded by Östen

Egil One-Hand

Egil One-Hand is a berserker hero from the Icelandic legendary saga Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana.

Life

Egil was the son of Hring ruler of Smaland and Ingibjorg, daughter of Earl Bjarkmar of Gautland.^[1] Egil was a troublesome young boy who would often go with a gang of his friends into the woods and kill birds and animals for sport.

At the age of twelve, Egil and all his friends had a competition to see who could swim across a large lake near his home.^[2] Egil quickly out swam everyone else and found himself lost in a thick fog. He wandered around the water for a few days until finally coming to shore, where he promptly fell asleep from exhaustion. When he awoke he was met by a Giant who forced Egil tend after his many difficult goats, should Egil ever fail in his tending, the Giant promised to murder him.

After a year of this Egil attempted to escape, but was caught by the giant within 4 days. The Giant upset at Egil's escape attempt placed two iron clamps, each with 40 pound weights on them, on Egil's feet. Egil had to carry the load with him where ever he went for the next seven years.^[3]

Once when Egil was out late searching for a goat who had run off, he found a cat and captured it. When he Egil returned to the Giant's cave, the Giant asked him how he was able to see in the dark. Egil explained he had special Golden eyes, when the Giant inquired more about these eyes, Egil flashed him the cat eyes. The Giant wanted them rather badly and agreed to an exchange of Egil's freedom for the Golden Eyes. In order to do the operation Egil tied the giant to a column and ripped out the Giant's eyes. He then told the Giant he had made a mistake and dropped the Golden Eyes into the fire. The Giant became very upset and ran to the door of the cave where he locked it and set up guard in front of it. Egil after some days of debating took a goat and killed it and sewed its hide around him so he felt like a goat. Then he caused a stampede towards the door and tried to slip out with the other goats. The Giant, however could tell that Goat-Egil's hooves were not clicking and grabbed him, he tried to kill Egil but missed because of his blindness and cut off Egil's ear instead. Egil responded by cutting off the giants right hand and stealing a valuable ring from him, and running away.

After spending some time free in the wilderness Egil came across Viking ships, under the command of a man named Borgar. Egil joined their crew until one day when a Berserker named Glammad fought Borgar, in the ensuing battle both men perished and Egil took over at leader of the both Viking companies. Hand picking the 32 best, he went on his way plundering and pillaging the baltic.

While plundering Egil saw battle on an island between a giantess with a very short skirt and giant, who were fighting over a ring.^[4] Egil went to assist the giantess and cut off a large portion of the giant's biceps. The giant then cut off Egil's arm and Egil ran away back to his men and ships, where they set sail immediately. A few days later at port, Egil was unable to sleep because of the pain from his stubbed arm. He went for a walk in the forest where he came across a Dwarf child fetching water. Egil took one of his gold rings and let it secretly fall into the child's pail. Later on an adult Dwarf came from the rock and wanted to know who had done this kindness for the child, Egil explained that he had done it for gold was little use to him in his agony. The Dwarf then took Egil aside and dressed his wound until it no longer hurt and indeed seemed healed. Then the Dwarf fitted a sword into Egil's arm so deeply that it went to his elbow, allowing Egil to strike easily with it, as if he still had a hand.

At some later point Egil and his men traveled to the Kingdom of Russia under King Hertygg, where they began plundering and laying waste to it. Rognvald, the leader of man charged with defending Russia attempted to fight and stop Egil with three times as many men. The battle went poorly for Rognvald, who lost all his men except for a handful. Rognvald was mortally wounded himself, having only enough strength left to report what had happened to

the king.^[5]

Asmund Berserkers-Slayer, who was with the King when Rognvald reported of the battle, then offered to go meet Egil and avenge Rognvald, the King agreed and Asmund set off. Once met, Asmund and Egil decided it'd be better not to waste so much life and for each other to just duel, and so three times they dueled, each time ending in an exhausted draw. However the final time Asmund gained the upper hand and was able to force Egil to surrender. Afterwards Egil pledged his loyalty to King Hertrygg.^[6]

Not long after Asmund and Egil decided to go search for the king's missing daughter, and the two set out on a voyage.

References and footnotes

[1] Seven Viking Romances pg. 240

[2] Seven Viking Romances pg. 241

[3] Seven Viking Romances pg. 242

[4] Seven Viking Romances pg. 244

[5] Seven Viking Romances pg. 230

[6] Seven Viking Romances pg. 232

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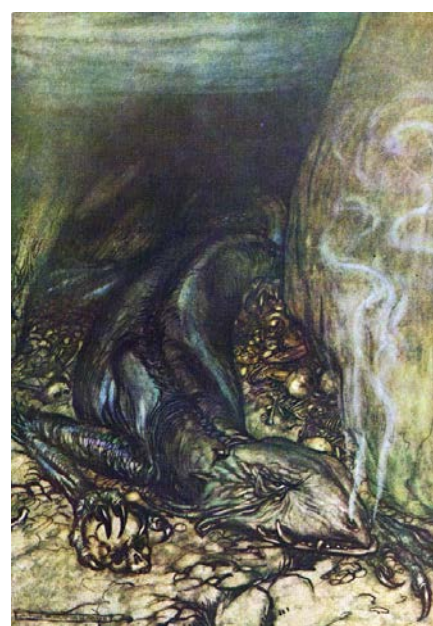
Fafnir

In Norse mythology, **Fáfñir** (Old Norse and Icelandic) or **Frænir** was a son of the dwarf king Hreidmar and brother of Regin and Ótr.

Narrative

In the Icelandic *Volsunga Saga* (late 13th century), Fáfñir was a dwarf gifted with a powerful arm and fearless soul. He guarded his father's house of glittering gold and flashing gems. He was the strongest and most aggressive of the three brothers.^[1]

Regin recounts to Sigurd how Odin, Loki and Hœnir were traveling when they came across Ótr, who had the likeness of an otter during the day. Loki killed the otter with a stone and the three Æsir skinned their catch. The gods came to Hreidmar's dwelling that evening and were pleased to show off the otter's skin. Hreidmar and his remaining two sons then seized the gods and held them captive while Loki was made to gather the ransom, which was to stuff the otter's skin with gold and cover its outside with red gold. Loki fulfilled the task by gathering the cursed gold of Andvari's as well as the ring, Andvaranaut, both of which were told to Loki as items that would bring about the death of whoever possessed them. Fáfñir then killed Hreidmar to get all the gold for himself. He became very ill-natured and greedy, so he went out into the wilderness to keep his fortune, eventually turning into a serpent or dragon (symbol of greed) to guard his treasure.^[2] Fáfñir also breathed poison into the land around him so no one would go near him and his treasure, wreaking terror in the hearts of the people.^[3]



Fáfñir guards the gold hoard in this illustration by Arthur Rackham to Richard Wagner's *Siegfried*.

Regin plotted revenge so that he could get the treasure and sent his foster-son, Sigurd Fávnesbane, to kill the dragon. Regin instructed Sigurd to dig a pit in which he could lie in wait under the trail Fáfñir used to get to a stream and there plunge his sword, Gram, into Fafnir's heart as he crawls over the pit to the water. Regin then ran away in fear, leaving Sigurd to the task. As Sigurd dug, Odin appeared in the form of an old man with a long beard, advising the warrior to dig more trenches for the blood of Fáfñir to run into, presumably so that Sigurd does not drown in the blood. The earth quaked and the ground nearby shook as Fáfñir crawled to the water. Fáfñir also blew poison into his path as it made his way to the stream.^[4] Sigurd, undaunted, stabbed Fáfñir in the left shoulder as he crawled over the ditch he was lying in and succeeded in mortally wounding the dragon. As the great serpent lies there dying, he speaks to Sigurd and asks him what his name is, what his father's and mother's names are, and who sent him to kill such a terrifying dragon. Fafnir figures out that his own brother, Regin, plotted the dragon's death, and tells Sigurd that he is happy that Regin will also cause Sigurd's death. Sigurd tells Fáfñir that he will go back to the dragon's lair and take all his treasure. Fáfñir warns Sigurd that all who possess the gold will be fated to die, but Sigurd replies that all men must one day die, and it is the dream of many men to be wealthy until that dying day, so he will take the gold without fear.^[5]

Regin then returned to Sigurd after Fáfñir was slain. Corrupted by greed, Regin planned to kill Sigurd after Sigurd had cooked Fáfñir's heart for him to eat and take all the treasure for himself. However, Sigurd, having tasted Fáfñir's blood while cooking the heart, gained knowledge of the speech of birds^[6] and learned of Regin's impending attack from the Oðinnic (of Odin) birds' discussion and killed Regin by cutting off his head with Gram.^[7] Sigurd then ate some of Fáfñir's heart and kept the remainder, which would later be given to Gudrun after their marriage.^[8]

Some versions are more specific about Fáfñir's treasure hoard, mentioning the swords Ridill and Hrotti, the helm of terror and a golden coat of chainmail.^[9]

In art and music

Fafnir appears — as "Fafner" — in Richard Wagner's epic opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1848-1874), although he began life as a giant rather than a dwarf. In the first opera, *Das Rheingold* (1869), Fafner and his brother Fasolt win a massive hoard of treasure from Wotan, the king of the gods, in exchange for building the castle Valhalla. The treasure includes the magic helmet Tarnhelm and a magic Ring. As they divide the treasure, Fafner kills Fasolt and takes the Ring for himself. Escaping to earth, he uses the Tarnhelm to transform himself into a dragon and guards the treasure in a cave for many years before being ultimately killed by Wotan's mortal grandson Siegfried, as depicted in the opera of the same name.

The 2007 adaptation of *Beowulf* mentions Fafnir in passing. King Hrothgar refers to him as the "dragon of the northern moors." The golden drinking horn which Hrothgar claimed as his prize upon slaying Fafnir is central to the plot.



Sigurd Fávnesbane featured on the portal plank from Hylestad stave church

Notes

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Harald Wartooth

Harald Wartooth or *Harold Hiltertooh* (Old Norse: *Haraldr hilditönn*, modern Swedish and Danish: **Harald Hildetand**) was a legendary king of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and the historical northern German province of Wendland, in the 8th and 9th century. According to the Danish *Chronicon Lethrense*, his empire reached as far as the Mediterranean.

Name

Saxo Grammaticus, in *Gesta Danorum*, gives two different accounts about why Harald had the name *wartooth*. According to one tradition, it was due to Harald having lost two of his teeth in battle against Veseti, the lord of Scania, and instead two new teeth grew out. Saxo further tells that according to another opinion, the name was derived from Harald having protruding teeth. A scholarly view, however, holds the name to be derived from a name for "war hero".^[1]



Harald Wartooth at the Battle of Bráavalla. Illustration by the Danish Lorenz Frølich in a 19th century book.

Family

All sources describe him as the son of Ivar Vidfamne's daughter Auðr the Deep-Minded (but *Hervarar saga* calls her Alfhild). According to *Sögubrot*, *Njal's Saga* and the *Lay of Hyndla*, Harald was the son of Hrærekr Ringslinger (slöngvanbaugi), the king of Zealand. *Sögubrot* relates that his mother later married Raðbarðr, the king of Garðaríki and they had the son Randver. However, according to *Hervarar saga*, both Harald and Randver were the sons of Valdar and Alfhild. *Njal's Saga* adds that Harald had the son Þrándr the Old (hinn gamli) who was the ancestor of one of the characters in the saga.^[2] *Sögubrot* also mentions that he had a son named Þrándr the Old (gamli), but also adds a second son, Hrærekr Ringslinger (slöngvandbaugi), who apparently was named exactly like his grandfather. *Landnámabók* informs that this Hrærekr Ringslinger the younger had a son named Þórólfr (Thorolfur) "Váganef", who in turn had the son Vémundr Wordplane. Vémundr was the father of Valgarður (Valgardur), the father of Hrafn "heimski" (the Foolish). Hrafn was one of the first settlers in Iceland and settled on the southern coast, in Rangárvallasýsla (county of Rángárvellir).^[3]

Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* does not mention any Ivar Vidfamne, and gives two different versions of Harald's ancestry. First Saxo writes that Harald was the son of the Scanian chieftain Borkar and a woman named Gro. Later Saxo has forgotten about this and writes that Harald was the son of Halfdan, Borkar's son, and a woman named Gyrid, the last member of the Skjöldungs.

Arild Hvitfeldt lists Harald's father as King Rørek of Zealand, who was murdered by his father-in-law, Ivar Vidfame, the King of Skåne in the last decades of the 600's. Harald Hildetand became king upon the death of Ivar Vidfame. During his long reign he became King of all Denmark, Vestfold in Norway, and all of southern Sweden. He also ruled Northumberland in England and Estonia in the east.

Claiming his inheritance

According to *Sögubrot*, he left Garðaríki at his father Ivar Vidfamne's death, and went to Zealand, where he was accepted as king. Then he went to Scania, which his mother's family had ruled, and was well received and given much help in men and arms. Then he took his fleet to Sweden in order to claim his inheritance. However, many petty kings arrived to reclaim their kingdoms, which Ivar had taken from them. These petty kings thought it would be easy to fight Harald who was only 15 years old. Harald successfully reclaimed his father's domains, so that in the end he owned more than his father had, and there was no king in either Denmark or Sweden who did not pay him tribute or was his vassal. He subjugated all the parts of England that had belonged to Halfdan the Valiant and later Ivar. In England he appointed kings and jarls and had them pay him tribute. He also appointed Hjörmund, the son of Hjörvard Ylfing, the king of Östergötland. *Hervarar saga* also mentions that Harald retook his father's domains, but it says that the conquests started out from Götaland (or Gotland depending on the manuscript). *Gesta Danorum* agrees with *Sögubrot*, by saying that the conquests began from Zealand.

The Battle of Bråvalla

When Harald realized that he was about to die of old age (he was 150 years old), he suggested to Sigurd Ring that a great battle should be fought between them. The place was chosen to be at the moor of Bråvalla, and so the legendary Battle of Bråvalla came to be. Harald hoped to die in this battle and go to Valhalla instead of dying in his bed and end up in Niflheim. Sigurd Ring came first to the battle site and bade his army to rest until the Danes arrived. This took time for the ships were so thick upon the Kattegat that one could walk across the Sound on the ships from Zealand to Skåne as if there was a bridge. The kings encouraged their warriors to attack without holding back. The lur horns sounded and the battle cries rose up. The battle began with an exchange of spears and arrows and even then, at the first, of the battle blood flowed upon the ground. Then swords were drawn and warrior fought against warrior. Stærkod who fought on Sigurd Ring's side fought first with Ubbe the Frisian and received of him six wounds. Then he fought with the shield maiden, Veborg, who struck him in the face so that his beard dangled loose, but he bit his beard to hold onto it. Then he met the shield maiden, Visne. "You hurry to your death!" she shouted. "Now, you shall die!" "No," he cried, "not before you have lost King Harald's standard." At that instant he struck her hand and went on.

Blind, old King Harald rode out into the fray with a sword in each hand and struck away at the enemy. Harald fell in the battle, some say by Odin's own hand, along with 15 kings and 30,000 free-born men. When Sigurd Ring heard that his opponent had fallen, he instantly gave the sign that the fighting should cease. The day after the battle he sought out King Harald's body and put it onto a funeral pyre along with his horse. Sigurd Ring stood before the fire and bade Harald ride straight to Valhalla and secure lodging for those who had perished. Thereafter all the chiefs walked around the pyre throwing weapons and gold onto it. Harald Hildetand fell the same day as his son, Rørek in a fight with Sigurd Ring himself about the year 770 or 772.^[4]

He was succeeded by Sigurd Ring, the father of Ragnar Lodbrok.

Notes

- [1] Andersson, Ingvar. (1947). *Skånes historia: till Saxo och Skånelagen*. Norstedts, Stockholm. p. 212.
- [2] *Njal's saga*, on Valgard (see the note) (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/njal/010.php#bottom1>)
- [3] *Landnámabók*, p. 28, on the settlement of Hrafn the Foolish (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/landnamabok/028.php>)
- [4] Hvitfeldt, Arild. *Danmarks Riges Krønike*

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- *Sögubrot*
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- *Ynglinga saga*

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Legendary titles		
Preceded by Ivar Vidfamne	King of Sweden	Succeeded by Sigurd Ring
Preceded by Sygarus	King of Denmark	Succeeded by Olo

Ingjald

Ingjald illråde or **Ingjaldr hinn illráði** (*Ingold Ill-ruler* or *Ill-ready*) was a legendary Swedish king of the House of Ynglings. Ingjald may have ruled in the 7th century, and he was the son of the former king Anund.[□]

Ingjald is mentioned in the *Ynglinga saga*, *Historia Norvegiæ*, *Hervarar saga*, *Upplendinga Konungum*, *Porsteins saga Víkingssonar* and *Íslendingabók*.

Ynglinga saga

Snorri Sturluson gave an extensive account on the life of Ingjald in the *Ynglinga saga* which is part of the *Heimskringla*.



Ingjald centralizing Sweden

Youth

The *Ynglinga saga*, a part of the *Heimskringla* relates that the viceroy of Fjädrundaland was named Ingvar and he had two sons, Alf and Agnar, who were of the same age as Ingjald. Svipdag the Blind was the viceroy of Tiundaland, the province of Uppsala where the Tings and the Yule (Midwinter) sacrifices were held (see the Temple at Uppsala).

One Midwinter, when Ingjald and Alf were six years old, many people had assembled at Uppsala for the sacrifices. Alf and Ingjald played, but Ingjald found that he was the weaker boy and became so angry that he almost started to cry (which was strange because people named Ingjald were known to be stronger than average). His foster-brother Gautvid led him to his foster-father Svipdag the Blind and told Svipdag about Ingjald's lack of manliness and strength. Svipdag said that it was a shame and the next day he gave Ingjald a roasted wolf's heart to eat. From that day, Ingjald became a very ferocious person and had a bad disposition and breath.

Anund arranged a marriage for his son Ingjald with Gauthild, the daughter of the Geatish king Algaut, who was the son of Gautrek the Mild and the grandson of Gaut. Gautrek consented as he believed that Ingjald had inherited his father's disposition. Gauthild's maternal grandfather was Olof the Sharp-sighted, the king of Närke.

The deceit

Snorri Sturluson relates that when his father Anund had died, Ingjald became the king of Sweden. The kings at Uppsala were the foremost among the kings of the various provinces since Odin ruled the country, and they were the supreme chiefs of the other kingdoms since the death of Agne and Sweden was divided between Erik and Alrik. The descendants of these two kings had spread, cleared land and settled new territories, until there were several petty kings.

In honour of his own ascendance to the throne, Ingjald invited the kings, the jarls and other important men to a grand feast in a newly built hall, just as large and sumptuous as the one in Uppsala. It was called the hall of the seven kings and had seven high seats. Algaut the Geatish king of West Götaland, King Ingvar of Fjädrundaland with his two sons Agnar and Alf, King Sporsnjall of Nerike and King Sigvat of Attundaland came but not King Granmar of Södermanland. The kings filled all seven seats but one. All the prominent people of Sweden had seats, except for Ingjald's own court whom he had sent to his old hall in Uppsala.

According to the custom of the time for those who inherited kings and jarls, Ingjald rested at the footstool until the Bragebeaker was brought in. Then he was supposed to stand up, take the beaker and make solemn vows, after which he would ascend his father's high seat. However, when the beaker was brought in, he took a bull's horn and made the solemn vow that he would enlarge his own kingdom by half towards all the four quarters, towards which he pointed his horn, or die.

When all the prominent guests were drunk, he ordered Svipdag's sons, Gautvid and Hylvid, to arm themselves and their men and to leave the building. Outside, they set fire to the building which burnt down and those who tried to escape were killed.

Thus Ingjald made himself the sole ruler of the domains of the murdered kings.

Wars

Granmar won allies in his son-in-law the sea-king Hjörvard of the Ylfings and his father-in-law Högne the Geatish king of East Götaland. They successfully withstood Ingjald's invasion where Ingjald realised that the men from the provinces he had conquered were not loyal to him. After a long standstill there was peace for *as long as the three kings lived*. However, one night Ingjald and his men surrounded a farm where Granmar and Hjörvard were at a feast and burnt the house down. He later disposed of five more kings, and he thus earned the name *Illråde* (ill-ruler) as he fulfilled his promise.

Snorri Sturluson tells that it was a common saying that Ingjald killed twelve kings by deceiving them that he only wished for peace, and that he thus earned his cognomen *Illråde* (ill-ruler or ill-adviser).

Downfall

Ingjald had two children, a son Olof Trätälja and a daughter Åsa. His daughter had inherited her father's psychopathic disposition. She married king Guðröðr of Skåne. Before she murdered her husband she managed to make him kill his own brother Halfdan the Valiant, the father of the great Ivar Vidfamne.

In order to avenge his father, Ivar Vidfamne gathered a vast host and departed for Sweden, where he found Ingjald at Ræning. When Ingjald and his daughter realized that it was futile to resist, they set the hall on fire and succumbed in the flames.

Ynglingatal and *Historia Norwegiae*

It is interesting to note that the citation from *Ynglingatal* does not appear to describe Ingjald as an evil king. It calls his life a brave life *fræknu fjörvi*:



Ingjald and his daughter Åsa

Ok Ingjald	With fiery feet devouring flame
í fjörvan trað	Has hunted down a royal game
reyks rösuðr	At Raening, where King Ingjald gave
á Ræningi,	To all his men one glowing grave.
þá er húspjófr	On his own hearth the fire he raised,
hyrjar leistum	A deed his foemen even praised;
goðkonung	By his own hand he perished so,
í gegnum steig.	And life for freedom did forego." ^[1]
Ok sá urðr	
allri þjóðu	
sjaldgætastr	
með Svíum þótti,	
er hann sjálfr	
sínu fjörvi	
freknu fyrstr	
um fara vildi. ^[18]	

The *Historia Norwegiæ* presents a Latin summary of *Ynglingatal*, older than Snorri's quotation (continuing after Anund):

Post istum filius suus Ingjaldr in regem sublimatur, qui ultra modum timens Ivarum cognomine withfadm regem tunc temporis multis formidabilem se ipsum cum omni comitatu suo cenaculo inclusos igne cremavit. Ejus filius Olavus cognomento tretelgia [...]^[2]

After him his son Ingjald ascended the throne. Being abnormally terrified of King Ivar Vidfadme, at that time an object of dread to many, he shut himself up in a dining-hall with his whole retinue and burnt all its inmates to death. His son, Olav, known as Tretelgie,...^[3]

Notes

[1] <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynglga.htm>

[2] Storm, Gustav (editor) (1880). *Monumenta historica Norwegiæ: Latinske kildeskriver til Norges historie i middelalderen*, Monumenta Historica Norwegiæ (Kristiania: Brøgger), pp. 101-102.

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Ingjald is still a common kings name in Iceland for example Ingjaldur Bogi The Viking

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Ingjald House of Yngling		
Legendary titles		
Preceded by Anund	King of Sweden	Succeeded by Ivar Vidfamne
	Head of the House of Yngling	Succeeded by Olof Trätälja

Ivar Vidfamne

Ivar Vidfamne (or *Ívarr inn víðfaðmi*; English exonym *Ivar Widefathom*) was a Swedish king hailing from Scania. He may have died c. 700.^[] According to the *Heimskringla* and the *Hervarar saga*, Ivar was also the king of Norway, Denmark, Saxony and parts of England.

Ivar in the Sagas

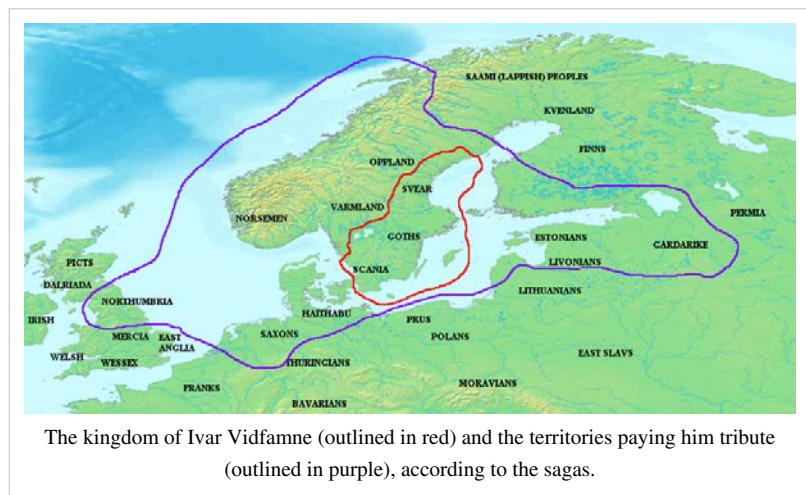
He began as king of Scania and conquered Sweden by defeating Ingjald Illråde. He is then said to have conquered all of Scandinavia and parts of England. Because of his harsh rule, many Swedes fled west and populated Värmland under its king Olof Trätälja. His last campaign was in North Eastern Europe where he died, defeated by Odin in disguise. (Another source claims he took his life by drowning himself in the Gulf of Finland.)

According to both *Ynglinga saga* and *Sögubrot*, his homeland was Scania, but according to the *Ynglinga saga*, he had to flee Scania when his uncle Guðröðr of Scania had slain his father Halfdan the Valiant. The *Ynglinga saga*, *Historia Norwegiæ*, *Hervarar saga* and *Upplendinga Konungum* tell that Ivar conquered Sweden after Ingjald's suicide, and later returned to take Denmark.

According to *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and *Njáls saga*, he was the son of

Halfdan the Valiant (also given as his father in the *Ynglinga saga* and the *Hervarar saga*), son of Harald the Old, son of Valdar, son of Roar (Hroðgar) of the house of Skjöldung (Scylding). According to *Hversu*, *Njal's saga*, the *Lay of Hyndla* and *Sögubrot*, Ivar had a daughter named Auðr the Deep-Minded.

Sögubrot relates that when Ivar was the king of Sweden, he gave his daughter Auðr the Deep-Minded to king Hrørekr Ringslinger of Zealand, in spite of the fact that she wanted to marry Hrørekr's brother Helgi the Sharp. Hrørekr and Auðr had the son Harald Wartooth. Ivar made Hrørekr kill his brother Helgi, and after this, he attacked and killed Hrørekr. However, Auðr arrived with the Zealand army and chased her father Ivar back to Sweden. The following year, Auðr went to Garðaríki with her son Harald and many powerful men and married its king Ráðbarðr. This was the opportunity for Ivar to conquer Zealand.



The *Hervarar saga* does not mention any daughter named Auðr. Instead it mentions an Alfhild. Ivar gave her to Valdar whom Ivar made subking of Denmark.

However, when Ivar learnt that Auðr had married without his permission, he marshalled a great leidang from Denmark and Sweden and went to Gardariki. He was very old at the time. However, when they had arrived at the borders of Raðbarð's kingdom, Karelia (*Karjálabotnar*), he threw himself overboard. Harald then returned to Scania to become its ruler. In the *Lay of Hyndla*, Ivar, Auðr, Hrerekr and Harald appear. Raðbarð also appears, but there is no information about his relationship with them.

Notes

Primary sources

- *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*
- *Lay of Hyndla*
- *Sögubrot af nokkrum fornkonungum*
- *Af Upplendinga konungum*
- *Ynglinga saga*
- *Njáls saga*

Secondary sources

Nerman, B. *Det svenska rikets uppkomst*. Stockholm, 1925.

Legendary titles		
Preceded by Ingjald	King of Sweden	Succeeded by Harald Wartooth
Preceded by Hrerekr Ringslinger	Legendary king of Zealand	
Preceded by Guðröðr of Scania	Legendary king of Scania	

Ohthere

Ohthere (also *Ohtere*), Old Norse **Óttarr vendilkráka** (*Vendelcrow*; in Modern Swedish *Ottar Vendelkråka*) is a semi-legendary king of Sweden of the house of Scylfings who would have lived during the 6th century (fl. c. 515 – c. 530^[1]).

His name can be reconstructed as Proto-Norse **Ōhta-harjaz* or **Ōhtu-harjaz*. The *harjaz* element is common in Germanic names and has a meaning of "warrior, army" (whence English *harry*); by contrast, the *oht* element is less frequent, and has been tentatively interpreted as "fearsome, feared".^[2]



Ohthere's Mound located at Vendel parish, Uppland, Sweden.

A prince of the Swedes, Ohthere and his brother Onela conducted successful raids against the Geats after King Hrethel had died. In 515, Ongentheow was killed in battle by the Geats and Ohthere succeeded his father as the king of Sweden. Ohthere led an army against the Geats, and besieged one of their armies. He nearly killed the Geatish king Hygelac but lost many of his forces in the conflict. Ohthere managed to get back to Sweden. In the 520s, Ohthere led a large raid to Denmark and plundered the Danish coast. A Danish army led by two Jarls, however, was waiting for him. Battle broke out. The Danish were reinforced, and Ohthere was killed in the battle. His corpse was taken back to Sweden and buried in a mound.

Beowulf

In the Old English poem *Beowulf* the name of Ohthere only appears in constructions referring to his father Ongenþeow (*fæder Ohtheres*),^[3] mother (*Onelan modor and Ohtheres*),^[4] and his sons Eadgils (*sunu Ohteres*,^[5] *sunu Ohteres*^[6]) and Eanmund (*sunu Ohteres*).^[7]

When Ohthere and his actions are concerned, he is referred to as *Ongenþeow's offspring* together with his brother Onela. The section deals with Ohthere and Onela pillaging the Geats at the death of their king Hreðel, restarting the Swedish-Geatish wars:

Pa was synn and sacu Sweona and Geata,
ofer wid wæter wroht gemæne,
here-nið hearda, syððan Hreðel swealt,
oððe him Ongenþeowes eaferan wæran
frome fyrd-hwate, freode ne woldon
ofer heafo healdan, ac ymb Hreosna-beorh
eatolne inwit-scear oft gefremedon.^[8]

There was strife and struggle 'twixt Swede and Geat
o'er the width of waters; war arose,
hard battle-horror, when Hrethel died,
and Ongentheow's offspring grew
strife-keen, bold, nor brooked o'er the seas
pact of peace, but pushed their hosts
to harass in hatred by Hreosnabeorh.^[9]

Later, it is implied in the poem that Ohthere has died, because his brother Onela is king. Ohthere's sons Eadgils and Eanmund fled to the Geats and the wars began anew.

Scandinavian sources

Ynglingatal, *Ynglinga saga*, *Íslendingabók* and *Historia Norvegiae* all present Óttarr as the son of Egill (called Ongenþeow in *Beowulf*) and as the father of Aðísl/Aðils/athils/Adils (Eadgils).

According to the latest source, *Ynglinga saga*, Óttarr refused to pay tribute to the Danish king Fróði for the help that his father had received. Then Fróði sent two men to collect the tribute, but Óttarr answered that the Swedes had never paid tribute to the Danes and would not begin with him. Fróði then gathered a vast host and looted in Sweden, but the next summer he pillaged in the east. When Óttarr learnt that Fróði was gone, he sailed to Denmark to plunder in return and went into the Limfjord where he pillaged in Vendsyssel. Fróði's jarls Vott and Faste attacked Óttarr in the fjord. The battle was even and many men fell, but the Danes were reinforced by the people in the neighbourhood and so the Swedes lost (a version apparently borrowed from the death of Óttarr's predecessor Jorund). The Danes put Óttarr's corpse on a mound to be devoured by wild beasts, and made a wooden crow that they sent to Sweden with the message that the wooden crow was all that Óttarr was worth. After this, Óttarr was called *Vendelcrow*.

It is only Snorri who uses the epithet *Vendelcrow*, whereas the older sources *Historia Norvegiae* and *Íslendingabók* use it for his father Egill. Moreover, it is only in Snorri's work that story of Óttarr's death in Vendsyssel appears, and it is probably his own invention.^[1] *Ynglingatal* only mentions that Óttarr was killed by the Danish jarls Vott and Faste in a place named *Vendel* (Laing has been influenced by Snorri's version in his translation):

Féll Óttarr	By Danish arms the hero bold,
und ara greipar	Ottar the Brave, lies stiff and cold.
dugandligr	To Vendel's plain the corpse was borne;
fyrir Dana vápnum,	By eagles' claws the corpse is torn,
þann hergammr	Spattered by ravens' bloody feet,
hrægum fœti	The wild bird's prey, the wild wolf's meat.
viti borinn	The Swedes have vowed revenge to take
á Vendli sparn.	On Frode's earls, for Ottar's sake;
Þau frá ek verk	Like dogs to kill them in their land,
Vötts ok Fasta	In their own homes, by Swedish hand. ^[11]
sænskri þjóð	
at sögum verða;	
at eylands	
jarlar Fróða	
vígframað	
um veginn höfðu. ^[10]	

The *Historia Norvegiae* presents a Latin summary of *Ynglingatal*, older than Snorri's quotation (continuing after Egil):

Cui successit in regnum filius suus Ottarus, qui a suo æquivoco Ottaro Danorum comite et fratre ejus Fasta in una provinciarum Daniæ, scilicet Wendli, interemptus est. Cujus filius Adils [...] ^[12]	The successor to the throne was his son Ottar, who was assassinated in Vendel, a law province of Denmark, by his namesake, a Danish jarl, and this man's brother, Fasta. His son Adils [...] ^[13]
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Historia Norvegiae only informs that Ohthere was killed by the Danish brothers *Ottar* [sic.] and Faste in a Danish province called *Vendel*.

Ohthere's Barrow

Ohthere's barrow (Swedish: *Ottarshögen*) (60°08′N 17°34′E^[14]) is located in Vendel parish, Uppland, Sweden. The barrow is 5 metres high and 40 metres wide. In the 17th century the barrow was known locally as *Ottarshögen*. The term Hög is derived from the Old Norse word *haugr* meaning mound or barrow.^[1]

The barrow was excavated in the period 1914-1916.^[1] It showed the remains of both a man and a woman, and the finds were worthy of a king.^[15] The Swedish archaeologist Sune Lindqvist^[16] reported that in its centre there was a wooden vessel with ashes. There were few finds but they were well-preserved. There were some decorative panels similar to those found in the other Vendel era graves nearby. A comb with a case was found, as well as a golden Roman coin, a solidus, dated to be no later than 477. It had been perforated and was probably used as decoration, but it showed signs of wear and tear and had probably been worn for a longer time. Lindquist stated that the identification of the barrow as that of Ohthere could not receive more archaeological confirmation than those provided by the excavation.

Notes

- [1] Ottar, an article in the encyclopedia Nordisk familjebok (<http://runeberg.org/nfbt/0584.html>)
- [2] Peterson, Lena. *Lexikon över urnnordiska personnamn* PDF (http://www.sofi.se/GetDoc?meta_id=1464)
- [3] Line 2929.
- [4] Line 2933.
- [5] Lines 2381,
- [6] Line 2395.
- [7] Lines 2613.
- [8] Lines 2473-2480.
- [9] *Modern English translation* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/981>) by Francis Barton Gummere
- [10] The original text at Heimskringla Norrøne Tekster og Kvad (<http://www.heimskringla.no/original/heimskringla/ynlingasaga.php>)
- [11] Laing's translation at Sacred Texts (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynglga.htm>)
- [12] Storm, Gustav (editor) (1880). *Monumenta historica Norwegiæ: Latinske kildekrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*, Monumenta Historica Norwegiæ (Kristiania: Brøgger), pp. 100-101.
- [13] Ekrem, Inger (editor), Lars Boje Mortensen (editor) and Peter Fisher (translator) (2003). *Historia Norwegie*. Museum Tusulanum Press. ISBN 87-7289-813-5, p. 77.
- [14] http://tools.wmflabs.org/geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Ohthere¶ms=60_08_N_17_34_E_
- [15] A presentation by the Swedish National Heritage Board (http://www.raa.se/cms/extern/se_och_besoka/sevardheter/ottarshogen.html)
- [16] *Fornvännen* 1917, Sune Lindqvist, "Ottarshögen i Vendel", p. 142

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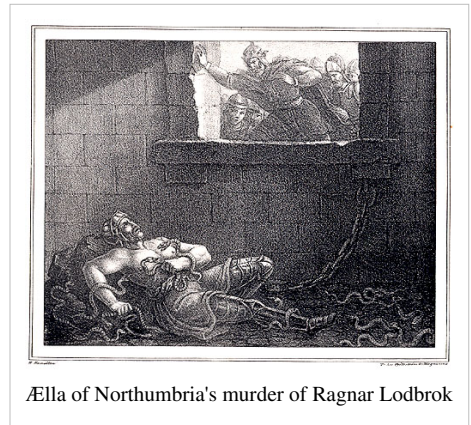
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Ohthere		
House of Yngling		
Preceded by Ongenþeow	Semi-legendary king of Sweden	Succeeded by Onela

Ragnar Lodbrok

Ragnar Lodbrok (Ragnar "Hairy-Breeches", Old Norse: *Ragnarr Loðbrók*) was a legendary Norse ruler and hero from the Viking Age who became known as the scourge of France and England and as the father of many renowned sons, including Ivar the Boneless, Björn Ironside, Halfdan Ragnarsson and Ubba.

According to legend, Ragnar was thrice married: to the shieldmaiden Lagertha, to the noblewoman Thora Town-Hart and to the warrior queen Aslaug. Said to have been a relative of the Danish king Gudfred or a son of king Sigurd Hring, he became king himself and distinguished himself by many raids and conquests until he was eventually seized by his foe, King Ælla of Northumbria, and killed by being thrown into a pit of snakes. His sons bloodily avenged him by invading England with the Great Heathen Army.^[1]



Ælla of Northumbria's murder of Ragnar Lodbrok

Ragnar is the subject of Old Norse poetry and several legendary sagas. While his sons are historical figures, it is uncertain whether Ragnar himself existed. Many of the tales told about him appear to originate with the deeds of a variety of historical Viking heroes and rulers.

Historicity

As a figure of legend whose life only partially took place in times and places covered by written sources, the extent of Ragnar's historicity is not quite clear.

In her commentary on Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, Hilda Ellis Davidson notes that Saxo's coverage of Ragnar's legend in book IX of the *Gesta* appears to be an attempt to consolidate many of the confusing and contradictory events and stories known to the chronicler into the reign of one king, Ragnar. That is why many acts ascribed to Ragnar in the *Gesta* can be associated, through other sources, with various figures, some of which are more historically certain. These candidates for the "historical Ragnar" include:

- King Horik I (d. 854),
- King Reginfrid (d. 814),
- a king who ruled part of Denmark and came into conflict with Harald Klak,
- one Reginherus who attacked Paris in the middle of the ninth century,
- possibly the Reghnall of the Irish Annals, and
- the Viking leader whose death caused his sons to invade England with the Great Heathen Army in 865.^[1]

So far, attempts to firmly link the legendary Ragnar with one or several of those men have failed because of the difficulty in reconciling the various accounts and their chronology. Nonetheless, the core tradition of a Viking hero named Ragnar (or similar) who wreaked havoc in mid-ninth-century Europe and who fathered many famous sons is remarkably persistent, and some aspects of it are covered by relatively reliable sources, such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. According to Davidson, writing in 1979, "certain scholars in recent years have come to accept at least part of Ragnar's story as based on historical fact".^[1] Katherine Holman, on the other hand, concludes that "although his sons are historical figures, there is no evidence that Ragnar himself ever lived, and he seems to be an amalgam of several different historical figures and pure literary invention."^[1]

Sources

The medieval sources that cover Ragnar include:

- the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a collection of 9th-century annals,
- book IX of the *Gesta Danorum*, a 12th-century work by the Christian chronicler Saxo Grammaticus,
- the Tale of Ragnar's sons (*Ragnarssona þáttr*), a legendary saga,
- the Tale of Ragnar Lodbrok, another saga, a sequel to the *Völsunga saga*,
- the *Ragnarsdrápa*, a skaldic poem of which only fragments remain, attributed to the 9th century poet Bragi Boddason,
- the Krákumál, Ragnar's death-song, a 12th-century Scottish skaldic poem.

In popular culture

Film and television

- In *The Vikings*, a film of 1958, Ragnar, played by Ernest Borgnine, is captured by King Ælla of Northumbria and cast into a pit of ferocious wolves. His son Einar (presumably a variation of the historical Ivar), played by Kirk Douglas, vows revenge and conquers Northumbria.^[2]
- Ragnar Lodbrok (played by Travis Fimmel) is the protagonist of the History Channel's 2013 historical drama series *Vikings*.

Video games

- The *Play the World* expansion pack for the 2001 video game *Civilization III* added Scandinavia as a playable civilization, with Ragnar as the leader.
- The *Viking Invasion* expansion pack for 2002's *Medieval: Total War* also included Ragnar as the first king of the Vikings, reigning during the late 8th and early 9th century.
- The *Warlords* expansion pack for 2005's *Civilization IV* included a playable Viking civilization with Ragnar as the leader.
- Ragnar is the name of the Nord king in the video game *Mount & Blade: Warband*, released in 2010
- In Paradox's *Crusader Kings 2* it is possible to play as one of Ragnar's 4 sons, in their conquest and revenge in England.

Literature

- *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand's 1957 novel, features a modern-day Scandinavian pirate named Ragnar Danneskjöld.
- Ragnar Lothbrok's shipwreck, capture, and execution, as well as his sons' revenge, are portrayed in Harry Harrison's alternative history novel *The Hammer and the Cross*, first of a trilogy.

Music

- "Lodbrok" is the eighth song on Grand Magus's self-titled debut album, released in 2001.
- The story of Ragnar Lodbrok and his son, Halfdan, is the theme of the song "Heathen Assault" by Doomsword from the 2003 album *Let Battle Commence*.

Sport

- Ragnar is the mascot of the NFL team Minnesota Vikings.
- The Ragnar Relay Series is a series of long distance relay races.

References

- [1] Davidson, 277
 [2] IMDb: *The Vikings*, 1958 (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052365/>)

Further reading

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- Waggoner, Ben (2009), *The Sagas of Ragnar Lodbrok, The Troth*, ISBN 978-0-578-02138-6

Legendary titles		
Preceded by Sigurd Ring	King of Sweden in West Norse tradition	Succeeded by Eysteinn Beli
Preceded by Harald Greyhide	King of Denmark	Succeeded by Sigurd Snake-in-the-Eye
Preceded by Siwardus Ring	King of Denmark in <i>Gesta Danorum</i>	Succeeded by Siwardus III

Shieldmaiden

A **shieldmaiden** was a woman who had chosen to fight as a warrior in Scandinavian folklore and mythology. They are often mentioned in sagas such as *Hervarar saga* and in *Gesta Danorum*. Shieldmaidens also appear in stories of other Germanic nations: Goths, Cimbri, and Marcomanni.^[1] The mythical Valkyries may have been based on the shieldmaidens.^[1]

Historical accounts

There are few historical attestations that Viking Age women took part in warfare,^[2] but the Byzantine historian Johannes Skylitzes records that women fought in battle when Sviatoslav I of Kiev attacked the Byzantines in Bulgaria in 971.^[2] When the Varangians had suffered a devastating defeat, the victors were stunned at discovering armed women among the fallen warriors.^[2]

When Leif Ericson's pregnant half-sister Freyðís Eiríksdóttir was in Vinland, she is reported to have taken up a sword, and, bare-breasted, scared away the attacking Native Americans.^[2] The fight is recounted in the *Greenland saga*, though Freyðís is not explicitly referred to as a shieldmaiden in the text.^[3]

Legendary accounts

Examples of shieldmaidens mentioned by name in the Norse sagas include Brynhild in the *Volsunga saga*, Hervor in *Hervarar saga*, the Brynhild of the *Bósa saga ok Herrauds*, the Swedish princess Thornbjörg in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and Hed, Visna and Veborg in *Gesta Danorum*.

According to Saxo Grammaticus, 300 shieldmaidens fought on the Danish side at the Battle of Bråvalla, in the year 750. Saxo also records an account of Lathgertha who fought in battle for Ragnar Lodbrok and saved him from defeat through personally leading a flanking attack.

Two shieldmaidens appear in certain translations of the "Hervarar saga." The first of these Hervor's was known to have taken up typically masculine roles early in her childhood, and often raided travelers in the woods dressed as a man. Later in her life she claimed the cursed sword Tyrping from her father's burial site and became a seafaring raider. She eventually settled and married. Her granddaughter was also named Hervor and commanded forces against attacking Huns. Although the saga remarks on her bravery she is mortally wounded by enemy forces and dies on the battlefield.^[4] Scholars Judith Jesch and Jenny Jochens theorize that shieldmaiden's often grim fates or their sudden return to typically female roles is a testament to their role as figures of both male and female fantasy as well as emblematic of the danger of abandoning gender roles. .^[4]



Hervor dying after the battle with the Huns. A painting by Peter Nicolai Arbo

Brynhildr Buðladóttir

Brynhildr of the *Volsunga saga*, along with her rival in love, Gudrun, provides an example of how a shieldmaiden compares to more conventional aristocratic womanhood in the sagas. Brynhildr is chiefly concerned with honor, much like a male warrior. When she ends up married to Gudrun's brother Gunnar instead of Sigurd, the man she intended to marry, Brynhildr speaks a verse comparing the courage of the two men:

"Sigurd fought the dragon
And that afterward will be
Forgotten by no one
While men still live.
Yet your brother
Neither dared
To ride into the fire
Nor to leap across it."^[5]

Brynhildr is married to Gunnar and not Sigurd because of deceit and trickery, including a potion of forgetfulness given to Sigurd so he forgets his previous relationship with her.^[5] Brynhildr is upset not only for the loss of Sigurd but also for the dishonesty involved. Similarly to her male counterparts, the shieldmaiden prefers to do things straightforwardly, without the deception considered stereotypically feminine in much of medieval literature. She enacts her vengeance directly, resulting in the deaths of herself, Sigurd, and Sigurd's son by Gudrun. By killing the child, she demonstrates an understanding of feud and filial responsibility; if he lived, the boy would grow up to take vengeance on Brynhildr's family.

Gudrun has a similar concern with family ties, but at first does not usually act directly. She is more inclined to incite her male relatives to action than take up arms herself. Gudrun is no shieldmaiden, and Brynhildr mocks her for this, saying, "Only ask what is best for you to know. That is suitable for noble women. And it is easy to be satisfied while everything happens according to your desires."^[5] In her later marriages, however, she is willing to kill her children, burn down a hall, and send her other sons to avenge the murder of her daughter, Svanhild. In the world of the sagas, women can be both honorable and remorseless, much like the male heroes. While a shieldmaiden does not fill a woman's typical role, her strength of character is found in even the more domestic women in these stories.

Cultural references

In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Éowyn of Rohan fights as a shieldmaiden in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. She successfully destroys the Witch-king though she is severely wounded in the process.

In Nancy Farmer's "The Sea of Trolls Trilogy", Thorgil, one of the main characters, is a shieldmaiden.

In Garth Nix's *The Seventh Tower* books, the fictional society of the Icecarls has a class of female warriors called Shield Maidens.

References

- [1] The article *Sköldmö* (<http://runeberg.org/nfce/0728.html>) in *Nordisk familjebok* (1917).
- [2] Harrison, D. & Svensson, K. (2007). *Vikingaliv*. Fälth & Hässler, Värnamo. ISBN 978-91-27-35725-9. p. 71
- [3] Thorsson, Ö. (Ed.) *The Sagas of the Icelanders*. Penguin Books, 1997.
- [4] Tolkien "The Saga of King Heidrik the Wise
- [5] Byock, Jesse L. (Trans.) *Saga of the Volsungs*. University of California Press, 1990.

Skírnir

In Norse mythology, **Skírnir** (Old Norse "bright one"^[1]) is the god Freyr's messenger and vassal. In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Skírnismál*, Skírnir is sent as a messenger to Jötunheimr to conduct Freyr's wooing of the fair Gerðr on condition of being given Freyr's sword as a reward. Skírnir also threatens Gerðr with his *gambantein*, a magic wand. In chapter 34 of the *Prose Edda* poem *Gylfaginning*, Skírnir is also sent to dwarfs in order to have them to make the restraint Gleipnir for the purpose of binding the wolf Fenrir.

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:149).

References

- Orchard, Andy (1997). *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*. Cassell. ISBN 0-304-34520-2



An illustration from Fredrik Sander's 1893 Swedish edition of the Poetic Edda

Skjöldr

Skjöldr (Latinized as **Skioldus**, sometimes Anglicized as **Skjold** or **Skiold**) was among the first legendary Danish kings. He is mentioned in the Prose Edda, in *Ynglinga saga*, in *Chronicon Lethrense*, in Sven Aggesen's history, in Arngrímur Jónsson's Latin abstract of the lost *Skjöldunga saga* and in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*. Under the name Scyld he also appears in the Old English poem *Beowulf*. The various accounts have little in common.

In the *Skjöldunga* and the *Ynglinga sagas*, Odin came from Asia and conquered Northern Europe. He gave Sweden to his son Yngvi and Denmark to his son Skjöldr. Since then the kings of Sweden were called Ynglings and those of Denmark Skjöldungs (Scyldings).



"Skjöld is proclaimed king" by Louis M. Moe (copyright: Vestfold college, Norway)

Scyld Scefing is the legendary ancestor of the Danish royal lineage known as the Scyldings. He is the counterpart of the *Skioldus* or *Skjöldr* of Danish and Icelandic sources.

He appears in the opening lines of *Beowulf*, where he is referred to as *Scyld Scefing*, indicating he is a descendant of Scef, Scyld son of Scef, or Scyld of the Sheaf. The *Beowulf* poet places him in a boat which is seen in other stories about Scef as a child in a boat. After relating in general terms the glories of Scyld's reign, the poet describes Scyld's funeral, his body was laid in a ship surrounded by treasures:

They decked his body no less bountifully
with offerings than those first ones did
who cast him away when he was a child
and launched him alone out over the waves.

William of Malmesbury's 12th century *Chronicle* tells the story of a Scef, as a sleeping child in a boat without oars, with a sheaf of corn at his head.^[1]

Axel Olrik in 1910 suggested a parallel "barley-figure" in Finnish Pekko, in turn connected by Fulk (1989) with Eddaic Bergelmir.^[2]

References

[1] Owen-Crocker, Gale R., *The Four Funerals in "Beowulf"*. Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000.

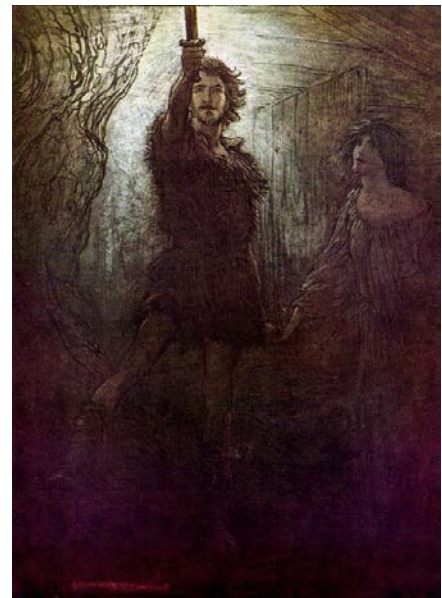
[2] Fulk, R. D. "An Eddic Analogue to the Scyld Scefing Story", *The Review of English Studies* (1989).

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Legendary titles		
Preceded by Lotherus	King of Denmark	Succeeded by Gram

Sigmund

In Norse mythology, **Sigmund** is a hero whose story is told in the *Völsunga saga*. He and his sister, Signý, are the children of Völsung and his wife Hljod. Sigmund is best known as the father of Sigurð the dragon-slayer, though Sigurð's tale has almost no connections to the Völsung cycle.



A depiction of Sigmund by Arthur Rackham.

Völsunga saga

In the *Völsunga saga*, Signý marries Siggeir, the king of Gautland (modern Västergötland). Völsung and Sigmund are attending the wedding feast (which lasted for some time before and after the marriage), when Odin, disguised as a beggar, plunges a sword (Gram) into the living tree Barnstokk ("offspring-trunk"^[1]) around which Völsung's hall is built. The disguised Odin announces that the man who can remove the sword will have it as a gift. Only Sigmund is able to free the sword from the tree.

Siggeir is smitten with envy and desire for the sword. He tries to buy it but Sigmund refuses. Siggeir invites Sigmund, his father Völsung and Sigmund's nine brothers to visit him in Gautland to see the newlyweds three months later. When the Völsung clan arrive, they are attacked by the Gauts; King Völsung is killed and his sons captured. Signý beseeches her husband to spare her brothers and to put them in stocks instead of killing them. As Siggeir thinks that the brothers deserve to be tortured before they are killed, he agrees.

He then lets his shapeshifting mother turn into a wolf and devour one of the brothers each night. During that time, Signý tries various ruses but fails every time until only Sigmund remains. On the ninth night, she has a servant smear honey on Sigmund's face and when the she-wolf arrives, she starts licking the honey off and sticks her tongue into Sigmund's mouth, whereupon Sigmund bites her tongue off, killing her. Sigmund then escapes his bonds and hides in the forest.



"Sigmund's Sword" (1889) by Johannes Gehrts.

Signý brings Sigmund everything he needs. Bent on revenge for their father's death, she also sends her sons to him in the wilderness, one by one, to be tested. As each fails, she urges Sigmund to kill them, until one day when he refuses to continue killing innocent children. Finally, in despair, she comes to him in the guise of a völva and conceives a child by him, Sinfjötli (the *Fitela* of *Beowulf*). Sinfjötli, born of their incest, passes the test.

Sigmund and his son/nephew, Sinfjötli, grow wealthy as outlaws. In their wanderings, they come upon men sleeping in cursed wolf skins. Upon killing the men and putting on the wolf skins, they are cursed with a type of lycanthropy. Eventually, they avenge the death of Völsung.

After Signý dies, Sigmund and Sinfjötli go harrying together. Sigmund marries a woman named Borghild and has two sons, one of them named Helgi. Sinfjötli slays Borghild's brother while vying for a woman they both want. Borghild avenges her brother by poisoning Sinfjötli.

Later, Sigmund marries a woman named Hjördís. After a short time of peace, Sigmund's lands are attacked by King Lyngi. In battle, Sigmund matches up against an old man who is Odin in disguise. Odin shatters Sigmund's sword, and Sigmund falls at the hands of others. Dying, he tells Hjördís that she is pregnant and that her son will one day make a great weapon out of the fragments of his sword. That son was to be Sigurd. Sigurd himself had a son named Sigmund, who was killed when he was three years old by a vengeful Brynhild.

Relation to other Germanic heroes

Sigmund/Siegmund is also the name of Sigurd/Siegfried's father in other versions of the Sigurd story, but without any of the details about his life or family that appear in Norse Völsung tales and poems. On the other hand, the Old English poem *Beowulf* includes Sigemund the Wælsing and his nephew Fitela in a tale of dragon slaying told within the main story. Herein the story of Sigemund is told to Beowulf, a warrior also from Gautland.

Parallels

Parallels to Sigmund's pulling the sword from the tree can be found in other mythologies (notably in the Arthurian legends). Also, Sinfjötli and Mordred share the characteristic of being nephew and son to the main characters.

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:14).

In modern fiction

The story of Sigmund, beginning with the marriage of Signy to Siggeir and ending with Sigmund's vengeance on Siggeir, was retold in the novelette "Vengeance" by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, which appeared in the magazine *Adventure*, June 30, 1925. Brodeur was a professor at Berkeley and became well known for his scholarship on *Beowulf* and Norse sagas.

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Sigurd Hring

Sigurd Hring (Old Norse: *Sigurðr hringr* (*Hringr* meaning 'Ring')) (fl.ca 750) was a legendary Swedish and Danish king mentioned in many old Scandinavian sagas. According to *Bósa saga ok Herrauds*, there was once a saga on Sigurd Hring, but this saga is now lost. In the old sources, he is notable for winning the Battle of the Brávellir against Harald Wartooth and for being the father of Ragnar Lodbrok.

Hervarar saga

The *Hervarar saga* tells that when Valdar died, his son Randver became the king of Denmark, while Harald Wartooth became the king of Götaland or Gotland. Then Harald conquered all of his father Ivar Vidfamne's territory. After Randver's death, his son Sigurd Hring became the king of Denmark, presumably as the subking of Harald. Sigurd Ring and Harald fought the Battle of the Brávellir on the plains of Östergötland where Harald and many of his men died. Sigurd ruled Denmark until his death and was succeeded by his son Ragnar Lodbrok. Harald Wartooth's son Eysteinn Beli ruled Sweden until he was killed by the sons of Ragnar Lodbrok.

Sögubrot af nokkrum fornkonungum

In *Sögubrot af nokkrum fornkonungum*, Sigurd is the paternal nephew of the Danish king Harald Wartooth, and presumably (the part of *Sögubrot* where this would have been narrated expressly has not been preserved) the son of Randver, who in his turn is the son of Harald's mother Auðr the Deep-Minded and her husband king Raðbarðr of Gardariki. Harald Wartooth was beginning to feel old he made Sigurd the king of Sweden and Västergötland. Sigurd beat his uncle at the colossal Battle of Brávalla, and became the ruler of Denmark as well. He made a shieldmaiden the ruler of Denmark (cf. *Chronicon Lethrense*, below).

Sigurd married Alfhild, the daughter of king Alf of Alfheim. Together with Alfhild, he had the son Ragnar Lodbrok.

As Sigurd grew old, distant parts of his realm began to secede, and it is told how he lost England due to old age. One day, he was in Västergötland and was visited by his brothers-in-law, the sons of Gandalf. They asked him to join them in attacking king Eysteinn of Vestfold in Norway. In Vestfold, there were great blóts held at Skiringssal. Unfortunately, *Sögubrot* (meaning the "fragment") ends there. However, the *Skjöldunga saga* is believed to be the original story on which *Sögubrot* is based and it continues the story (see below).

Skjöldunga saga

The *Skjöldunga saga* tells that Sigurd Ring was married to Alfhild, the daughter of king Alf of Alfheim, and their son was Ragnar Lodbrok. Unfortunately, Alfhild died. When Sigurd Ring was an old man, he came to Skiringssal to take part in the great blóts. There he spotted a very beautiful girl named Alfsol, and she was the daughter of King Alf of Vendel (Vendsyssel). The girl's two brothers refused to allow Sigurd to marry her. Sigurd fought with the brothers and killed them, but their sister had been given poison by her brothers so that Sigurd could never have her. When her corpse was carried to Sigurd, he went aboard a large ship where he placed Alvsol and her brothers. Then, he steered the ship with full sails out on the sea, as the ship burnt.

Ragnar Lodbrok succeeded his father, but put a subking on the throne of Sweden, king Eysteinn Beli, who later was killed by Ragnar's sons.

Gesta Danorum

According to *Gesta Danorum* (book 7), by Saxo Grammaticus, Hring was the son of the Swedish king Ingjald (*Ingild*) and the maternal nephew of the Danish king Harald Wartooth. His father Ingjald had raped the sister of Harald, but the latter did not mind in order to preserve the friendship with Ingjald. Ring fought with Harald Wartooth in the Battle of the Brávellir and became the king of Denmark as well. Saxo then describes the different subkings and their adventures. In book 9, he returns to Sigurd Hring as *Siward, surnamed Hring*, the father of Ragnar Lodbrok.

Other sources

According to *Hversu Noregr byggdist*, Sigurd was the son of Randver, the brother of Harald Wartooth. Randver and Harald were the sons of Hrærekr slöngvanbaugi.

In the part of the *Heimskringla* called the *Saga of Harald Fairhair*, Harald Fairhair learns that the Swedish king Erik Eymundsson had enlarged Sweden westwards, until it reached the same extent as it had during king Sigurd Ring and his son Ragnar Lodbrok. This included Romerike, Westfold all the way to Grenmar, and Vingulmark.

In *Ragnar Lodbrok's saga*, it is mentioned that Sigurd Ring and Harald Wartooth fought in the Battle of the Brávellir and that Harald fell. After the battle Sigurd Ring was the king of Denmark, and he was the father of Ragnar Lodbrok.

Ragnarssona þáttr only states that Ring was the king of Sweden and Denmark, and the father of Ragnar Lodbrok.

In *Bósa saga ok Herrauds*, it is only said that Sigurd Ring, the father of Ragnar Lodbrok fought with Harald Wartooth at the Battle of the Brávellir where Harald died. It adds that there was a saga on Sigurd Ring (which today no longer exists).

According to the *Chronicon Lethrense*, Harald Wartooth had made all the countries down to the Mediterranean pay tribute. However, when he went to Sweden to demand tribute, the Swedish king Ring met him at the Battle of the Brávellir, and Harald lost and died. Hring made a shieldmaiden the ruler of Denmark (cf. *Sögubrot af nokkrum fornkonungum*, above).

Gríms saga loðinkinna and the younger version of *Orvar-Odd's saga* only mention Sigurd Hring in a few lines relating to the Battle of the Brávellir with Harald Wartooth.

In *Norna-Gests þáttr*, it is said that Sigurd Hring was very old when Sigurd's sons-in-law, the sons of Gandalf, asked him to help them fight against Sigurd Fafnisbani and the Gjukungs. Sigurd Ring could not help them in person, as he was busy fighting against ravaging Curonians and *Kænir*.

Historical origins

It has been suggested that a report of a struggle for the Danish crown may have given rise to the legend of Sigurd Hring. Following the death of Hemming in 812, his brother or cousin Sigifrid and Anulo (Latin for Ring, but perhaps originally representing Old Norse Anleifr), nephew of an earlier king Harald, fought a battle for the succession in which both were killed. This struggle appears to be reflected in the legendary Battle of the Brávellir, fought by Sigurd Ring, nephew of Harald Wartooth.

Primary sources

- *Bósa saga ok Herrauds*
- *Chronicon Lethrense*
- *Gesta Danorum*
- *Gríms saga loðinkinna*
- *Heimskringla (Saga of Harald Fairhair)*
- *Hervarar saga*
- *Hversu Noregr byggdist*
- *Norna-Gests þáttur*
- *Orvar-Odd's saga*
- *Ragnar Lodbrok's saga*
- *Ragnarssona þáttur*
- *Skjöldunga saga*
- *Sögubrot*

Secondary sources

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External links

- Searching in mediavel kings ^[1]
- Early History of Scania and Sigurd Ring (Swedish) ^[2]

Legendary titles		
Preceded by Harald Wartooth	King of Sweden in West Norse tradition	Succeeded by Ragnar Lodbrok
	King of Denmark in West Norse tradition	
Preceded by Harald Wartooth	King of Denmark as Ringo in <i>Gesta Danorum</i>	Succeeded by Olo
Preceded by Hemmingus	King of Denmark as Siwardus Ring in <i>Gesta Danorum</i>	Succeeded by Ragnar Lodbrok

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[1] <http://www.rootsweb.com/~medieval/danking.htm>

[2] <http://home.swipnet.se/~w-87143/danmark.htm>

Starkad

Starkad (Old Norse: *Starkaðr* or *Störkuðr*,^[1] Latin: *Starcaterus*, and during the late Middle Ages, also known as *Starkodder*)^[2] was a legendary hero in Norse mythology.

Starkad appears in numerous accounts, and the stories of his adventures relate to different Scandinavian traditions.^[2] He is most fully treated in *Gesta Danorum* but he also appears in Icelandic sources.^[1] He is portrayed as a great warrior who performed many heroic deeds but also many crimes.^[2]



Starkad as illustrated on Carta Marina (1539) by Olaus Magnus.

A cognate of the Starkad legends can be found in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*.^{[1][3]}

Beowulf

In *Beowulf*, the feud between the Danes and the Heaðobards was to be ended with the marriage of Ingeld, the son of the fallen Heaðobard king Froda, and Freawaru, the daughter of the Danish king Hroðgar.^[1] During the wedding an unnamed old warrior reminded the Heaðobards of their defeat and encouraged them to revenge.^{[1][3][4]} That is the origin of Starkad's admonishing speech to the Danish king Ingellus, son of Frotho^{[1][3]} (see the account given in *Gesta Danorum* below). It is consequently possible that Sophus Bugge was right in deriving the name *Starkaðr* from originally meaning "the strong Heaðobard".^[1]

Hervarar saga

A version of the legend of Starkad can be found in the prologue of the U-version of *Hervarar saga*, and in a shortened form in the H-version of the *Hauksbók*.^[5]

In this version a Starkad Ala-Warrior lived in northern Norway at the waterfalls of Alufoss. He descended from the giants known as the *þursar* (jotuns), and his father's name was Storkvid. Starkad was very much a jotun himself and had eight arms, but he was betrothed to a girl named Ogn Elf-burst. One day, when Starkad had gone north across the *Élivágar*, another giant named Hergrim kidnapped Ogn. Starkad challenged Hergrim to a holmgang, a duel. Starkad used four swords at the same time and slew Hergrim. Ogn did not wish to be Starkad's wife and committed suicide by stabbing herself with a sword. Starkad took everything Hergrim owned including his son Grimr.

Álfhildr was the daughter of king Álfr of Álheim (modern Bohuslän) and like the people of Álheim, she was very beautiful.^[6] One autumn, king Álfr performed the *Dísablót*, a sacrifice to the goddesses, and Álfhildr took part in it. As she was reddening the horgr (altar) with blood, Starkad kidnapped her. King Álfr called on the god Thor to help him rescue his daughter. Thor granted his wish by killing Starkad and rescuing the girl.

Gautreks saga

Gautreks saga continues the account found in *Hervarar saga*. It tells among other things the adventures of Starkad, the son of Stórvirkr who was the son of Starkad Ala-warrior, whom Thor had killed.

It tells that young Starkad was raised at the court of Harald, the king of Agder, together with Harald's son Vikar. One day, Herþjófr,^[7] the king of Hordaland, made a raid and killed king Harald. He also took Vikar hostage to ensure the loyalty of the people of Agder. When Vikar had grown up, he assembled a warband, including Starkad and avenged his father by killing Herþjófr with thirty of his warriors. Vikar was then king of Agder, Hordaland, and Hardanger.

Starkad took part in Víkar's many battles for the hegemony of the petty kingdoms of southern Norway, one of the battles where Battle at Lake Vænir and he was Víkar's greatest warrior.

After all these victories, when sailing north from Agdir to Hordaland with a large army, Víkar was becalmed. Divination showed Odin required a sacrifice of one person chosen by lot and Víkar's lot came up each time. The decision was put off till the next day. Then Grani Horsehair, Starkad's foster father, took Starkad to a secret council of the gods and revealed himself to be Odin. Odin bestowed on Starkad the blessings of living three lifetimes, of possessing the most excellent of weapons, an abundance of riches, victory in battle, the gift of poetry and always to be held in the highest esteem among the rich and powerful. Thor, however, who hated Starkad because of his jotun origin, denied Starkad the blessing of having children and cursed him to commit a crime every lifetime he lived and never to possess real estate. Thor further cursed Starkad never to feel that he had enough property, always to receive dangerous wounds in battle, never to remember his skaldic poems and ever to be hated by commoners. After blessings and curses laid on Starkad alternately by Odin and Thor, Odin asked Starkad to send him King Víkar in payment for Odin's blessings. Starkad agreed and Odin gave Starkad a spear which Odin promised would appear to be only a reed-stalk. So Vikar met his death.

After Vikar's death, Starkad fled to Sweden and the kings Alrek and Eirík at Uppsala. Starkad served them first as a companion on their viking expeditions and then, after Alrek and Eirík had settled down, he went on further Viking expeditions alone.

Skaldic poetry

Starkad is said to have composed poems himself which appear in *Gautrek's saga*. Thor's hate of Starkad because of his jotun origins is mentioned in *Skáldskaparmál*, where there is a *lausavísa* by Vetrlíði Sumarliðason praising Thor for having killed giants and giantesses, and for having defeated Starkad:

Leggi brauzt þú Leiknar,	Thou didst break the leg of Leikn,	You broke Leikn's bones,
lamðir Þrívalda,	Didst bruise Þrívaldi,	you pounded Thrivaldi
steypðir Starkeði,	Didst cause to stoop Starkadr,	you cast down Starkad,
stéttu of Gjalp dauða. ^[8]	Didst stand on lifeless Gjalp. ^[9]	you stood over the dead Gjalp. ^[10]

However, it could also be a reference to Starkad's grandfather, Starkad Ala-Warrior, whom Thor killed for having kidnapped Álfhildr, the princess of Alfheim.



The hero Starkad, from Olaus Magnus' *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (1555).

Ynglinga saga

In the *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson tells what happened a few generations after the deaths of Alrek and Eirík.

The Swedish king Aun was not a warlike king and had been chased away from his kingdom by Halfdan. When Halfdan had died, Aun returned to Uppsala to rule his old kingdom. After having sacrificed one of his sons to Odin, the god let him live for another sixty years. However, when twenty-five years had passed, a Danish prince named Áli the Bold appeared and chased Aun to exile in Götaland. Áli ruled for twenty-five years until Starkad appeared and killed him. Then Aun could return to his kingdom and ruled it for another period of twenty-five years.

Sögubrot

The *Sögubrot* deals with events taking place in the 8th century, a long time after Starkad killed Áli the Bold.

When the Swedish king Sigurd Ring prepared for the Battle of the Brávellir against the Danish Harald Wartooth, a much later king Áli the Bold appeared with seven other kings to help him in the battle. These kings were accompanied by a great many champions, and among them Starkad the Old, the son of Stórverkr. Starkad would later compose a poem about this battle that would serve as a source for the sagas.

When the battle had begun, a formidable champion named Ubbi of Friesland charged against Ragnvald the Good Councilor the foremost champion in the wedge formation of king Sigurd. After a fierce fight, Ragnvald died and Ubbi pushed on killing champion after champion.

When king Sigurd Ring saw this he encouraged his warriors and said that it was not possible that no one could defeat Ubbi. He then asked "where is Starkad?". The old warrior answered "it is difficult to win sire. However, I will do my best and do what I can, but Ubbi is a tough fighter". Starkad engaged with Ubbi and a fight began that was long and the most fierce of the entire battle. Eventually, Starkad gave Ubbi a single wound, but Starkad had received six big ones, and thought that no one had been closer to kill him before. The two champions were separated by the pushing throng of warriors, and Ubbi finally fell riddled with arrows from the archers of Telemark.

The shieldmaiden Vebiorg took on the Swedish army. First she killed the champion Söti, but then Starkad attacked her. After giving Vebiorg a number of slashes, she cut his mouth so that his chin fell. Starkad had to bite his beard to keep his chin in place. She was killed by Thorkil the Bold.

Biting his beard and ignoring his wounds, Starkad charged the Danish army, killing man after man, until he met the shieldmaiden Ursina who carried the banner of king Harald Wartooth. She told him that he had met his last opponent, but he cut off the hand that held the banner and killed her. Starkad continued killing warrior after warrior, until he finally was so severely wounded that he had a large gash on his neck and a large gash on his chest that made



Starkad leads Geats (the banner with a lion) and Swedes (the banner with three crowns) in battle against the Danes, from Olaus Magnus' *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (1555).

his two lungs hang out. On his right hand, he had lost a finger.

The battle ended with Swedish victory.

Norna-Gests þáttur

In *Norna-Gests þáttur*, the account of Starkad takes place not long after the victory at the Battle of the Brávellir. The account deals with a meeting between Starkad and the hero Sigurd Dragonslayer. The old Norna-Gest told that during the time when he was with Sigurd Dragonslayer, the Swedish king Sigurd Ring demanded tribute from Sigurd and his people. When Sigurd refused, the king of Sweden sent an army to subdue him, led by the sons of Gandalf.

In the Swedish army, there was a man who was even bigger and stronger than the sons of Gandalf. The giant man killed both men and horses and nothing could defeat him. Sigurd and Gest approached the huge warrior and asked who he was. He answered that he was Starkad the son of Stórvirkur.

When Starkad learnt that Sigurd was the same Sigurd who had killed the dragon Fafnir, he tried to escape. However, Sigurd went after him and dealt a blow with his sword Gramr that ripped two teeth off Starkad's mouth. Sigurd then asked Starkad to go home. When Starkad had left the battle, the sons of Gandalf retired as well, and so Sigurd had won the battle against the Swedes.

Gesta Danorum

It is in *Gesta Danorum* that the most comprehensive treatment of Starkad is found. The Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus wrote that Starkad was the son of Stórvirkur (Storwerk/Storuerkus) and saved himself from a shipwreck. He entered the service of the Danish king Frotho and was given a ship so that he could patrol the shores.



Starkad in battle, from Olaus Magnus' *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (1555).

No man was Starkad's equal as he was endowed with a superhuman size and a noble disposition. Saxo Grammaticus gives two accounts of Starkad's origin. According to one, he was born in the land of Estonians east of the Baltic sea. According to the second, which the chronicler considers fantastic and unlikely, Starkad was born of jotuns, and he had formerly many arms until Thor cut off all arms but two. Odin had bestowed on Starkad the curse and the blessing that he would live the lives of three men, and commit three evil deeds.

His first evil deed was the murder of the Norwegian petty king Vikar (Wicarus). Starkad had joined a Viking expedition with Vikar, but they found themselves stopped by a strong wind. They then had the idea that they could appease the gods by performing a blót with human blood, and decided to cast lots as to whom was to be sacrificed. Starkad made a noose of willow and put it around the king's neck in the pretense that it was only for show and not for killing. However, the knot was so strong that the king was dying, and Starkad gave him the coup de grace with his sword. Others say that the noose of willow suddenly became so strong that the king was strangled.

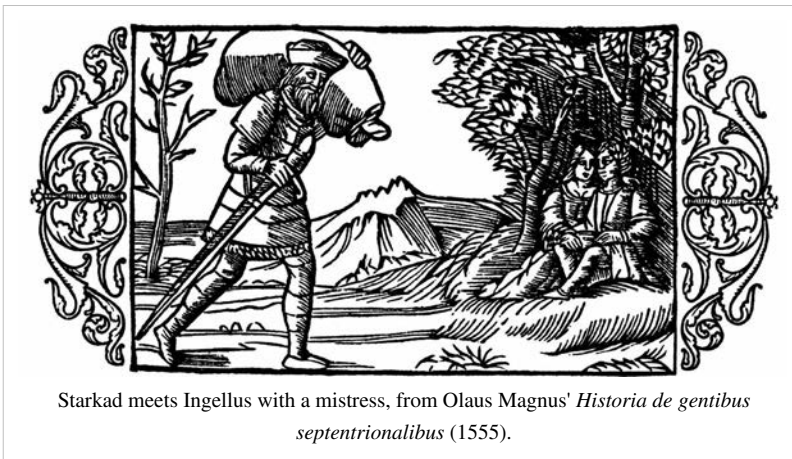
Starkad joined the Danish Viking Bemon (Bemonus) and they had a tough discipline on their crew, forbidding them alcoholic beverages. During an attack in Russia, they discovered that the Russians had riddled the terrain with caltrops to stop the Vikings. However, Starkad and his men donned clogs and so won the battle. When Bemon was dead, Starkad entered the service of the Bjarmians and did many heroic deeds among them.

Later, Starkad stayed for seven years in Sweden at Uppsala, with the sons of Frey. However the effeminate jingle of bells, the dancing and the mimes at the sacrifices (see the Temple at Uppsala) nauseated Starkad.

He then enlisted with the Danish king Haki (Haco), and fought for him during the attack on king Hagleik (Hugletus) of Ireland. Hagleik wasted his riches on actors and jugglers, but was defended by Svipdag (Suibdagus) and Geigad (Gegathus), who gave Starkad the most vicious wound he had ever received. After winning the battle, Starkad had all the mimes and jugglers flogged, and all the riches looted.

Starkad was then sent with the Slavic prince Win (Winus) to quell a rebellion in the East. He fought against Curonians, Sambians, Semigallians, until all the Easterlings had been defeated. By covering his sword with a hide, he also defeated a warlord named Wisin (Wisinnus), who lived at Anafial in Russia, and who could make a weapon blunt only by looking at it. He continued his victories by killing the jotun Tanna in Byzantium and the Polish champion Wasce/Wilzce.

When the Saxons rebelled against Frotho, and challenged him to a duel against Hama, Starkad unexpectedly returned and took Frotho's place in the duel. Hama contemptuously brought Starkad to his knees with a blow by his fist, but Starkad rose up and cut Hama to death.



Starkad meets Ingellus with a mistress, from Olaus Magnus' *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (1555).

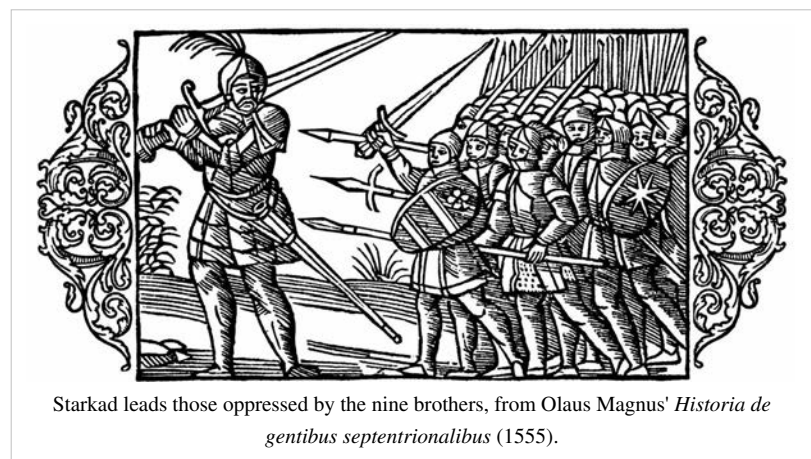
After a while Frotho was killed through treachery by a Saxon named Swerting (Swertingus). Frotho's son Ingild (Ingellus) lived a wanton life and married one of Swerting's daughters. This angered Starkad so much that he enlisted at the Swedish king Halfdan's (Haldanus) court instead. However, when he learnt that Helga, Ingild's sister, was about to marry a lowly goldsmith, Starkad appeared in disguise and castrated the

goldsmith. He gave Helga a slap on her face and lambasted her. Then he returned to Sweden and king Halfdan.

Ingild gave Helga to a Norwegian named Helgi (Helgo), on the condition that he fight nine brothers from Zealand who courted her, and among whom the eldest was named Angantyr (Angaterus). Helgi went to Sweden's most famous city Uppsala and asked Starkad to help him in the fight. Starkad agreed, but left Helgi with his bride in order to fight with the nine brothers himself at the moor of Roliung.

Starkad killed the nine brothers but had received seventeen wounds himself, and was so seriously wounded that his guts hanged out. He refused the care of three lowly passers-by, but accepted the treatment of a peasant's son, and could return to Sweden.

As Ingild continued his sinful life and did not do his duty to avenge his father, Starkad appeared during a banquet that Ingild had with the sons of Swerting, his father's slayer. Starkad



Starkad leads those oppressed by the nine brothers, from Olaus Magnus' *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (1555).

strongly admonished Ingild and humiliated his queen who tried to calm Starkad with kindness and her costly ribbon. Starkad succeeded in exciting Ingild to kill Swerting's sons and to divorce his Saxon bride.

During the Battle of the Brávellir between the Swedish king Sigurd Ring (Ringo) and Harald Wartooth (Haraldus Hyldetan), Starkad fought on the Swedish side. He received such a severe wound that his lung hanged out, his skull was cleft and a finger was cut off. He had to leave the battle to tend to his wounds.

Starkad was accepted with honour in the warband of the Norwegian hero Olo. However, when Olo had succeeded in conquering Zealand, Starkad was convinced to join Lennius/Lenus/Lennus scheme to attack and kill Olo. However, Olo was hard to kill as his gaze scared everyone. It was not until Starkad managed to cover Olo's face that he could kill him. Starkad was rewarded with 120 pounds in gold, but regretted his crime, and avenged Olo's death by killing Lennius.



Starkad arranges his own demise, from Olaus Magnus' *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (1555).

When Starkad was so old that he wished to die and his eyesight was bad, he hanged his gold around his neck and went out to wander. He killed a man who wanted one of his swords and some riders who were contracted to kill Starkad by Hather (Hatherus), Lennius' son.

In front of Hather, Starkad sung about his accomplishments, and as Hather's response showed Starkad that Hather was of noble birth, Starkad asked him

to be his slayer. Starkad promised Hather all his gold and imperviousness, should Hather cut off his head and run between the head and the body as he fell. Hather cut off Starkad's head but avoided running, as he feared being crushed by Starkad's huge body. When the head had hit the ground, it bit a tussock of grass which showed how ferocious Starkad was.

Hather did not want the old warrior to lie unburied, but showed him respect by making a barrow for him on the heath of Roljung, at the same spot where Starkad's heavy body long ago had made an imprint on a stone.

Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus

Olaus Magnus' cites the story of Starkad from *Gesta Danorum*. He disputes Saxo about origin of the hero and informs that Starkad was from the nation of Tavastians, 'Starchaterum Thauestum'.^[11]

Later traditions

Later medieval traditions locate Starkad's death and the heath of Roljung to Skåne. According to the *Annales Ryenses* (late 13th century), it was still possible to see Starkad's sword in the water beneath the bridge of *Boilyngh* when the water was low.^[12] It is likely that *Boilyngh* is a misspelling of *Roljung*.^[12] Later this spot was located to Rönne river, and in the 16th century, people talked of the *Stones of Starkkarl* at Vegeholm.^[12] The Danish folklorist Axel Olrik and Arthur Stille recorded many recent traditions about Starkad in north-western Skåne.^[12]

Notes

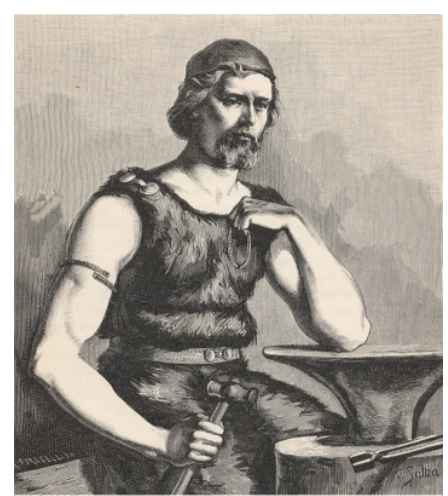
- [1] The article *Starkad* in *Nordisk familjebok* (1909). (<http://runeberg.org/nfcf/0547.html>)
- [2] The article *Starkad* in *Nationalencyklopedin*.
- [3] Andersson, Ingvar. (1947). *Skånes historia: till Saxo och Skånelagen*. Norstedts, Stockholm. p. 210.
- [4] Lines 2042-2067.
- [5] See Tunstall's comments on his translation of the *Hervarar saga* at Northvegr. (<http://www.northvegr.org/lore/oldheathen/029.php>).
- [6] The beauty of her people is explained in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* as due to the fact that her people were related to the elves.
- [7] Herþjófr was the son of Hunþjófr, the son of Friðþjófr the Bold, the protagonist of *Fridthjófs saga ins frækna*.
- [8] *Skáldskaparmál* in Old Norse at «Norrøne Tekster og Kvad», Norway. (<http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Skáldskaparmál>)
- [9] Brodeur's translation (http://www.cybersamurai.net/Mythology/nordic_gods/LegendsSagas/Edda/ProseEdda/SkaldskaparmalXI-XX.htm#skald11)
- [10] Faulke's translation (<http://home.earthlink.net/~asatru/thor/skaldskaparmal.html>)
- [11] Magni Gothus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus. Epitome libri V. gap. 3* (http://books.google.com/books?id=o9b5aGZH2noC&pg=PT124&lpg=PT124&dq=Thauestum&source=bl&ots=l6HDaEwK5Q&sig=E9Q_2-3DdfOjwY90YWshavrtkBA&hl=fi&ei=DGTFtqJcg9XhBL3s1JMN&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=Thauestum&f=false#Olaus)
- [12] Andersson, Ingvar. (1947). *Skånes historia: till Saxo och Skånelagen*. Norstedts, Stockholm. p. 213.

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- *Beowulf*:
 - *Old English edition* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/9701>) edited by James Albert Harrison and Robert Sharp
- Translations of *Beowulf*:
 - *Modern English translation* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/981>) by Francis Barton Gummere
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Wayland the Smith

In Germanic and Norse mythology, **Wayland the Smith** (Old English: *Weland*; Old Norse: *Völundr*, *Velentr*; Old High German: *Wiolant*; Proto-Germanic: **Welandaz*, from **Wēla-nandaz*, lit. "battle-brave"^[1]) is a legendary master blacksmith. In Old Norse sources, *Völundr* appears in *Völundarkviða*, a poem in the *Poetic Edda*, and in *Þiðrekssaga*, and his legend is also depicted on the Ardre image stone VIII. In Old English sources, he appears in *Deor*, *Waldere* and in *Beowulf* and the legend is depicted on the Franks Casket. He is mentioned in the German poems about Dietrich von Bern as the Father of Witige.



An illustration of Völundr.

Old Norse references

Weyland had two brothers, Egil and Slagfiðr. In one version of the myth, the three brothers lived with three Valkyries: Ölrún, Hervör alvitr and Hlaðguðr svanhvít. After nine years, the Valkyries left their lovers. Egil and Slagfiðr followed, never to return. In another version, Weyland married the swan maiden Hervör, and they had a son, Heime, but Hervör later left Weyland. In both versions, his love left him with a ring. In the former myth, he forged seven hundred duplicates of this ring.

At a later point in time, he was captured in his sleep by King Niðhad in Nerike who ordered him hamstrung and imprisoned on the island of Sævarstöð. There he was forced to forge items for the king. Weyland's wife's ring was given to the king's daughter, Bodvild. Nidud wore Weyland's sword.

In revenge, Weyland killed the king's sons when they visited him in secret, fashioned goblets from their skulls, jewels from their eyes, and a brooch from their teeth. He sent the goblets to the king, the jewels to the queen and the brooch to the king's daughter. When Bodvild took her ring to him to be mended, he took the ring and raped her, fathering a son and escaping on wings he made. Weyland (*Völund*) made the magic sword Gram (also named Balmung and Nothung) and the magic ring that Thorsten retrieved.



Völund's smithy in the centre, Niðhad's daughter to the left, and Nidud's dead sons hidden to the right of the smithy. Between the girl and the smithy, Völund can be seen in an eagle fetch flying away. From the Ardre image stone VIII.

Old English references

The Old English poem *Deor*, which recounts the famous sufferings of various figures before turning to those of Deor, its author, begins with "Welund":

Welund tasted misery among snakes.
 The stout-hearted hero endured
 troubles
 had sorrow and longing as his
 companions
 cruelty cold as winter - he often found
 woe
 Once Nithad laid restraints on him,
 supple sinew-bonds on the better man.
 That went by; so can this.
 To Beadohilde, her brothers' death was
 not
 so painful to her heart as her own
 problem
 which she had readily perceived
 that she was pregnant; nor could she ever
 foresee without fear how things would turn out.
 That went by, so can this.^[2]

Weland had fashioned the mail shirt worn by Beowulf according to lines 450–455 of the epic poem of the same name:

"No need then
 to lament for long or lay out my body.
 If the battle takes me, send back
 this breast-webbing that Weland fashioned
 and Hrethel gave me, to Lord Hygelac.
 Fate goes ever as fate must." (Heaney trans.)

The Franks Casket is one of a number of other Anglo-Saxon references to Wayland, whose story was evidently well known and popular, although no extended version in Old English has survived. The reference in *Waldere* is similar to that in *Beowulf*; the hero's sword was made by Weland.^[3] In the front panel of the Franks Casket, incongruously paired with an *Adoration of the Magi*, Wayland stands at the extreme left in the forge where he is held as a slave by King Niðhad, who has had his hamstrings cut to hobble him. Below the forge is the headless body of Niðhad's son, who Wayland has killed, making a goblet from his skull; his head is probably the object held in the tongs in Wayland's hand. With his other hand Wayland offers the goblet, containing drugged beer, to Bodvild, Niðhad's daughter, who he then rapes when she is unconscious. Another female figure is shown in the centre; perhaps Wayland's helper, or Bodvild again. To the right of the scene Wayland (or his brother) catches birds; he then makes wings from their feathers, with which he is able to escape.^[4]



The hamstrung smith Weyland from the front of the Franks Casket (see text).

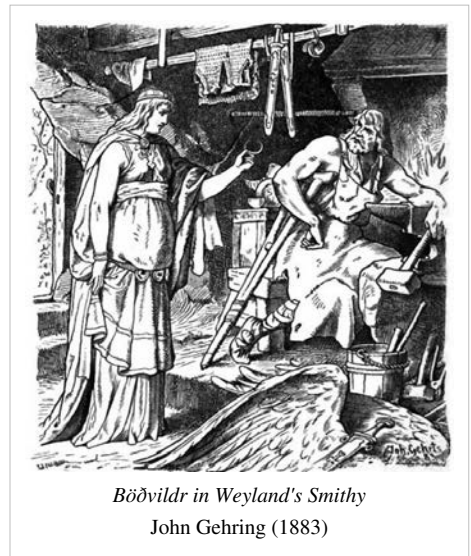
During the Viking Age in northern England, Wayland is depicted in his smithy, surrounded by his tools, at Halton, Lancashire, and fleeing from his royal captor by clinging to a flying bird, on crosses at Leeds, West Yorkshire, and at Sherburn-in-Elmet and Bedale, both in North Yorkshire.^[5]

Toponyms

Wayland is associated with Wayland's Smithy, a burial mound in Oxfordshire. This was named by the English, but the megalithic mound significantly predates them. It is from this association that the superstition came about that a horse left there overnight with a small silver coin (groat) would be shod by morning. This superstition is mentioned in the first episode of *Puck of Pook's Hill* by Rudyard Kipling, "The Sword of Weland", which narrates the rise and fall of the god.

Swords described as having been forged by Wayland

- Adylok / Hatheloke, the sword of Torrent of Portyngale, according to The Romance *Torrent of Portyngale*.
- Almace, the sword of Archbishop Turpin, according to *Karlamagnus Saga*.
- Caliburn, in Mary Stewart's Arthurian Legend, is the sword of Macsen, Merlin, and Arthur.
- Curtana, the sword of Ogier the Dane, according to *Karlamagnus Saga*.
- Durandal, the sword of Roland, according to *Karlamagnus Saga*: though in *Orlando Innamorato* Durandal is said to have been originally the sword of Hector of Troy.
- Mimung, which he forged to fight the rival smith Amilias, according to *Thidrekssaga*; *Karlamagnus Saga* relates that Mimung later came into the possession of Landri or Landres, nephew of Charlemagne.
- The unnamed sword of Huon of Bordeaux, according to Lord Berners.
- An unnamed sword whose history is related by Rudyard Kipling in *Puck of Pook's Hill*.
- The unnamed sword of the hero in the *Chanson de Gui de Nanteuil*.
- "Un ouvrier de Galan", a journeyman of Wayland's, is said to have forged the hero's sword Merveilleuse in the *Chanson de Doon de Mayence*.
- Gram, the sword of Sigmund, which would be destroyed by Odin, and is later reforged by Regin and used by Sigmund's son Sigurd to slay the dragon Fafnir. according to *Völsunga saga*



Böðvildr in Weyland's Smithy
John Gehring (1883)

In popular culture

- Albion, the sword of Herne's Son, the "Hooded Man", in the TV series *Robin of Sherwood*. Also, Morax, Solas, Orias, Elidor, Beleth, and Flauros, in the *Robin of Sherwood* episode "The Swords of Wayland".

In modern fiction

The Winter of the World, a fantasy series by Michael Scott Rohan combines mythical elements from Norse and Old English sources, including the forging of a sword resembling the Curtana, a character being captured and forced to forge items by a king while crippled and imprisoned on an island, and creating a set of wings to escape from imprisonment. The storylines of Elof the Smith in the trilogy in some ways parallel the stories of Wayland Smith.

David Drake's *Northworld: Justice* is based upon Weyland's story.

There is a character named Weyland Smith in *Fables* based on Wayland the Smith.

Wayland Smith also appears in Raymond E. Feist's 1988 work *Faerie Tale*.

Wayland is the name of a military research and development station in the Honor Harrington series by David Weber.

In the 2012 Doctor Who audio drama *Gods and Monsters*, Weyland is revealed to be an Elder God, who has been manipulating the Seventh Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) and some of his companions.

John Wayland Smith is the name of the skilled magical blacksmith in Susan Cooper's *Dark Is Rising* fantasy sequence.

References

- [1] see Hellmut Rosenfeld, *Der Name Wieland*, Beiträge zur Namenforschung (1969).
- [2] Translation by Steve Pollington (http://www.kami.demon.co.uk/gesithas/readings/deor_me.html)
- [3] R.K. Gordon, ed. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. (London: Dent) 1954:65. (<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=11406305>) Partial text of the *Walder* fragments in modern English - see the start of fragment A for Wayland
- [4] G. Henderson, *Early Medieval Art*, 1972, rev. 1977, Penguin, p. 157
- [5] All noted in Richard Hall, *Viking Age Archaeology* (series Shire Achaeology) 1995:40.

Other sources

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External links

- Article on Wayland the Smith; also deals with Egil (<http://www.waylands.net/public/smithy/legends.htm>)
- Austin Simmons, *The CIPHERMENT of the Franks Casket* (PDF) (http://homer0s.godsong.org/FRANKS_CASKET.pdf)
- Weland on the Franks Casket; essay on the Saga (<http://www.franks-casket.de/english/index.html>)
- Völundarkviða - Heimskringla.no (<http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Völundarkviða>)

Other Beings

Alberich

In the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, **Alberich** is a dwarf, who guards the treasure of the Nibelungen, but is overcome by Siegfried. News of the gold robbery and ring of power incited gods and giants alike to action. The giants Fafner and Fasolt demanded the ring in payment for building Valhalla, and carried off Freyja as a hostage. In the border, the gods, Odin, Frigg, Loki, Freyr, and Thor all search despairingly for the hidden treasure.

Wagner

In Wagner's opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Alberich is chief of the Nibelungen race of dwarfs and the main antagonist driving events. He gains the power to forge the ring after renouncing love. His brother, the Smith Mime, creates the Tarnhelm for Alberich. The murderer of the hero Siegfried, Hagen (legend), is son of Alberich. Wagner's Alberich is a composite character, mostly based on Alberich from the *Nibelungenlied*, but also on Andvari from Norse mythology. He has been widely described, most notably by Theodor Adorno, as a negative Jewish stereotype, with his race expressed through "distorted" music and "muttering" speech;^{[1][2][3]} other critics, however, disagree with this assessment.^[4]



Alberich, by Arthur Rackham.

See Also

- Oberon (the French translation of Alberich used for the name of the "King of Fairies" in French and English texts)
- Elegast/Elbegast/Alegast— elf guest, elf spirit (Dutch, German, and Scandinavian texts, respectively)

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[4] See e.g.

- Bulfinch, Thomas. 1834. *Bulfinch's Mythology*. Reprinted by New York: Harper & Row, 1970, p. 354–356, 903. ISBN 0-690-57260-3.
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Auðumbla

Auðumbla (also spelled **Auðumla**, **Auðhumbla** or **Auðhumla**) is the primeval cow of Norse mythology. She is attested in *Gylfaginning*, a part of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, in association with Ginnungagap and Ymir.

Normalized text of R ^[1]

Brodeur's translation

Þá mælti Gangleri: "Hvar bygði Ymir, eða við hvat lifði hann?"

Then said Gangleri: "Where dwelt Ymir, or wherein did he find sustenance?"

<Hár svarar>: "Næst var þat þá er hrímit draup at þar varð af kýr sú er Auðhumla hét, en fjórar mjólkár runnu ór spenum hennar, ok fæddi hún Ymi."

Hár answered: "Straightway after the rime dripped, there sprang from it the cow called Auðumla; four streams of milk ran from her udders, and she nourished Ymir."

Þá mælti Gangleri: "Við hvat fæddisk kýrin?"

Then asked Gangleri: "Wherewithal was the cow nourished?"

Hár svarar: "Hon sleikti hrímsteinana er saltir váru. Ok hinn fyrsta <dag> er hon sleikti steina, kom ór steininum at kveldi manns hár, annan dag manns höfuð, þriðja dag var þar allr maðr. Sá er nefndr Búri[.]"

And Hár made answer: "She licked the ice-blocks, which were salty; and the first day that she licked the blocks, there came forth from the blocks in the evening a man's hair; the second day, a man's head; the third day the whole man was there. He is named Búri[.]"

Auðumbla is not mentioned again in the *Prose Edda* and, apart from one mention in *Nafnaþulur*, her name does not occur in any other ancient source. Nevertheless she is generally accepted by scholars as a genuine part of the Norse mythos and not dismissed as an invention of Snorri Sturluson.

Etymology

Auðumbla's name appears in different variations in the manuscripts of the *Prose Edda*. Its meaning is unclear. The *auð-* prefix can be related to words meaning "wealth", "ease", "fate" or "emptiness", with "wealth" being, perhaps, the most likely candidate. The *-um(b)la* suffix is unclear but, judging from apparent cognates in other Germanic languages, could mean "polled cow". Another theory links it with the name *Ymir*. The name may have been obscure and interpreted differently even in pagan times.

The name can be represented or Anglicized as *Audumbla*, *Audumla*, *Audhumbla*, *Audhumla*, *Authumbla*, *Authumla*, *Authhumbla*, *Authhumla*, *Audhumbla* or *Audhhumla*.

Theories

The Swedish scholar Viktor Rydberg, writing in the late 19th century, drew a parallel between the Norse creation myths and accounts in Zoroastrian and Vedic mythology, postulating a common Proto-Indo-European origin. While many of Rydberg's theories were dismissed as fanciful by later scholars his work on comparative mythology was sound to a large extent. Zoroastrian mythology does have a primeval ox which is variously said to be male or female and comes into existence in the middle of the earth along with the primeval man.



While Ymir suckles at the udder of Auðumbla, Búri is licked out of the ice in this 18th-century painting by Nicolai Abildgaard (1790)

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Dökkálfar and Ljósálfar

In Norse mythology, **Dökkálfar** (Old Norse "Dark Elves", singular **Dökkálfr**) and **Ljósálfar** (Old Norse "Light Elves", singular **Ljósálfr**) are two contrasting types of elves; the prior dwell within the earth and are most swarthy, while the latter live in *Álfheimr*, located in heaven, and are "fairer than the sun to look at". The *Dökkálfar* and the *Ljósálfar* are solely attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Scholars have produced theories about the origin and implications of the dualistic concept.



Elfplay (1866) by August Malmström

Attestations

In the *Prose Edda*, the *Dökkálfar* and the *Ljósálfar* are attested in chapter 17 of the book *Gylfaginning*. In the chapter, Gangleri (the king Gylfi in disguise) asks the enthroned figure of High what other "chief centres" there are in the heavens outside of the spring *Urðarbrunnr*. Gangleri responds that there are many fine places in heaven, including a place called *Álfheimr* (Old Norse "Elf Home" or "Elf World"). High says that the *Ljósálfar* live in *Álfheimr*, while the *Dökkálfar* dwell underground and look—and particularly behave—quite unlike the *Ljósálfar*. High describes the *Ljósálfar* as "fairer than the sun to look at", while the *Dökkálfar* are "blacker than pitch".^[1]

Theories and interpretations

As the concept is only recorded in *Gylfaginning*, it is unclear whether the distinction between the two types of elves was a creation of Snorri, and/or whether or not the distinction is a result of Christian influence by way of importation of the concept of angels. An argument against the angel theory is that the idea of "dark" and "light" aspects of the same beings is not inherently unlikely, death and fertility cults often being closely related.^[2]

Scholar John Lindow comments that whether or not the *Dökkálfar* and the *svartálfar* (Old Norse "swart elves" or "black elves")—whom scholars have commented appear simply to be dwarfs—were considered the same at the time of the writing of the *Prose Edda* is unclear.^[3]

Notes

- [1] Faulkes (1995:19-20).
 [2] Simek (2007:56).
 [3] Lindow (2001:110).

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Draugr

A **draugr**, **draug** or (Icelandic) **draugur** (original Old Norse plural **draugar**, as used here, not "draugrs"), or **dreypur** (Faroese), or **draugen** (Norwegian, Swedish and Danish, meaning "*the draug*"), also known as *aptrganga* ("afturganga" in modern Icelandic) (literally "after-walker", or "one who walks after death") is an undead creature from Norse mythology, a subset of Germanic mythology. The original Norse meaning of the word is ghost, and older literature makes clear distinctions between sea-draug and land-draug. Draugar live in their graves, often guarding treasure buried with them in their burial mound. They are animated corpses - unlike ghosts they have a corporeal body with similar physical abilities as in life.

The Old English cognate was *dréag* ("apparition, ghost").^[1] The Gaelic word *dréag* or *driug* meaning "portent, meteor" is borrowed from either the Old English or the Old Norse word.^[2]

Traits

Draugar possess superhuman strength, can increase their size at will, and carry the unmistakable stench of decay. They are undead corpses from Norse/Icelandic mythology, that appear to retain some semblance of intelligence. They exist either to guard their treasure, wreak havoc on living beings, or torment those who had wronged them in life. The draugr's ability to increase its size also increased its weight, and the body of the draugr was described as being extremely heavy. Thorolf of Eyrbyggja Saga was "uncorrupted, and with an ugly look about him... swollen to the size of an ox," and his body was so heavy that it could not be raised without levers.^{[3][4]} They are also noted for the ability to rise from the grave as wisps of smoke and "swim" through solid rock,^[5] which would be useful as a means of exiting their graves. In folklore the draugar slay their victims through various methods including crushing them with their enlarged forms, devouring their flesh, devouring them whole in their enlarged forms, indirectly killing them by driving them mad, and drinking their blood. Animals feeding near the grave of a draugr may be driven mad by the creature's influence.^[1] They may also die from being driven mad. Thorolf, for example, caused birds that flew over his howe to drop dead.^[6] Draugar are also noted as being able to drive living people insane.^[7]

The draugr's victims were not limited to trespassers in its howe. The roaming ghosts decimated livestock by running the animals to death while either riding them or pursuing them in some hideous, half-flayed form. Shepherds, whose duties to their flocks left them out of doors at night time, were also particular targets for the hunger and hatred of the undead:

... the oxen which had been used to haul Thorolf's body were ridden to death by demons, and every single beast that came near his grave went raving mad and howled itself to death. The shepherd at Hvamm often came racing home with Thorolf after him. One day that Fall neither sheep nor shepherd came back to the

farm.^[6]

Draugar are noted for having numerous magical abilities (referred to as *trollskap*) resembling those of living witches and wizards, such as shape-shifting, controlling the weather, and seeing into the future.[□] Among the creatures that a draugr may turn into are a seal,^{[8][9]} a great flayed bull, a grey horse with a broken back but no ears or tail, and a cat that would sit upon a sleeper's chest and grow steadily heavier until the victim suffocated.[□] The draugr Thrain shape-shifted into a "cat-like creature" (*kattakyn*) in *Hromundar saga Greipssonar*:

Then Thrain turned himself into a troll, and the barrow was filled with a horrible stench; and he stuck his claws into the back of Hromund's neck, tearing the flesh from his bones...^[10]

Draugar have the ability to enter into the dreams of the living,[□] "but it generally happens even so that they leave beside the living person some gift, by which, on awakening, the living person may be assured of the tangible nature of the visit."^[11] Draugar also have the ability to curse a victim, as shown in the *Grettis Saga* where Grettir is cursed to be unable to become any stronger. Draugar also brought disease to a village and could create temporary darkness in daylight hours. While the draugr certainly preferred to be active during the night, it did not appear to be vulnerable to sunlight like some other revenants. A draugr's presence may be shown by a great light that glowed from the mound like "fox-fire."^[12] This fire would form a barrier between the land of the living and the land of the dead.^[13] The draugr could also move magically through the earth, swimming through solid stone as does Killer-Hrapp:

Then Olaf tried to rush Hrapp, but Hrapp sank into the ground where he had been standing and that was the end of their encounter.^[5]

Some draugar are immune to weapons, and only a hero has the strength and courage needed to stand up to so formidable an opponent. In legends the hero would often have to wrestle the draugr back to his grave, thereby defeating him, since weapons would do no good. A good example of this kind of fight is found in the *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*. Although iron could injure a draugr, as is the case with many supernatural creatures, it would not be sufficient to stop it.^[14] Sometimes the hero is required to dispose of the body in unconventional ways. The preferred method is to cut off the draugr's head, burn the body, and dump the ashes in the sea; the emphasis being on making absolutely sure the draugr was dead and gone.[□]

The draugar were said to be either *hel-blár* ("blue-death") or, conversely, *nár-föl* ("corpse-pale").[□] The "blue-death" color was not actually achromatic but was a dark blue or maroon hue that covered the entire body. Glámr, the undead shepherd of the *Grettis saga*, was reported to be dark blue in color^[15] and in *Laxdæla saga* the bones of a dead sorceress who had appeared in dreams were dug up and found to be "blue and evil looking."^[16]

The resting place of the draugr was a tomb that served much as a workable home for the creature. Draugar are able to leave this dwelling place and visit the living during the night. Such visits are supposed to be universally horrible events that often end in death for one or more of the living, which would then warrant the exhumation of the draugr's tomb by a hero. The motivation of the actions of a draugr was primarily jealousy and greed. The greed of a draugr causes it to viciously attack any would-be grave robbers, but the draugr also expresses an innate jealousy of the living, stemming from a longing for the things of the life it once had. This idea is clearly expressed in the *Friðþjofs saga*, where a dying king declared:

My howe shall stand beside the firth. And there shall be but a short distance between mine and Thorsteinn's, for it is well that we should call to one another.^[17]

This desire for the friendship experienced in life is one example of the manifestation of this aspect of the draugr. Draugar also exhibit an immense and nearly insatiable appetite, as shown in the encounter of Aran and Asmund, sword brothers who made an oath that if one should die, the other would sit vigil with him for three days inside the burial mound. When Aran died, Asmund brought his own possessions into the barrow: banners, armor, hawk, hound, and horse. Then Asmund set himself to wait the agreed upon three days:

During the first night, Aran got up from his chair and killed the hawk and hound and ate them. On the second night he got up again from his chair, and killed the horse and tore it into pieces; then he took great bites at the

horse-flesh with his teeth, the blood streaming down from his mouth all the while he was eating... The third night Asmund became very drowsy, and the first thing he knew, Aran had got him by the ears and torn them off.^[18]

Creation of Draugar

After a person's death, the main indicant that the person will become a draugr is that the corpse is not in a horizontal position. In most cases, the corpse is found in an upright or sitting position, and this is an indication that the dead might return.^[19] Any mean, nasty, or greedy person can become a draugr. As noted by Ármann, "most medieval Icelandic ghosts are evil or marginal people. If not dissatisfied or evil, they are unpopular".^[20] This is the prime way that draugar share characteristics with ghosts, since any person can become a ghost. In western culture, ghosts are generally people with unfinished business, or those who are so evil their spirit makes an impact on the place they lived. Ghosts and draugar refuse to follow the prescribed path of death, selfishly staying on Earth when they are supposed to move on. This is easily understandable because, "selfishness is an important attribute of every ghost, and therefore it is no wonder that ghosts tend to be people who were troublesome during their lifetime".^[21] However, unlike ghosts, draugar can also come about through infection by another draugar, such as what appears to be the case of Glámr. When Glámr arrives in the haunted valley in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, "the previous evil spirits are relegated to the sidelines and, when Glámr is found dead, they disappear, whereas he takes over their role as ghost of the valley".^[22] Although Glámr is an arguably marginal character to begin with, it is only after his fight with the first malignant spirit that the first spirit leaves the valley, and Glámr takes it's place wrecking havoc. It is also said in *Eyrbyggja Saga* that a shepherd is killed by a draugr and rises the next night as one himself.

Means of prevention

Traditionally, a pair of open iron scissors were placed on the chest of the recently deceased, and straws or twigs might be hidden among their clothes. The big toes were tied together or needles were driven through the soles of the feet in order to keep the dead from being able to walk. Tradition also held that the coffin should be lifted and lowered in three different directions as it was carried from the house to confuse a possible draugr's sense of direction.

The most effective means of preventing the return of the dead was believed to be the corpse door. A special door was built, through which the corpse was carried feet-first with people surrounding it so the corpse couldn't see where it was going. The door was then bricked up to prevent a return. It is speculated that this belief began in Denmark and spread throughout the Norse culture. The belief was founded on the idea that the dead could only leave through the way they entered.

In *Eyrbyggja Saga* the draugar infesting the home of the Icelander Kiartan were driven off by holding a "door-doom". One by one the draugar were summoned to the door-doom and given judgment, and they were forced out of the home by this legal method. The home was then purified with holy water to ensure they never came back.



The Nørre Nærå Runestone is interpreted as having a "grave binding inscription" used to keep the deceased in its grave.^[23]

Similar creatures

A variation of the draugr is the haugbui. The haugbui (from the Old Norse word **'haugr'** meaning "howe" or "barrow") was a mound-dweller, the dead body living on within its tomb. The notable difference between the two was that the haugbui is unable to leave its grave site and only attacks those that trespass upon their territory.^[1]

The haugbui was rarely found far from its burial place and is a type of undead commonly found in Norse saga material. The creature is said to either swim alongside boats or sail around them in a partially submerged vessel, always on their own. In some accounts, witnesses portray them as shape-shifters who take on the appearance of seaweed or moss-covered stones on the shoreline.^[24]

The words "dragon" and "draugr" are not linguistically related. However, both the serpent and the spirit serve as jealous guardians of the graves of kings or ancient civilizations. Dragons that act as draugar appear in *Beowulf* as well as in some of the heroic lays of the *Poetic Edda* (in the form of Fafnir).

Folklore

Icelandic Sagas

One of the best-known draugr is Glámr, who was defeated by the hero of the *Grettis Saga*. After Glámr dies on Christmas Eve, "people became aware that Glámr was not resting in peace. He wrought such havoc that some people fainted at the sight of him, while others went out of their minds"^[1] After an epic battle between Glámr and Grettir, Grettir eventually gets Glámr on his back, and just before Grettir kills him, Glámr curses Grettir because, "Glámr was endowed with more evil force than most other ghosts"^[1] and thus he was able to speak and leave Grettir with his curse after his death .

A somewhat ambivalent, alternative view of the draugr is presented by the example of Gunnar in *Njál's saga*:

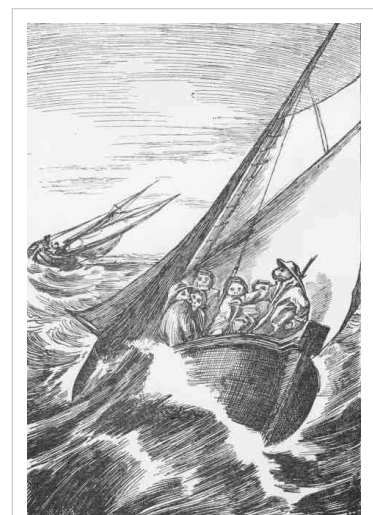
It seemed as though the howe was agape, and that Gunnar had turned within the howe to look upwards at the moon. They thought that they saw four lights within the howe, but not a shadow to be seen. Then they saw that Gunnar was merry, with a joyful face.

In the *Eyrbyggja Saga* a shepherd is assaulted by a blue-black draugr. The shepherd's neck is broken during the ensuing scuffle. The shepherd rises the next night as a draugr.^[1]

Recent

In more recent folklore, the draugr is often identified with the spirits of mariners drowned at sea. In Scandinavian folklore, the creature is said to possess a distinctly human form, with the exception that its head is composed entirely of seaweed. In other tellings, the draug is described as being a headless fisherman, dressed in oilskin and sailing in half a boat. This trait is common in the northernmost part of Norway, where life and culture was based on fishing more than anywhere else. The Norwegian municipality of Bø has the half-boat of draugen in its coat-of-arms. The reason for this may be that the fishermen often drowned in great numbers, and the stories of restless dead coming in from sea were more common up north than anywhere else in the country.

A recorded legend from Trøndelag tells how a corpse lying on a beach became the object of a quarrel between the two types of draugr. A similar source even tells of a third type, the *gleip*, known to hitch themselves to sailors walking ashore and make them slip on the wet rocks. Norwegian folklore thus records a number of different draug-types.



A draugr aboard a ship, in sub-human form, wearing oilskins

But, though the draugr usually presages death, there is an amusing account in Northern Norway of a Nordlending who managed to outwit him:

It was Christmas Eve, and Ola went down to his boathouse to get the keg of brandy he had bought for the holidays. When he got in, he noticed a draugr sitting on the keg, staring out to sea. Ola, with great presence of mind and great bravery (it might not be amiss to state that he already had done some drinking), tiptoed up behind the draug and struck him sharply in the small of the back, so that he went flying out through the window, with sparks hissing around him as he hit the water. Ola knew he had no time to lose, so he set off at a great rate, running through the churchyard which lay between his home and the boathouse. As he ran, he cried, "Up, all you Christian souls, and help me!" Then he heard the sound of fighting between the ghosts and the draugr, who were battling each other with coffin boards and bunches of seaweed. The next morning, when people came to church, the whole yard was strewn with coffin covers, boat boards, and seaweed. After the fight, which the ghosts won, the draugr never came back to that district.

Literature

The modern and popular connection between the draugr and the sea can be traced back to the author Jonas Lie and the story-teller Regine Nordmann, as well as the drawings of Theodor Kittelsen, who spent some years living in Svolvær. Up north, the tradition of sea-draugar is especially vivid.

Arne Garborg describes land-draugar coming fresh from the graveyards, and the term draug is even used of vampires. (In Norway "vampires" is translated as "Bloodsucker-draugar".) The notion of mountain-habiting draug is present in the poetic works of Henrik Ibsen (*Peer Gynt*), and Aasmund Olavsson Vinje. The Nynorsk translation of *The Lord of the Rings* used the term for both ring-wraiths and the dead men of Dunharrow.

Draugr sightings in modern times are not common, but are still reported by individuals from time to time. Due to this trend, the term "draug" has come to be used to describe any type of revenant in Nordic folklore.

Popular culture

- The zombies in *Dead Snow* share qualities with draugr, awakening to protect their stolen gold when the protagonists find them.
- In *The Morganville Vampires* draugr are the ancient enemies of vampires. These draugr are of the sea-draugr kind.
- Draugr are featured heavily in the *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* and *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* expansion, *Bloodmoon*, usually found in the tombs of ancient Nords. In *Skyrim*, they are shown as intelligent (although they possess the same AI as other enemies) zombies clad in armor and speak in an ancient dragon language.
- The draugr is the inspiration for the main character in the webcomic "Draugr" by Patrick Grant.^[25]
- The draugr is also one of the inspirations behind "Serpent's Mound" by Ceri Norman.^[26]
- The "Draug" are villains that walk ashore onto fictional "Solomon Island", New England in "The Secret World".
- The intelligent zombie Vikke of *Lollipop Chainsaw* is loosely based on the Draugr.
- The villain Surt, in the Norse-inspired novel "The Sword and the Satchel" by Elizabeth Boyer, is a draugr.
- The video game *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* features Draugs as an enemy.

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- [4] *Grettirs Saga*, p. 115.
- [5] Magnussen and Palsson, *Laxdaela Saga*, p. 103
- [6] Palsson and Edwards, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, p. 115.
- [7] Gudbrandr Vigfusson and F. York Powell, "Floamanna Saga", in *Origines Islandicae*, Vol II, p. 646.
- [8] Palsson and Edwards, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, p. 165.
- [9] *Laxdaela Saga*, p. 80.
- [10] Kershaw, p. 68
- [12] Fox and Palsson, *Grettirs Saga*, p. 36.
- [13] Davidson, *The Road to Hel*, p. 161.
- [14] Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales and Legends*, p. 107.
- [15] Fox and Palsson, *Grettirs Saga*, p. 72.
- [16] Magnusson and Palsson, *Laxdaela Saga*, p. 235.
- [17] Davidson, *The Road to Hel*, p. 91.
- [18] *Gautreks Saga and Other Medieval Tales*, pp. 99-101.
- [24] The Walking Dead: Draugr and Aptrgangr in Old Norse Literature (<http://forums.skadi.net/archive/index.php/t-76010.html>)

Further reading

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External links

- Norwegian Folk Narrative in America (http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume12/vol12_2.htm)
Norwegian-American Studies
- Weird Tales from Northern Seas (<http://www.online-literature.com/jonas-lie/weird-tales-from-northern-seas/>)
- Draugr and Aptrgangr in Old Norse Literature (<http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/ghosts.shtml>)
- *The Fisherman and the Draug*, by Jonas Lie

Fyrisvellir

Fyrisvellir, **Fyris Wolds** or **Fyrisvallarna** was the marshy plain (*vellir*) south of Gamla Uppsala where travellers had to leave the ships and walk to the Temple at Uppsala and the hall of the Swedish king.

The name is related to, or derived from, Old Norse *Fyrva* which meant "to ebb" and it referred to the partially inundated soggy plains that today are dry farmland and the modern town of Uppsala. In mediaeval times, a royal

estate called *Førisæng*, "Fyris meadow", was located near this field. The small lakes *Övre Föret*, "the Upper Fyri", and *Nedre Föret*, "the Lower Fyri", are remains of this marsh and retain a modern form of *Fyri* (the *-t* suffix is the definite article, which lake names always take in Swedish). The field went alongside what was renamed the *Fyris river* (Fyrisån) in the 17th century to make the connection between the river and the Sagas more obvious.

In Scandinavian mythology, the battle between Haki and Hagleik took place on these wolds, as well as that between Haki and Jorund. It was also the location of the Battle of the Fýrisvellir between Eric the Victorious and his nephew Styrbjörn the Strong, in the 980s.

According to a story about Hrólfr Kraki found in many texts, Hrólfr spread gold on this plain as he and his men were fleeing the Swedish king Adils. The king's men then dismounted to collect the gold. In skaldic poetry gold was often referred to with the kenning *the seed of the Fyris Wolds*.



This article contains content from the Owl Edition of Nordisk familjebok, a Swedish encyclopedia published between 1904 and 1926, now in the public domain.

Coordinates: 59°52′19″N 17°36′51″E^[1]



After the Battle of the Fýrisvellir, by Mårten Eskil Winge (1888).

References

- [1] http://tools.wmflabs.org/geohack/geohack.php?pagenam=Fyrisvellir¶ms=59_52_19_N_17_36_51_E_

Garmr

In Norse mythology, **Garmr** or **Garm** (Old Norse "rag"^[1]) is a dog associated with Ragnarök, and described as a blood-stained watchdog that guards Hel's gate.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

The *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál* mentions Garmr:

The best of trees | must Yggdrasil be,
 Skíðblaðnir best of boats;
 Of all the gods | is Óðinn the greatest,
 And Sleipnir the best of steeds;
 Bifröst of bridges, | Bragi of skalds,
 Hábrók of hawks, | and Garm of hounds.^[2]

One of the refrains of *Völuspá* uses Garmr's howling to herald the coming of Ragnarök:

Now Garm howls loud | before Gnipahellir,
 The fetters will burst, | and the wolf run free;
 Much do I know, | and more can see
 Of the fate of the gods, | the mighty in fight.^[3]

After the first occurrence of this refrain the Fimbulvetr is related; the second occurrence is succeeded by the invasion of Jötnar (giants) in the world of gods; after the last occurrence, the rise of a new and better world is described.

Baldurs draumar describes a journey which Odin makes to Hel. Along the way he meets a dog.

Then Óðinn rose, | the enchanter old,
 And the saddle he laid | on Sleipnir's back;
 Thence rode he down | to Niflhel deep,
 And the hound he met | that came from hell.
 Bloody he was | on his breast before,
 At the father of magic | he howled from afar;
 Forward rode Óðinn, | the earth resounded
 Till the house so high | of Hel he reached.^[4]

Although unnamed, this dog is normally assumed to be Garmr.^[5] Alternatively, Garmr is sometimes assumed to be identical to Fenrir. In either case it is often suggested that Snorri invented the battle between Garmr and Týr, since it is not mentioned in the surviving poetry. Garmr is sometimes seen as a hellhound, comparable to Cerberus.



"Hel" (1889) by Johannes Gehrts.

Prose Edda

The *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning* assigns him a role in Ragnarök:

Then shall the dog Garmr be loosed, which is bound before Gnipahellir: he is the greatest monster; he shall do battle with Týr, and each become the other's slayer.^[6]

Etymology

Bruce Lincoln brings together Garmr and the Greek mythological dog Cerberus, deriving both names from a Proto-Indo-European root **ger-* "to growl" (perhaps with the suffixes *-*m/*b* and *-*r*).^[7]

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:52).

[2] Bellows (1923.) (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe06.htm>)

[3] Bellows (1923). (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe03.htm>)

[4] Bellows (1923). (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe13.htm>)

[5] Lincoln (1991:97) (http://books.google.com/books?id=1aVe-YRHs7UC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_navlinks_s#v=onepage&q=&f=false)

[6] Brodeur (1916). (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/pre/pre04.htm>)

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Geri and Freki

In Norse mythology, **Geri** and **Freki** (Old Norse, both meaning "the ravenous" or "greedy one") are two wolves which are said to accompany the god Odin. They are attested in the *Poetic Edda*, a collection of epic poetry compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, and in the poetry of skalds. The pair has been compared to similar figures found in Greek, Roman and Vedic mythology, and may also be connected to beliefs surrounding the Germanic "wolf-warrior bands", the *Úlfhéðnar*.

Etymology

The names *Geri* and *Freki* have been interpreted as meaning either "the greedy one" or "the ravenous one".^[1] The name *Geri* can be traced back to the Proto-Germanic adjective **geraz*, attested in Burgundian *girs*, Old Norse *gerr* and Old High German *ger* or *giri*, all of which mean "greedy".^[2] The name *Freki* can be traced back to the Proto-Germanic adjective **freakaz*, attested in Gothic *faihu-friks* "covetous, avaricious", Old Norse *frekr* "greedy", Old English *frec* "desirous, greedy, gluttonous, audacious" and Old High German *freh* "greedy".^[3] John Lindow interprets both Old Norse names as nominalized adjectives.^[4] Bruce Lincoln further traces *Geri* back to a Proto-Indo-European stem **gher-*, which is the same as that found in *Garmr*, a name referring to the hound closely associated with the events of Ragnarök.^[5]

Attestations

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál*, the god Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) provides the young Agnarr with information about Odin's companions. Agnarr is told that Odin feeds Geri and Freki while the god himself consumes only wine:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Geri and Freki the war-wont sates,
the triumphant sire of hosts;
but on wine only the famed in arms,
Odin, ever lives.^[6]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Freki and Geri does Heerfather feed,
The far-famed fighter of old:
But on wine alone does the weapon-decked god,
Othin, forever live.^[7]

The pair is also alluded to via the kenning "Viðrir's (Odin's) hounds" in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, verse 13, where it is related that they roam the field "greedy for the corpses of those who have fallen in battle".^[8]



Benjamin Thorpe translation:

The warriors went to the trysting place of swords,
which they had appointed at Logafjöll.

Broken was Frodi's peace between the foes:

Vidrir's hounds went about the isle
slaughter-greedy.^[9]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

The warriors forth to the battle went,

The field they chose at Logafjoll;

Frothi's peace midst foes they broke,

Through the isle went hungrily Vithrir's
hounds.^[10]

In the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning* (chapter 38), the enthroned figure of High explains that Odin gives all of the food on his table to his wolves Geri and Freki and that Odin requires no food, for wine is to him both meat and drink. High then quotes the above mentioned stanza from the poem *Grímnismál* in support.^[11] In chapter 75 of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál* a list of names for wargs and wolves is provided that includes both Geri and Freki.^[12]

In skaldic poetry *Geri* and *Freki* are used as common nouns for "wolf" in chapter 58 of *Skáldskaparmál* (quoted in works by the skalds Þjóðólfr of Hvinir and Egill Skallagrímsson) and *Geri* is again used as a common noun for "wolf" in chapter 64 of the *Prose Edda* book *Háttatal*.^[13] *Geri* is referenced in kennings for "blood" in chapter 58 of *Skáldskaparmál* ("Geri's ales" in a work by the skald Þórðr Sjáreksson) and in for "carrion" in chapter 60 ("Geri's morsel" in a work by the skald Einarr Skúlason).^[14] *Freki* is also used in a kenning for "carrion" ("Freki's meal") in a work by Þórðr Sjáreksson in chapter 58 of *Skáldskaparmál*.^[15]

Archaeological record

If the rider on horseback on the image on the Böksta Runestone has been correctly identified as Odin, then Geri and Freki are shown taking part in hunting an elk or moose.^[16]

Theories

Freki is also a name applied to the monstrous wolf Fenrir in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*. Folklorist John Lindow sees irony in the fact that Odin feeds one Freki at his dinner table and another—Fenrir—with his flesh during the events of Ragnarök.^[17]

Historian Michael Spiedel connects Geri and Freki with archaeological finds depicting figures wearing wolf-pelts and frequently found wolf-related names among the Germanic peoples, including Wulfhroc ("Wolf-Frock"), Wolfhetan ("Wolf-Hide"), Isangrim ("Grey-Mask"), Scrutolf ("Garb-Wolf") and Wolfgang ("Wolf-Gait"), Wolfdregil ("Wolf-Runner"), and Vulfolaic ("Wolf-Dancer") and myths regarding wolf warriors from Norse mythology (such as the *Úlfhéðnar*). Spiegel believes this to point to the pan-Germanic wolf-warrior band cult centered around Odin that waned away after Christianization.^[18]

Scholars have also noted Indo-European parallels to the wolves Geri and Freki as companions of a divinity. 19th century scholar Jacob Grimm observed a connection between this aspect of Odin's character and the Greek Apollo, to whom both the wolf and the raven are sacred.^[19] Philologist Maurice Bloomfield further connected the pair with the two dogs of Yama in Vedic mythology, and saw them as a Germanic counterpart to a more general and widespread Indo-European "Cerberus"-theme.^[20] Michael Spiedel finds similar parallels in the Vedic Rudra and the Roman Mars. Elaborating on the connection between wolves and figures of great power, he writes: "This is why Geri and Freki, the wolves at Woden's side, also glowered on the throne of the Anglo-Saxon kings. Wolf-warriors, like Geri and Freki, were not mere animals but mythical beings: as Woden's followers they bodied forth his might, and so did wolf-warriors."^[18]



A Vendel era bronze plate found on Öland, Sweden depicting a wolf-pelt warrior drawing a sword beside a dancing figure.

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:90; 106); Lindow (2001:120; 139).
 [2] Orel (2003:132).
 [3] Orel (2003:113).
 [4] Lindow (2001:120 and 139).
 [5] Lincoln (1991:99).
 [6] Thorpe (1907:21).
 [7] Bellows (1923:92).
 [8] Lincoln views this activity as the reason behind their epithet "ravenous" or "greedy". See Lincoln (1991:99).
 [9] Thorpe (1907:138).
 [10] Bellows (1936:295-296).
 [11] Faulkes (1995:33).
 [12] Faulkes (1995:64).
 [13] Faulkes (1995:135 and 204).
 [14] Faulkes (1995:136 and 138).
 [15] Faulkes (1995:136).
 [16] Silén (1993:88—91).
 [17] Lindow (2001:120).
 [18] Spiedel (2004:24—28).
 [19] Grimm (1882:147).
 [20] Bloomfield also mentions another Nordic pair in this connection: *Geri* "Greedy" and *Gifr* "Violent" are two dogs which guard the maiden Menglöð in the *Fjölsvinnsmál*. See Bloomfield (1908:316-318).

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Gulltoppr

In Norse mythology, **Gulltoppr** (Old Norse "golden mane"^[1]) is one of the horses of the gods. Gulltoppr is mentioned in a list of horses in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál* and in *Nafnaþulur* section of the *Prose Edda*. According to *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, he is the horse of Heimdallr. Rudolf Simek theorizes that Snorri assigned a horse to Heimdallr in an attempt to systematize the mythology.^[1]

Notes

[1] Simek (2007:122).

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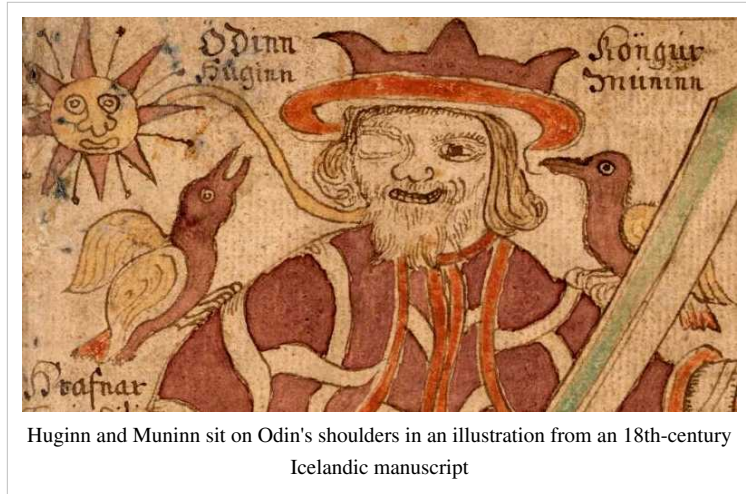
Hati

Hati may refer to:

- Hati Hróðvitnisson, a wolf in Norse mythology
 - Hati (moon), one of the planet Saturn's moons
 - Hati, Iran, a village in Khuzestan Province, Iran
 - Hati District, an administrative subdivision of Khuzestan Province, Iran
 - Hati Rural District, an administrative subdivision of Khuzestan Province, Iran
 - Haiti, a country with a similar spelling
-

Huginn and Muninn

In Norse mythology, **Huginn** (from Old Norse "thought"^[1]) and **Muninn** (Old Norse "memory"^[2] or "mind"^[3]) are a pair of ravens that fly all over the world, Midgard, and bring information to the god Odin. Huginn and Muninn are attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources: the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, compiled in the 13th century by Óláfr Þórðarson; and in the poetry of skalds. The names of the ravens are sometimes modernly anglicized as **Hugin** and **Munin**.



Huginn and Muninn sit on Odin's shoulders in an illustration from an 18th-century Icelandic manuscript

In the *Poetic Edda*, a disguised Odin expresses that he fears that they may not return from their daily flights. The *Prose Edda* explains that Odin is referred to as "raven-god" due to his association with Huginn and Muninn. In the *Prose Edda* and the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, the two ravens are described as perching on Odin's shoulders. *Heimskringla* details that Odin gave Huginn and Muninn the ability to speak.

Migration Period golden bracteates, Vendel era helmet plates, a pair of identical Germanic Iron Age bird-shaped brooches, Viking Age objects depicting a moustached man wearing a helmet, and a portion of the 10th or 11th century Thorwald's Cross may depict Odin with one of the ravens. Huginn and Muninn's role as Odin's messengers has been linked to shamanic practices, the Norse raven banner, general raven symbolism among the Germanic peoples, and the Norse concepts of the fylgja and the hamingja.

Attestations

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál*, the god Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) provides the young Agnarr with information about Odin's companions. He tells the prince about Odin's wolves Geri and Freki, and, in the next stanza of the poem, states that Huginn and Muninn fly daily across the entire world, Midgard. Grímnir says that he worries Huginn may not come back, yet more does he fear for Muninn:



Odin enthroned and holding his spear Gungnir, flanked by his ravens Huginn and Muninn and wolves Geri and Freki (1882) by Carl Emil Doepler

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Hugin and Munin fly each day
over the spacious earth.

I fear for Hugin, that he come not back,
yet more anxious am I for Munin.^[4]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

O'er Mithgarth Hugin and Munin both
Each day set forth to fly;

For Hugin I fear lest he come not home,
But for Munin my care is more.^[5]

In the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning* (chapter 38), the enthroned figure of High tells Gangleri (king Gylfi in disguise) that two ravens named Huginn and Muninn sit on Odin's shoulders. The ravens tell Odin everything they see and hear. Odin sends Huginn and Muninn out at dawn, and the birds fly all over the world before returning at dinner-time. As a result, Odin is kept informed of many events. High adds that it is from this association that Odin is referred to as "raven-god". The above mentioned stanza from *Grímnismál* is then quoted.^[6]

In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál* (chapter 60), Huginn and Muninn appear in a list of poetic names for ravens. In the same chapter, excerpts from a work by the skald Einarr Skúlason are provided. In these excerpts Muninn is referenced in a common noun for 'raven' and Huginn is referenced in a kenning for 'carrion'.^[7]

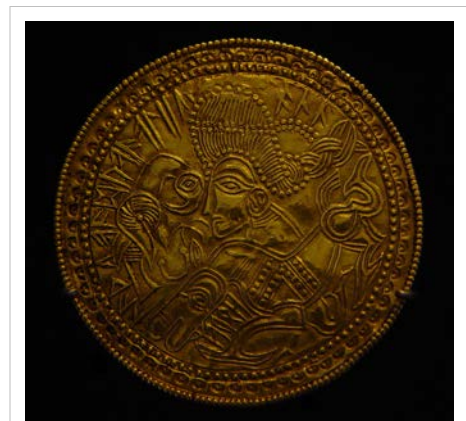
In the *Heimskringla* book *Ynglinga saga*, an Euhemerized account of the life of Odin is provided. Chapter 7 describes that Odin had two ravens, and upon these ravens he bestowed the gift of speech. These ravens flew all over the land and brought him information, causing Odin to become "very wise in his lore."^[8]

In the *Third Grammatical Treatise* an anonymous verse is recorded that mentions the ravens flying from Odin's shoulders; Huginn seeking hanged men, and Muninn slain bodies. The verse reads:

Two ravens flew from Hnikar's [Óðinn's]
shoulders; Huginn to the hanged and
Muninn to the slain [lit. corpses].^[9]

Archaeological record

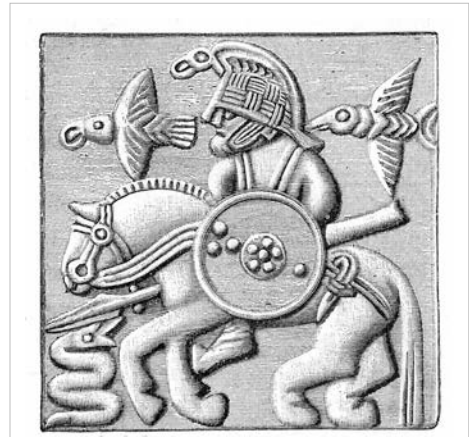
Migration Period (5th and 6th century AD) gold bracteates (types A, B, and C) feature a depiction of a human figure above a horse, holding a spear and flanked by one or more often two birds. The presence of the birds has led to the iconographic identification of the human figure as the god Odin, flanked by Huginn and Muninn. Like Snorri's *Prose Edda* description of the ravens, a bird is sometimes depicted at the ear of the human, or at the ear of the horse. Bracteates have been found in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway with a small amounts found in England and areas south of Denmark.^[10] Austrian Germanist Rudolf Simek states that these bracteates may depict Odin's healing of a horse, and the depictions of the birds by the horse may indicate that the ravens are healing the horse. He says that this may indicate that Odin's ravens were not originally just Odin's battlefield companions, but also "Odin's helpers in his veterinary function."^[11]



A C-type bracteate (DR BR42) featuring a figure above a horse flanked by a bird

Vendel era helmet plates (from the 6th or 7th century) found in grave in Sweden depict a helmeted figure holding a spear and a shield while riding a horse, flanked by two birds. The plate has been interpreted as Odin accompanied by two birds; his ravens.^[12]

A pair of identical Germanic Iron Age bird-shaped brooches from Bejsebakke in northern Denmark may be depictions of Huginn and Muninn. The back of each bird feature a mask-motif, and the feet of the birds are shaped like the heads of animals. The feathers of the birds are also composed of animal-heads. Together, the animal-heads on the feathers form a mask on the back of the bird. The birds have powerful beaks and fan shaped tails, indicating that they are ravens. The brooches were intended to be worn on each shoulder, after Germanic Iron Age fashion.^[13] Archaeologist Peter Vang Petersen comments that while the symbolism of the brooches is open to debate, the shape of the beaks and tail feathers confirms the brooch depictions are ravens. Petersen notes that "raven-shaped ornaments worn as a pair, after the fashion of the day, one on each shoulder, makes one's thoughts turn towards Odin's ravens and the cult of Odin in the Germanic Iron Age." Petersen says that Odin is associated with disguise and that the masks on the ravens may be portraits of Odin.^[13]



A plate from a Vendel era helmet featuring a figure riding a horse, holding a spear and shield, and confronted by a serpent

The Oseberg tapestry fragments, discovered within the Viking Age Oseberg ship burial in Norway, features a scene containing two black birds hovering over a horse, possibly originally leading a wagon (as a part of a procession of horse-led wagons on the tapestry). In her examination of the tapestry, scholar Anne Stine Ingstad interprets these birds as Huginn and Muninn flying over a covered cart containing an image of Odin, drawing comparison to the images of Nerthus attested by Tacitus in 1 CE.^[14]

Excavations in Ribe in Denmark have recovered a Viking Age lead metal-caster's mold and 11 identical casting-moulds. These objects depict a mustached man wearing a helmet that features two head-ornaments. Archaeologist Stig Jensen proposes these head-ornaments should be interpreted as Huginn and Muninn, and the wearer as Odin. He notes that "similar depictions occur everywhere the Vikings went—from eastern England to Russia and naturally also in the rest of Scandinavia."^[15]

A portion of Thorwald's Cross (a partly surviving runestone erected at Kirk Andreas on the Isle of Man) depicts a bearded human holding a spear downward at a wolf, his right foot in its mouth, and a large bird on his shoulder.^[16] Andy Orchard comments that this bird may be either Huginn or Muninn.^[2] Rundata dates the cross to 940,^[17] while Pluskowski dates it to the 11th century.^[16] This depiction has been interpreted as Odin, with a raven or eagle at his shoulder, being consumed by the monstrous wolf Fenrir during the events of Ragnarök.^{[16][18]}

In November 2009, the Roskilde Museum announced the discovery and subsequent display of a niello-inlaid silver figurine found in Lejre, Denmark, which they dubbed *Odin from Lejre*. The silver object depicts a person sitting on a throne. The throne features the heads of animals and is flanked by two birds. The Roskilde Museum identifies the figure as Odin sitting on his throne Hliðskjálf, flanked by the ravens Huginn and Muninn.^[19]

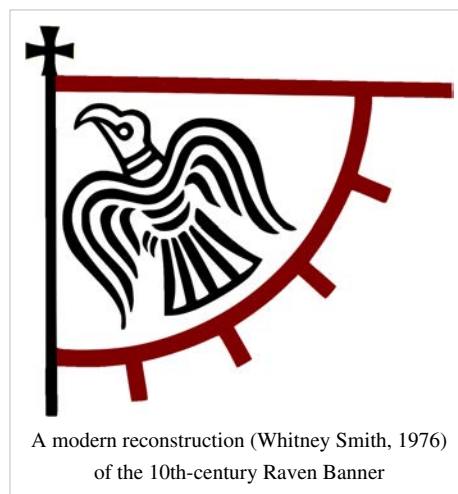
Theories

Scholars have linked Odin's relation to Huginn and Muninn to shamanic practice. John Lindow relates Odin's ability to send his "thought" (Huginn) and "mind" (Muninn) to the trance-state journey of shamans. Lindow says the *Grímnismál* stanza where Odin worries about the return of Huginn and Muninn "would be consistent with the danger that the shaman faces on the trance-state journey."^[20]

Rudolf Simek is critical of the approach, stating that "attempts have been made to interpret Odin's ravens as a personification of the god's intellectual powers, but this can only be assumed from the names Huginn and Muninn themselves which were unlikely to have been invented much before the 9th or 10th centuries" yet that the two ravens, as Odin's companions, appear to derive from much earlier times.^[11]

Instead, Simek connects Huginn and Muninn with wider raven symbolism in the Germanic world, including the Raven Banner (described in English chronicles and Scandinavian sagas), a banner which was woven in a method that allowed it, when fluttering in the wind, to appear as if the raven depicted upon it was beating its wings.^[11]

Anthony Winterbourne connects Huginn and Muninn to the Norse concepts of the fylgja—a concept with three characteristics; shape-shifting abilities, good fortune, and the guardian spirit—and the hamingja—the ghostly double of a person that may appear in the form of an animal. Winterbourne states that "The shaman's journey through the different parts of the cosmos is symbolized by the *hamingja* concept of the shape-shifting soul, and gains another symbolic dimension for the Norse soul in the account of Oðin's ravens, Huginn and Muninn."^[21] In response to Simek's criticism of attempts to interpret the ravens "philosophically", Winterbourne says that "such speculations [...] simply strengthen the conceptual significance made plausible by other features of the mythology" and that the names *Huginn* and *Muninn* "demand more explanation than is usually provided."^[21]



Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:92).

[2] Orchard (1997:115).

[3] Lindow (2001:186).

[4] Thorpe (1907:21).

[5] Bellows (1923:92).

[6] Faulkes (1995:33).

[7] Faulkes (1995:138, 244, and 247).

[8] Hollander (2007:11).

[9] Wills (2006:8).

[10] Simek (2007:43 and 164).

[11] Simek (2007:164).

[12] Simek (2007:164) and Lindow (2005:187).

[13] Petersen (1990:62).

[14] Ingstad (1995:141–142).

[15] Jensen (1990:178).

[16] Pluskowski (2004:158).

[17] Entry Br Olsen;185A in Rundata 2.0

[18] Jansson (1987:152)

[19] Roskilde Museum. Odin fra Lejre (<http://roskildemuseum.dk/Default.aspx?ID=310>) and additional information (<http://www.roskildemuseum.dk/Default.aspx?ID=306&Purge=True>). Retrieved Nov 16, 2009.

[20] Lindow (2001:188).

[21] Winterbourne (2004:38–41).

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Kraken

Kraken



The *colossal octopus*: pen and wash drawing by malacologist Pierre Dénys de Montfort, 1801, from the descriptions of French sailors reportedly attacked by such a creature off the coast of Angola

Mythology	Norse
Grouping	Legendary creature
Sub-grouping	Sea monster
Country	Greenland
Habitat	Greenland Sea

Kraken (/ˈkreɪkən/ or /ˈkrɑːkən/)^[1] are legendary sea monsters of giant proportions said to dwell off the coasts of Norway and Greenland. The legend may have originated from sightings of giant squid that are estimated to grow to 13–15 m (40–50 ft) in length, including the tentacles.^[2]^[1] The sheer size and fearsome appearance attributed to the kraken have made it a common ocean-dwelling monster in various fictional works.

History

The 13th century Old Icelandic saga *Örvar-Odds saga* tells of two massive sea-monsters called Hafgufa ("sea mist") and Lyngbagr ("heather-back"). The *hafgufa* is believed to be a reference to the kraken:

Now I will tell you that there are two sea-monsters. One is called the *hafgufa* (sea-mist), another *lyngbagr* (heather-back). Whales are the biggest of everything in the world, but the *hafgufa* is the greatest monster occurring in the water. It is its nature that it swallows both men and ships and whales and everything that it can reach. It is submerged both by day and night together, and when it strikes up its head and nose above the surface, then it stays at least until the turn of the tide. Now, that sound we sailed through? We sailed between its jaws, and its nose and lower jaw were those rocks that appeared to you in the ocean, while the *lyngbagr* was the island we saw sinking down. However, Qgmundur Floki has sent these creatures to you by means of his secret arts for to cause the death of you and all your men. He thought that more men should have gone the same way as those that had already drowned, and he expected that the *hafgufa* would have swallowed us all. Today I sailed through its mouth because I knew that it had recently surfaced.^[3]

After returning from Greenland, the anonymous author of the Old Norwegian scientific work *Konungs skuggsjá* (circa 1250) described in detail the physical characteristics and feeding behavior of these beasts. The narrator proposed there must only be two in existence, stemming from the observation that the beasts have always been sighted in the same parts of the Greenland Sea, and that each seemed incapable of reproduction, as there was no increase in their numbers.

There is a fish that is still unmentioned, which it is scarcely advisable to speak about on account of its size, because it will seem to most people incredible. There are only a very few who can speak upon it clearly, because it is seldom near land nor appears where it may be seen by fishermen, and I suppose there are not many of this sort of fish in the sea. Most often in our tongue we call it *hafgufa*. Nor can I conclusively speak about its length in ells, because the times he has shown before men, he has appeared more like land than like a fish. Neither have I heard that one had been caught or found dead; and it seems to me as though there must be no more than two in the oceans, and I deem that each is unable to reproduce itself, for I believe that they are always the same ones. Then too, neither would it do for other fish if the *hafgufa* were of such a number as other whales, on account of their vastness, and how much subsistence that they need. It is said to be the nature of these fish that when one shall desire to eat, then it stretches up its neck with a great belching, and following this belching comes forth much food, so that all kinds of fish that are near to hand will come to present location, then will gather together, both small and large, believing they shall obtain there food and good eating; but this great fish lets its mouth stand open the while, and the gap is no less wide than that of a great sound or fjord, And nor may the fish avoid running together there in their great numbers. But as soon as its stomach and mouth is full, then it locks together its jaws and has the fish all caught and enclosed, that before greedily came there looking for food.^[4]

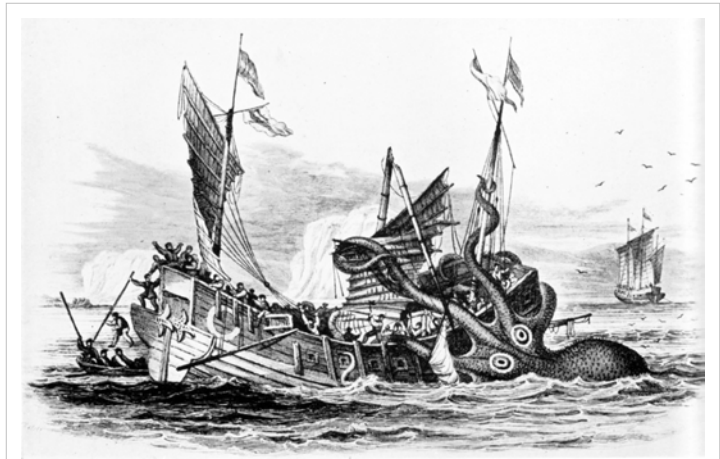
Carolus Linnaeus classified the kraken as a cephalopod, designating the scientific name *Microcosmus marinus* in the first edition of his *Systema Naturae* (1735), a taxonomic classification of living organisms. The creature was excluded from later editions.^{[5][6]} Linnaeus's later work, *Fauna Suecica* (1746) calls the creature *singulare monstrum*, "a unique monster", and says of it *Habitare fertur in mari Norwegico, ipse non dum animal vidi*, "It is said to inhabit the seas of Norway, but I have not seen this animal".^[7]

Kraken were also extensively described by Erik Pontoppidan, bishop of Bergen, in his *Det Forste Forsorg paa Norges Naturlige Historie* "Natural History of Norway" (Copenhagen, 1752–3).^{[8][9]} Pontoppidan made several claims regarding kraken, including the notion that the creature was sometimes mistaken for an island^[10] and that the real danger to sailors was not the creature itself but rather the whirlpool left in its wake.^[11] However, Pontoppidan also described the destructive potential of the giant beast: "it is said that if [the creature's arms] were to lay hold of the largest man-of-war, they would pull it down to the bottom".^{[10][11][12]} According to Pontoppidan, Norwegian fishermen often took the risk of trying to fish over kraken, since the catch was so plentiful^[6] (hence the saying "You must have fished on Kraken"^[13]). Pontoppidan also proposed that a specimen of the monster, "perhaps a young and careless one", was washed ashore and died at Alstahaug in 1680.^{[12][14]} By 1755, Pontoppidan's description of the kraken had been translated into English.^[15]

Swedish author Jacob Wallenberg described the kraken in the 1781 work *Min son på galejan* ("My son on the galley"):

... Kraken, also called the Crab-fish, which is not that huge, for heads and tails counted, he is no larger than our Öland is wide [i.e., less than 16 km] ... He stays at the sea floor, constantly surrounded by innumerable small fishes, who serve as his food and are fed by him in return: for his meal, (if I remember correctly what E. Pontoppidan writes,) lasts no longer than three months, and another three are then needed to digest it. His excrements nurture in the following an army of lesser fish, and for this reason, fishermen plumb after his resting place ... Gradually, Kraken ascends to the surface, and when he is at ten to twelve fathoms, the boats had better move out of his vicinity, as he will shortly thereafter burst up, like a floating island, spurting water from his dreadful nostrils and making ring waves around him, which can reach many miles. Could one doubt that this is the Leviathan of Job?^[16]

In 1802, the French malacologist Pierre Dénys de Montfort recognized the existence of two kinds of giant octopus in *Histoire Naturelle Générale et Particulière des Mollusques*, an encyclopedic description of mollusks. Montfort claimed that the first type, the *kraken octopus*, had been described by Norwegian sailors and American whalers, as well as ancient writers such as Pliny the Elder. The much larger second type, the *colossal octopus*, was reported to have attacked a sailing vessel from Saint-Malo, off the coast of Angola.^[10]



Pierre Dénys de Montfort's "Poulpe Colossal" attacks a merchant ship (1810)

Montfort later dared more sensational claims.

He proposed that ten British warships, including the captured French ship of the line *Ville de Paris*, which had mysteriously disappeared one night in 1782, must have been attacked and sunk by giant octopuses. The British, however, knew—courtesy of a survivor from the *Ville de Paris*—that the ships had been lost in a hurricane off the coast of Newfoundland in September 1782, resulting in a disgraceful revelation for Montfort.^[6]

Appearance and origins

Since the late 18th century, kraken have been depicted in a number of ways, primarily as large octopus-like creatures, and it has often been alleged that Pontoppidan's kraken might have been based on sailors' observations of the giant squid. In the earliest descriptions, however, the creatures were more crab-like^[14] than octopus-like, and generally possessed traits that are associated with large whales rather than with giant squid. Some traits of kraken resemble undersea volcanic activity occurring in the Iceland region, including bubbles of water; sudden, dangerous currents; and appearance of new islets.

Etymology

The English word *kraken* is taken from Norwegian but its origins are otherwise obscure.^[17] In Norwegian, *Kraken* is the definite form of *krake*, a word designating an unhealthy animal or something twisted (cognate with the English *crook* and *crank*).^[18] In modern German, *Krake* (plural and declined singular: *Kraken*) means octopus, but can also refer to the legendary Kraken.^[19]

Legacy

Although fictional and the subject of myth, the legend of the kraken continues to the present day, with numerous references existing in popular culture, including film, literature, television, video games and other miscellaneous examples (e.g. postage stamps, a rollercoaster ride, and a rum product).

In 1830 Alfred Tennyson published the irregular sonnet *The Kraken*,^[20] which described a massive creature that dwelled at the bottom of the sea:

Below the thunders of the upper deep;
Far far beneath in the abysmal sea,
His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee
About his shadowy sides; above him swell
Huge sponges of millennial growth and height;
And far away into the sickly light,
From many a wondrous grot and secret cell
Unnumber'd and enormous polypi
Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green.
There hath he lain for ages, and will lie
Battening upon huge seaworms in his sleep,
Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;
Then once by man and angels to be seen,
In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.



An illustration from the original 1870 edition of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* by author Jules Verne

Pontoppidan's description influenced Jules Verne's depiction of the famous giant squid in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* from 1870.

Later developments of the kraken image may be traced at Kraken in popular culture.

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- [6] " Kraken (<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=3X1GAQAIAAJ&pg=PA255>)". *Encyclopædia Metropolitana; or, Universal Dictionary of Knowledge* . 21. B. Fellowes, London. 1845. pp. 255–258.

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External links

- "King's Mirror" (See Chapter XII) (<http://www.mediumaevum.com/75years/mirror/index.html>)

Ratatoskr

In Norse mythology, **Ratatoskr** (Old Norse, generally considered to mean "drill-tooth"^[1] or "bore-tooth"^[2]) is a squirrel who runs up and down the world tree Yggdrasil to carry messages between the unnamed eagle, perched atop Yggdrasil, and the wyrm Níðhöggr, who dwells beneath one of the three roots of the tree. Ratatoskr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Scholars have proposed theories about the implications of the squirrel.

Etymology

The name *Ratatoskr* contains two elements: *rata-* and *-toskr*. The element *toskr* is generally held to mean "tusk". Guðbrandur Vigfússon theorized that the *rati-* element means "the traveller". Vigfússon says that the name of the legendary drill Rati may feature the same term. According to Vigfússon, *Ratatoskr* means "tusk the traveller" or "the climber tusk."^[3]

Sophus Bugge theorized that the name *Ratatoskr* is a loan from Old English meaning "Rat-tooth." Bugge's basis hinges on the fact that the *-toskr* element of the compound does not appear anywhere else in Old Norse. Bugge proposed that the *-toskr* element is a reformation of the Old English word *tūsc* (Old Frisian *tusk*) and, in turn, that the element *Rata-* represents Old English *ræt* ("rat").^[4]

According to Albert Sturtevant, "[as] far as the element *Rata-* is concerned, Bugge's hypothesis has no valid foundation in view of the fact that the [Old Norse] word *Rata* (gen. form of *Rati**) is used in *Háv[amál]* (106, 1) to signify the instrument which Odin employed for *boring* his way through the rocks in quest of the poet's mead [...]" and that "*Rati** must then be considered a native [Old Norse] word meaning "The Borer, Gnawer" [...]."^[4]

Sturtevant says that Bugge's theory regarding the element *-toskr* may appear to be supported by the fact that the word does not appear elsewhere in Old Norse. Sturtevant, however, disagrees. Sturtevant says that the Old Norse proper name *Tunne* (derived from Proto-Norse **Tunþē*) refers to "a person who is characterized as having some peculiar sort of *tooth*" and theorizes a Proto-Germanic form of *-toskr*. Sturtevant concludes that "the fact that the [Old Norse] word occurs only in the name *Rata-toskr* is no valid evidence against this assumption, for there are many [Old Norse] *hapax legomena* of native origin, as is attested by the equivalents in the Mod[ern] Scandinavian dialects."^[5] Modern scholars have accepted this etymology, listing the name *Ratatoskr* as meaning "drill-tooth" (Jesse Byock, Andy Orchard, Rudolf Simek^[1]) or "bore-tooth" (John Lindow^[2]).



A 17th century Icelandic manuscript depicting Ratatoskr. Although unexplained in the manuscript and not otherwise attested, in this image Ratatoskr bears a horn.

Attestations

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál*, the god Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) says that Ratatoskr runs up and down Yggdrasil bringing messages between the eagle perched atop it and Níðhöggr below it:



A red squirrel in an evergreen tree in Norway

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Ratatösk is the squirrel named, who has run
in Yggdrasil's ash;
he from above the eagle's words must carry,
and beneath the Nidhöggr repeat.^[6]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Ratatosk is the squirrel who there shall run
On the ash-tree Yggdrasil;
From above the words of the eagle he bears,
And tells them to Nithogg beneath.^[7]

Ratatoskr is described in the *Prose Edda's Gylfaginning's* chapter 16, in which High states that

'An eagle sits at the top of the ash, and it has knowledge of many things. Between its eyes sits the hawk called Vedrfolnir [...]. The squirrel called Ratatosk [...] runs up and down the ash. He tells slanderous gossip, provoking the eagle and Nidhogg.'^[8]

Theories

According to Rudolf Simek, "the squirrel probably only represents an embellishing detail to the mythological picture of the world-ash in *Grímnismál*."^[9] Hilda Ellis Davidson, describing the world tree, states the squirrel is said to gnaw at it—furthering a continual destruction and re-growth cycle, and posits the tree symbolizes ever-changing existence.^[10] John Lindow points out that Yggdrasil is described as rotting on one side and as being chewed on by four harts and Níðhöggr, and that, according to the account in *Gylfaginning*, it also bears verbal hostility in the fauna it supports. Lindow adds that "in the sagas, a person who helps stir up or keep feuds alive by ferrying words of malice between the participants is seldom one of high status, which may explain the assignment of this role in the mythology to a relatively insignificant animal."^[2]

Richard W. Thorrington Jr. and Katie Ferrell theorize that "the role of Ratatosk probably derived from the habit of European tree squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*) to give a scolding alarm call in response to danger. It takes little imagination for you to think that the squirrel is saying nasty things about you."^[11]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:129), Simek (2007:261), and Byock (2005:173).
- [2] Lindow (2001:259).
- [3] Vigfusson (1874:483).
- [4] Sturtevant (1956:111).
- [5] Sturtevant (1956:111–112).
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- [8] Byock (2005:26).
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Sköll

In Norse mythology, **Sköll** (Old Norse "Treachery")^[1] is a wolf that chases the horses *Árvakr* and *Alsviðr*, that drag the chariot which contains the sun (*Sól*) through the sky every day, trying to eat her. Sköll has a brother, *Hati*, who chases *Máni*, the moon. At *Ragnarök*, both Sköll and *Hati* will succeed in their quests.

Sköll, in certain circumstances, is used as a *heiti* to refer indirectly to the father (*Fenrir*) and not the son. This ambiguity works in the other direction also, for example in *Vafþrúðnismál*, where confusion exists in stanza 46 where *Fenrir* is given the sun-chasing attributes of his son Sköll. This can mostly be accounted for by the use of *Hróðvitnir* and *Hróðvitnisson* to refer to both *Fenrir* and his sons.

Popular culture

- Sköll is the name of a rare spirit animal in wolf form in *World of Warcraft*. The area he appears in is strongly influenced by Norse mythology.
- In one episode of Tiziano Sclavi's *Dylan Dog, the Nightmare Investigator*, Sköll and his brother *Hati*, were used as characters in tale N°289 "La via degli enigmi" ("The Way of Puzzles") and N°290 "L'erede Oscuro" ("The Dark Heir"); in which they are evil creatures who serve the main antagonist.
- In the 2nd season episode "Død Kalm" of *The X-Files*, Special Agent Dana Scully tells the story of Sköll in a voice-over.
- In the Anita Blake novels the Sköll and *Hati* are the enforcers of the *Ulfric* (Werewolf leader).
- In the MMORPG *RuneScape*, *Hati* appeared during January 2011 and could be fought by players for in-game bonuses, and *Hati* returned in January 2012 accompanied by Sköll.
- A.A.S.R.Skøll is the name of the Amsterdam Student Rowing Club Skøll.
- Sköll is the surname of the Norwegian bassist Hugh Steven James Mingway who has played in *Ved Buens Ende*, *Arcturus* (band) and *Ulver*.
- Sköll and his brother *Hati* appear in the comic *Off-White*. In the comic, he has abandoned his duty to chase the sun, instead choosing to reincarnate as a normal wolf.

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:150).

References

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hati_Hróðvitnisson



"The Wolves Pursuing Sol and Mani" (1909) by J. C. Dollman.



"Far away and long ago" (1920) by Willy Pogany.

Sleipnir

In Norse mythology, **Sleipnir** (Old Norse "slippy"^[1] or "the slipper"^[2]) is an eight-legged horse. Sleipnir is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In both sources, Sleipnir is Odin's steed, is the child of Loki and Svaðilfari, is described as the best of all horses, and is sometimes ridden to the location of Hel. The *Prose Edda* contains extended information regarding the circumstances of Sleipnir's birth, and details that he is grey in color.



"Odin Rides to Hel" (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

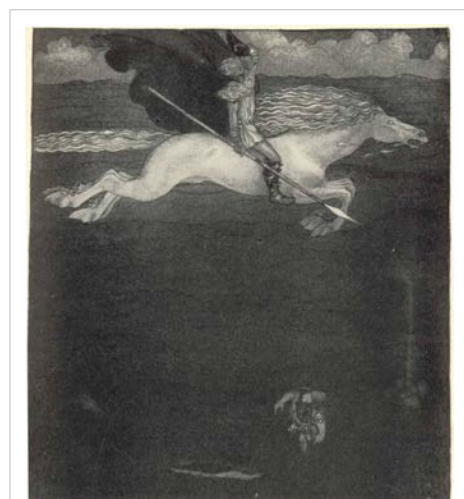
Additionally, Sleipnir is mentioned in a riddle found in the 13th century legendary saga *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, in the 13th century legendary saga *Völsunga saga* as the ancestor of the horse Grani, and book I of *Gesta Danorum*, written in the 12th century by Saxo Grammaticus, contains an episode considered by many scholars to involve Sleipnir. Sleipnir is generally accepted as depicted on two 8th century Gotlandic image stones; the Tjängvide image stone and the Ardre VIII image stone.

Scholarly theories have been proposed regarding Sleipnir's potential connection to shamanic practices among the Norse pagans. In modern times, Sleipnir appears in Icelandic folklore as the creator of Ásbyrgi, in works of art, literature, software, and in the names of ships.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, Sleipnir appears or is mentioned in the poems *Grímnismál*, *Sigrdrífumál*, *Baldurs draumar*, and *Hyndluljóð*. In *Grímnismál*, Grimnir (Odin in disguise and not yet having revealed his identity) tells the boy Agnar in verse that Sleipnir is the best of horses ("Odin is the best of the Æsir, Sleipnir of horses").^[3] In *Sigrdrífumál*, the valkyrie Sigrdrífa tells the hero Sigurðr that runes should be cut "on Sleipnir's teeth and on the sledge's strap-bands."^[4] In *Baldurs draumar*, after the Æsir convene about the god Baldr's bad dreams, Odin places a saddle on Sleipnir and the two ride to the location of Hel.^[5] The *Völuspá hin skamma* section of *Hyndluljóð* says that Loki produced "the wolf" with Angrboða, produced Sleipnir with Svaðilfari, and thirdly "one monster that was thought the most baleful, who was descended from Býleistr's brother."^[6]



"Odin and Sleipnir" (1911) by John Bauer.

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, Sleipnir is first mentioned in chapter 15 where the enthroned figure of High says that every day the Æsir ride across the bridge Bifröst, and provides a list of the Æsir's horses. The list begins with Sleipnir: "best is Sleipnir, he is Odin's, he has eight legs."^[7] In chapter 41, High quotes the *Grímnismál* stanza that mentions Sleipnir.^[8]

In chapter 42, Sleipnir's origins are described. Gangleri (described earlier in the book as King Gylfi in disguise) asks High who the horse Sleipnir belongs to and what there is to tell about it. High expresses surprise in Gangleri's lack of knowledge about Sleipnir and its origin. High tells a story set "right at the beginning of the gods' settlement, when the gods established Midgard and built Val-Hall" about an unnamed builder who has offered to build a fortification for the gods in three seasons that will keep out invaders in exchange for the goddess Freyja, the sun, and the moon. After some debate, the gods agree to this, but place a number of restrictions on the builder, including that he must complete the work within three seasons with the help of no man. The builder makes a single request; that he may have help from his stallion Svaðilfari, and due to Loki's influence, this is allowed. The stallion Svaðilfari performs twice the deeds of strength as the builder, and hauls enormous rocks to the surprise of the gods. The builder, with Svaðilfari, makes fast progress on the wall, and three days before the deadline of summer, the builder was nearly at the entrance to the fortification. The gods convene, and figured out who was responsible, resulting in a unanimous agreement that, along with most trouble, Loki was to blame.^[9]

The gods declare that Loki would deserve a horrible death if he could not find a scheme that would cause the builder to forfeit his payment, and threatened to attack him. Loki, afraid, swore oaths that he would devise a scheme to cause the builder to forfeit the payment, whatever it would cost himself. That night, the builder drove out to fetch stone with his stallion Svaðilfari, and out from a wood ran a mare. The mare neighed at Svaðilfari, and "realizing what kind of horse it was," Svaðilfari became frantic, neighed, tore apart his tackle, and ran towards the mare. The mare ran to the wood, Svaðilfari followed, and the builder chased after. The two horses ran around all night, causing the building work to be held up for the night, and the previous momentum of building work that the builder had been able to maintain was not continued.^[10]

When the Æsir realize that the builder is a hrimthurs, they disregard their previous oaths with the builder, and call for Thor. Thor arrives, and kills the builder by smashing the builder's skull into shards with the hammer Mjöllnir. However, Loki had "such dealings" with Svaðilfari that "somewhat later" Loki gave birth to a grey foal with eight legs; the horse Sleipnir, "the best horse among gods and men."^[10]

In chapter 49, High describes the death of the god Baldr. Hermóðr agrees to ride to Hel to offer a ransom for Baldr's return, and so "then Odin's horse Sleipnir was fetched and led forward." Hermóðr mounts Sleipnir and rides away. Hermóðr rides for nine nights in deep, dark valleys where Hermóðr can see nothing. The two arrive at the river Gjöll



An illustration of Odin riding Sleipnir from an 18th century Icelandic manuscript.



An 18th century *Prose Edda* manuscript illustration featuring Hermóðr upon Sleipnir (left), Baldr (upper right), and Hel (lower right).

and then continue to Gjöll bridge, encountering a maiden guarding the bridge named Móðguðr. Some dialogue occurs between Hermóðr and Móðguðr, including that Móðguðr notes that recently there had ridden five battalions of dead men across the bridge that made less sound than he. Sleipnir and Hermóðr continue "downwards and northwards" on the road to Hel, until the two arrive at Hel's gates. Hermóðr dismounts from Sleipnir, tightens Sleipnir's girth, mounts him, and spurs Sleipnir on. Sleipnir "jumped so hard and over the gate that it came nowhere near." Hermóðr rides up to the hall, and dismounts from Sleipnir. After Hermóðr's pleas to Hel to return Baldr are accepted under a condition, Hermóðr and Baldr retrace their path backward and return to Asgard.^[11]

In chapter 16 of the book *Skáldskaparmál*, a kenning given for Loki is "relative of Sleipnir."^[12] In chapter 17, a story is provided in which Odin rides Sleipnir into the land of Jötunheimr and arrives at the residence of the jötunn Hrungrnir. Hrungrnir asks "what sort of person this was" wearing a golden helmet, "riding sky and sea," and says that the stranger "has a marvellously good horse." Odin wagers his head that no horse as good could be found in all of Jötunheimr. Hrungrnir admitted that it was a fine horse, yet states that he owns a much longer-paced horse; Gullfaxi. Incensed, Hrungrnir leaps atop Gullfaxi, intending to attack Odin for Odin's boasting. Odin gallops hard ahead of Hrungrnir, and, in his, fury, Hrungrnir finds himself having rushed into the gates of Asgard.^[13] In chapter 58, Sleipnir is mentioned among a list of horses in *Porgrímspula*: "Hrafn and Sleipnir, splendid horses [...]"^[14] In addition, Sleipnir occurs twice in kennings for "ship" (once appearing in chapter 25 in a work by the skald Refr, and "sea-Sleipnir" appearing in chapter 49 in *Húsdrápa*, a work by the 10th century skald Úlfr Uggason).^[15]

Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks

In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, the poem *Heiðreks gátur* contains a riddle that mentions Sleipnir and Odin:

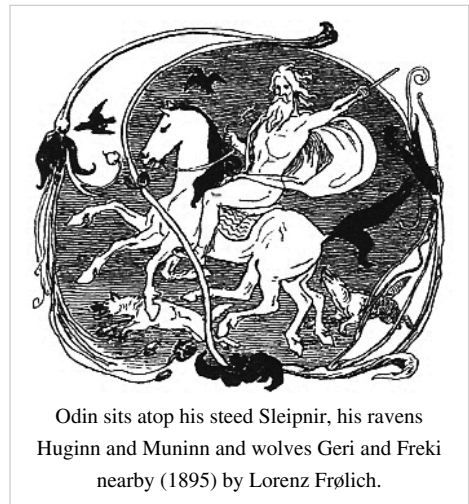
36. Gestumblindi said:

"Who are the twain
that on ten feet run?
three eyes they have,
but only one tail.

Alright guess now
this riddle, Heithrek!"

Heithrek said:

"Good is thy riddle, Gestumblindi,
and guessed it is:
that is Odin riding on Sleipnir."^[16]



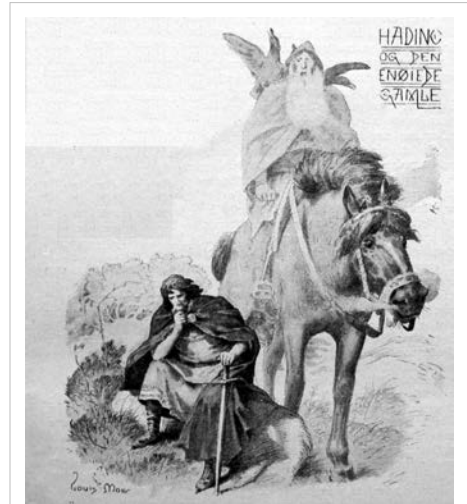
Odin sits atop his steed Sleipnir, his ravens Huginn and Muninn and wolves Geri and Freki nearby (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Völsunga saga

In chapter 13 of *Völsunga saga*, the hero Sigurðr is on his way to a wood and he meets a long-bearded old man he had never seen before. Sigurd tells the old man that he is going to choose a horse, and asks the old man to come with him to help him decide. The old man says that they should drive the horses down to the river Busiltjörn. The two drive the horses down into the deeps of Busiltjörn, and all of the horses swim back to land but a large, young, and handsome grey horse that no one had ever mounted. The grey-bearded old man says that the horse is from "Sleipnir's kin" and that "he must be raised carefully, because he will become better than any other horse." The old man vanishes. Sigurd names the horse Grani, and the narrative adds that the old man was none other than (the god) Odin.^[17]

Gesta Danorum

Sleipnir is generally considered as appearing in a sequence of events described in book I of *Gesta Danorum*.^[18] In book I, the young Hadingus encounters "a certain man of great age who had lost an eye" who allies him with Liserus. Hadingus and Liserus set out to wage war on Lokerus, ruler of Kurland. Meeting defeat, the old man takes Hadingus with him onto his horse as they flee to the old man's house, and the two drink an invigorating draught. The old man sings a prophecy, and takes Hadingus back to where he found him on his horse. During the ride back, Hadingus trembles beneath the old man's mantle, and peers out of its holes. Hadingus realizes that he is flying through the air: "and he saw that before the steps of the horse lay the sea; but was told not to steal a glimpse of the forbidden thing, and therefore turned his amazed eyes from the dread spectacle of the roads that he journeyed."^[19] Additionally, in book II, Biarco mentions Odin and Sleipnir: "If I may look on the awful husband of Frigg, howsoever he be covered in his white shield, and guide his tall steed, he shall in no way go safe out of Leire; it is lawful to lay low in war the war-waging god."^[20]



"Hadingus and the Old Man" (1898) by Louis Moe.

Archaeological record

Two of the 8th century picture stones from the island of Gotland, Sweden depict eight-legged horses, which are thought by most scholars to depict Sleipnir: the Tjängvide image stone and the Ardre VIII image stone. Both stones feature a rider sitting atop an eight-legged horse, which some scholars view as Odin. Above the rider on the Tjängvide image stone is a horizontal figure holding a spear, which may be a valkyrie, and a female figure greets the rider with a cup. The scene has been interpreted as a rider arriving at the world of the dead.^[21]



Detail of figure riding an eight-legged horse on the Tjängvide image stone



The Ardre VIII image stone

Theories

John Lindow theorizes that Sleipnir's "connection to the world of the dead grants a special poignancy to one of the kennings in which Sleipnir turns up as a horse word," referring to the skald Úlfr Uggason's usage of "sea-Sleipnir" in his *Húsdrápa*, which describes the funeral of Baldr. Lindow continues that "his use of Sleipnir in the kenning may show that Sleipnir's role in the failed recovery of Baldr was known at that time and place in Iceland; it certainly indicates that Sleipnir was an active participant in the mythology of the last decades of paganism." Lindow adds that the eight legs of Sleipnir "have been interpreted as an indication of great speed or as being connected in some unclear way with cult activity."^[21]

Hilda Ellis Davidson says that "the eight-legged horse of Odin is the typical steed of the shaman" and that in the shaman's journeys to the heavens or the underworld, a shaman "is usually represented as riding on some bird or animal." Davidson says that while the creature may vary, the horse is fairly common "in the lands where horses are in general use, and Sleipnir's ability to bear the god through the air is typical of the shaman's steed" and cites an example from a study of shamanism by Mircea Eliade of an eight-legged foal from a story of a Buryat shaman. Davidson says that while attempts have been made to connect Sleipnir with hobby horses and steeds with more than four feet that appear in carnivals and processions, but that "a more fruitful resemblance seems to be on the bier on which a dead man is carried in the funeral procession by four bearers; borne along thus, he may be described as riding on a steed with eight legs." As an example, Davidson cites a funeral dirge from the Gondi people in India as recorded by Verrier Elwin, stating that "it contains references to Bagri Maro, the horse with eight legs, and it is clear from the song that it is the dead man's bier." Davidson says that the song is sung when a distinguished Muria dies, and provides a verse:^[22]

What horse is this?

It is the horse of Bagri Maro.

What should we say of its legs?

This horse has eight legs.

What should we say of its heads?

This horse has four heads. . . .

Catch the bridle and mount the horse.^[22]

Davidson adds that the representation of Odin's steed as eight-legged could arise naturally out of such an image, and that "this is in accordance with the picture of Sleipnir as a horse that could bear its rider to the land of the dead."^[22]

Ulla Loumand cites Sleipnir and the flying horse Hófvarpnir as "prime examples" of horses in Norse mythology as being able to "mediate between earth and sky, between Ásgarðr, Miðgarðr and Útgarðr and between the world of mortal men and the underworld."^[23]

The *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture* theorizes that Sleipnir's eight legs may be the remnants of horse-associated divine twins found in Indo-European cultures and ultimately stemming from Proto-Indo-European religion. The encyclopedia states that "[...] Sleipnir is born with an extra set of legs, thus representing an original pair of horses. Like Freyr and Njörðr, Sleipnir is responsible for carrying the dead to the otherworld." The encyclopedia cites parallels between the birth of Sleipnir and myths originally pointing to a Celtic goddess who gave birth to the Divine horse twins. These elements include a demand for a goddess by an unwanted suitor (the hrimthurs demanding the goddess Freyja) and the seduction of builders.^[24]

Modern influence

According to Icelandic folklore, the horseshoe shaped canyon Ásbyrgi located in Jökulsárgljúfur National Park, northern Iceland was formed by Sleipnir's hoof.^[25] Sleipnir is depicted with Odin on Dagfin Werenskjold's wooden relief "Odin på Sleipnir" (1945–1950) on the exterior of the Oslo City Hall in Oslo, Norway.^[1] Sleipnir has been and remains a popular name for ships in Northern Europe, and Rudyard Kipling's short story entitled "*Sleipnir*," late "*Thurinda*"^[26] (1888) features a horse named "Sleipnir."^[25] A statue of Sleipnir (1998) stands in Wednesbury, England, a town which takes its name from the Anglo-Saxon version of Odin, Wōden.^[27]



The horseshoe shaped canyon Ásbyrgi.

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:151).
- [2] Kermode (1904:6).
- [3] Larrington (1999:58).
- [4] Larrington (1999:169).
- [5] Larrington (1999:243).
- [6] Larrington (1999:258).
- [7] Faulkes (1995:18).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:34).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:35).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:36).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:49–50).
- [12] Faulkes (1995:76).
- [13] Faulkes (1995:77).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:136).
- [15] Faulkes (1995:92 and 121).
- [16] Hollander (1936:99).
- [17] Byock (1990:56).
- [18] Lindow (2001:276–277).
- [19] Grammaticus & Elton (2006:104–105).
- [20] Grammaticus & Elton (2006:147).
- [21] Lindow (2001:277).
- [22] Davidson (1990:142–143).
- [23] Loumand (2006:133).
- [24] Mallory. Adams (1997:163).
- [25] Simek (2007:294).
- [26] <http://books.google.com/books?id=KeEhAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA141#v=onepage&q=&f=false>
- [27] Noszlopy, Waterhouse (2005:181).

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Surtr

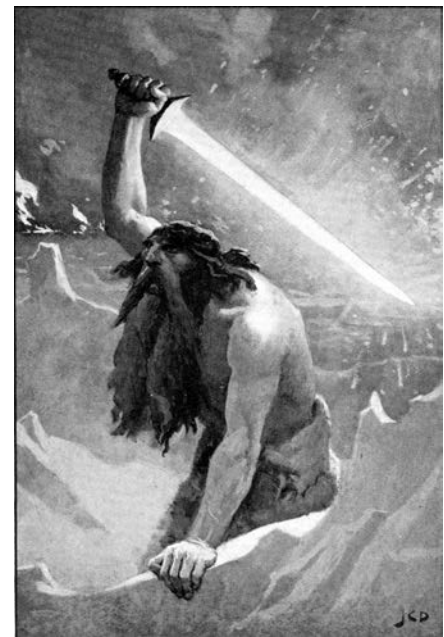
In Norse mythology, **Surtr** (Old Norse "black"^[1] or "the swarthy one"^[2]) is a jötunn. Surtr is attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. In both sources, Surtr is foretold as being a major figure during the events of Ragnarök; carrying his bright sword, he will go to battle against the Æsir, he will do battle with the major god Freyr, and afterward the flames that he brings forth will engulf the Earth.

In a poem from the *Poetic Edda*, Surtr is described as having a female companion, Sinmara. In a book from the *Prose Edda* additional information is given about Surtr, including that he is stationed guarding the frontier of the fiery realm Múspell, that he will lead "Múspell's sons" to Ragnarök, and that he will defeat Freyr. Surtr has been the subject of place names and artistic depictions, and scholarly theories have been proposed about elements of Surtr's descriptions and his potential origins.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

Surtr is mentioned twice in the poem *Völuspá*, where a völva divulges information to the god Odin. The völva says that, during Ragnarök, Surtr will come from the south with flames, carrying a very bright sword:



"The Giant with the Flaming Sword" (1909) by John Charles Dollman.



"Surtr with the Flaming Sword" (1882) by Friedrich Wilhelm Engelhard.

Old Norse:	English:
Sutr ferr sunnan	Surtr moves from the south
með sviga lævi:	with the scathe of branches:
skinn af sverði	there shines from his sword
sól valtíva. ^[3]	the sun of Gods of the Slain. ^[3]

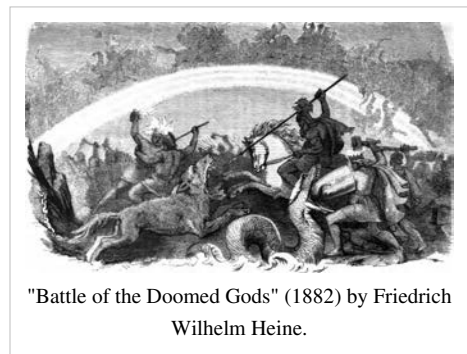
Following this, the *völva* says that "stone peaks clash", "troll wives take to the road", "warriors tread the path from Hel", and the heavens "break apart". The next stanza relates that Odin is to be killed by the wolf Fenrir, and that Surtr will go to battle against the god Freyr. No further detail is given about the fight between Surtr and Freyr in the poem. In the stanzas that follow, a number of gods and their opponents are described as doing battle at Ragnarök, and that the world will be consumed in flames, yet afterward the world will resurface anew and fertile, and the surviving gods will meet again.^[3]

In the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*, the wise *jötunn* Vafþrúðnir poses the question to Odin (disguised as "Gagnráðr") "what the plain is called where in battle Surt and the sweet gods will meet". Odin responds that the "ordained field" is Vígríðr, and that it stretches "a hundred leagues" in every direction.^[4] Later in the poem, Odin, still disguised and now questioning Vafþrúðnir, asks which of the *Æsir* will "rule over the possessions of the gods when Surt's fire is slaked". Vafþrúðnir responds that, "when Surt's fire is slaked" the god Thor's sons Móði and Magni shall possess Thor's hammer Mjöllnir.^[5]

In the poem *Fáfnismál*, the hero Sigurd asks the mortally wounded dragon Fáfnir the name of the island where Surtr and the *Æsir* "will mingle sword-liquid together". Fáfnir says that the island is called Óskópnir, that all of the gods shall go there bearing spears, and that on their way there the bridge Bifröst will break beneath them, causing their horses to "flounder in the great river".^[6] In the poem *Fjölsvinnsmál* Surtr is mentioned as having a female companion named Sinmara.^[7]

Prose Edda

In chapter 4 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of Third tells Gangleri (described as King Gylfi in disguise) about the location of Múspell. Third says that the bright and flaming region of Múspell existed prior to Niflheim, and it is impassable to those not native to the region. To defend Múspell, Surtr is stationed at its frontier. Third adds that Surtr has a flaming sword, and that "at the end of the world he will go and wage war and defeat all the gods and burn the whole world with fire". The stanza from *Völuspá* that foretells Surtr moving from the south is then quoted.^[8] In chapter 18, Gangleri asks what will protect the fair hall Gimlé "when Surtr's fire burns heaven and earth".^[9]



"Battle of the Doomed Gods" (1882) by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine.

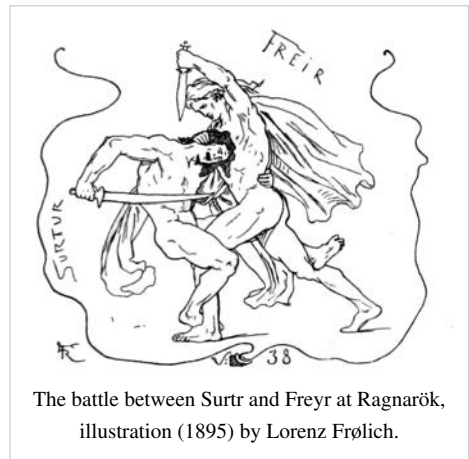
In chapter 51 of *Gylfaginning*, High describes the events of Ragnarök. High says that "amid this turmoil the sky will open and from it will ride the sons of Muspell. Surtr will ride in front, and both before and behind him there will be burning fire. His sword will be very fine. Light will shine from it more brightly than from the sun." High continues that when the sons of Múspell ride over the bridge Bifröst it will break, and that they will continue to the field of Vígríðr. The wolf Fenrir and the Midgard Serpent will also arrive there. By then, Loki will have arrived with "all of Hel's people", Hrym, and all of the frost *jötnar*; "but Muspell's sons will have their own battle array; it will be very bright". Further into the chapter, High describes that a fierce battle will erupt between these forces and the *Æsir*, and that during this, Surtr and Freyr will engage in battle "and there will be a harsh conflict before Freyr falls". High adds that the cause of Freyr's death will be that Freyr is lacking "the good sword" that he once gave his servant Skírnir.^[10]

As foretold by High further into chapter 51 *Gylfaginning*, Once Heimdallr and Loki fight (and mutually kill one another), Surtr "will fling fire over the earth burn the whole world". High quotes ten stanzas from *Völuspá* in support, and then proceeds to describe the rebirth and new fertility of the reborn world, and the survivors of Ragnarök, including various gods and the two humans named Líf and Lífthrasir that will have hid from "Surtr's fire" in the wood Hoddmímis holt.^[11]

In the Epilogue section of the book *Skáldskaparmál*, a euhemerized monologue states that "what they called Surt's fire was when Troy burned".^[12] In chapter 2, a work by the skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir is quoted that mentions "Surt's deep vales", using the name *Surtr* as a common noun for a jötunn, with "deep vales" referring to the depths of the mountains (specifically Hnitbjorg).^[13] In chapter 75, Surtr is included within a list of "very powerful" jötnar.^[14]

Theories

Scholar Rudolf Simek theorizes that "the concept of Surtr is undoubtedly old", citing examples of Surtr being mentioned in works by the 10th century skalds Eyvindr skáldaspillir and Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, in poems collected in the *Poetic Edda*, and that the name of the volcanic caves Surtshellir in western Iceland was already recorded in the *Landnámabók* manuscript. Simek notes that jötnar are usually described as living to the east in Old Norse sources, yet Surtr is described as being from the south, and that this "surely has to do with his association with fire and heat". Simek says that "in Iceland Surtr was obviously thought of as being a mighty giant who ruled the powers of (volcanic) fire of the Underworld", and Simek theorizes that the notion of Surtr as an enemy of the gods likely did not originate in Iceland.^[2] Simek compares Surtr to the jötnar Eldr, Eimnir, Logi, and Brandingi, noting that they all appear to be personifications of fire.^[15]



The battle between Surtr and Freyr at Ragnarök, illustration (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Scholar Bertha Phillpotts theorizes that the figure of Surtr was inspired by Icelandic eruptions, and that he was a volcano demon.^[16] Scholar Andy Orchard theorizes that the description of Surtr found in *Gylfaginning* "appears to owe something to biblical and patristic notions of the angel with a flaming sword who expelled Adam and Eve from paradise and who stand guard over the Garden of Eden."^[1] Scholar John Lindow states that the name *Surtr* may imply Surtr's charred appearance.^[17]

Place names and modern influence

Surtshellir, a group of volcanic tunnels in western Iceland recorded in the *Landnámabók* manuscript, is named after Surtr. In modern Iceland, the notion of Surtr as a giant of fire lives on; Surtsey ("Surtr's island"), a volcanic island that appeared in 1963 in Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland, is named after Surtr. The description found in *Gylfaginning* of Surtr guarding the frontier of Múspell is depicted in John Charles Dollman's painting "The Giant with the Flaming Sword".^[2] Surtur, a natural satellite of the planet Saturn, and Surt, a volcano on the planet Jupiter's moon Io, are both named after Surtr. Surtur, a character from the American comic series *Thor*, is based on Surtr (1963). Swedish death metal band Amon Amarth named their eighth studio album *Surtur Rising* after Surtr.

See Also

Poetic Edda

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:154).
- [2] Simek (2007:303–304)
- [3] Dronke (1997:21).
- [4] Larrington (1999:42).
- [5] Larrington (1997:48).
- [6] Larrington (1997:160).
- [7] Bellows (2004:243).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:9–10).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:20).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:53–54).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:54–56).
- [12] Faulkes (1995:66).
- [13] Faulkes (1995:68 and 254).
- [14] Faulkes (1995:156).
- [15] Simek (2007:44).
- [16] Phillpotts (1905:14 ff.) in Davidson (1990:208).
- [17] Lindow (1997:282).

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Svartálfar

In Norse mythology, **svartálfar** (Old Norse "swart elves" or "black elves", singular **svartálfr**) are beings who dwell in **Svartálfaheimr** (Old Norse "world of the swart elves" or "world of the black elves"). Both the svartálfar and Svartálfaheimr are solely attested in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Scholars have noted that the svartálfar appear to be synonymous with dwarfs and potentially also the *dökkálfar* (Old Norse "dark elves").

Attestations

The Svartálfar and Svartálfaheimr are solely attested in the *Prose Edda*, in which they are mentioned in two books; *Gylfaginning* (*Svartálfaheimr*) and *Skáldskaparmál* (*svartálfar*). In chapter 33 of *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High tells of the binding of the wolf Fenrir. High relates that when Fenrir had grown so large that the gods began to grow concerned, the god Odin sent the god Freyr's messenger Skírnir down to Svartálfaheimr to "some dwarfs" who made the silky yet immensely strong fetter Gleipnir from six fantastical ingredients. Whereas the other fetters failed, Gleipnir succeeds in binding the wolf.^[1]

In chapter 35 of *Skáldskaparmál*, it is detailed that the god Loki once cut the lustrous golden hair of the goddess Sif, wife of the god Thor. Upon hearing of the shearing of his wife's locks, Thor, taking hold of Loki, intends to break every bone in Loki's body until Loki swears to get svartálfar to make "a head of hair out of gold that would grow like any other hair". Loki then goes to a group of dwarfs, the Sons of Ivaldi, who not only smith Sif's hair but also various other important objects owned by the gods, and the tale continues.^[2]

Theories and interpretations

Scholars have commented that, as both attestations mentioning the beings and location appear to refer to dwarfs, *svartálfr* and *dwarf* may simply be synonyms for the same concept.^[3] Scholar John Lindow comments that whether the *dökkálfar* and the *svartálfr* were considered the same at the time of the writing of the *Prose Edda* is also unclear.^[4]

Notes

[1] Faulkes (1995:28).

[2] Faulkes (1995:96).

[3] Lindow (2001:110), Orchard (1997:20), and Simek (2007:305).

[4] Lindow (2001:110).

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Svaðilfari

In Norse mythology, **Svaðilfari** (Old Norse "unlucky traveler"^[1]) is a stallion that fathered the eight-legged horse Sleipnir with Loki (in the form of a mare). Svaðilfari was owned by the disguised and unnamed hrimthurs who built the walls of Asgard.



Loki and Svaðilfari (1909) by Dorothy Hardy

Gylfaginning

In chapter 42 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, High tells a story set "right at the beginning of the gods' settlement, when the gods at established Midgard and built Val-Hall" about an unnamed builder who has offered to build a fortification for the gods that will keep out invaders in exchange for the goddess Freyja, the sun, and the moon. After some debate, the gods agree to this, but place a number of restrictions on the builder, including that he must complete the work within three seasons with the help of no man. The builder makes a single request; that he may have help from his stallion Svaðilfari, and due to Loki's influence, this is allowed. The stallion Svaðilfari performs twice the deeds of strength as the builder, and hauls enormous rocks to the surprise of the gods. The builder, with Svaðilfari, makes fast progress on the wall, and three days before the deadline of summer, the builder was nearly at the entrance to the fortification. The gods convened, and figured out who was responsible, which resulted in a unanimous agreement that, along with most trouble, Loki was to blame.^[2]

The gods declare that Loki would deserve a horrible death if he could not find a scheme that would cause the builder to forfeit his payment, and threatened to attack him. Loki, afraid, swore oaths that he would devise a scheme to cause the builder to forfeit the payment, whatever it would cost himself. That night, the builder drove out to fetch stone with his stallion Svaðilfari, and out from a wood ran a mare. The mare neighs at Svaðilfari, and "realizing what kind of horse it was," Svaðilfari becomes frantic, neighs, tears apart his tackle, and runs towards the mare. The mare runs to the wood, Svaðilfari follows, and the builder chases after. The two horses run around all night, causing the building work to be held up for the night, and the previous momentum of building work that the builder had been able to maintain is not continued.^[3]



A depiction of the unnamed master builder with the horse Svaðilfari (1919) by Robert Engels.

When the Æsir realize that the builder is a hrimthurs, they disregard their previous oaths with the builder, and call for Thor. Thor arrives, and kills the builder by smashing the builder's skull into shards with Mjöllnir. However, Loki "had such dealings" with Svaðilfari that "somewhat later" Loki gave birth to a gray foal with eight legs; the horse Sleipnir, "the best horse among gods and men".^[3]

Comparative mythology

- In a Bulgarian epic, the hero Marko is promised in marriage a "weird widow" if he can "construct a tower, but cannot finish the building for want of one last building stone." A certain Aithiopian interfered. (David E. Bynum : "The Dialectic of Narrative in a Bulgarian Ballad", p. 63. In :-- *INDIANA UNIVERSITY URALIC AND ALTAIC STUDIES*, Vol. 141 = Egle Victoria Žygas & Peter Voorheis (eds.) : *Folklorica*. Bloomington, 1982.)
- The name /SVaðiL-fari/ may be etymologically identical with the Vaidik god-name /Savitṛ/ < /*SaViTL/ (the reconstruction with final /*-t̥/ is based on Slavic and Hittite agentives in /-tal/). Savitṛ is likened to a "horse" (Laksman Sarup (tr.) : *The Nighaṅṭu and the Nirukta*. 1920. p. 164, 32nd section).

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:156).

[2] Faulkes (1995:35).

[3] Faulkes (1995:36).

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Tanngrisnir and Tanngnjóstr

Tanngrisnir (Old Norse "teeth-barer, snarler") and **Tanngnjóstr** (Old Norse "teeth grinder") are the goats who pull the god Thor's chariot in Norse mythology. They are attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written by Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century.

The *Prose Edda* relates that when Thor cooks the goats, their flesh provides sustenance for the god, and, after Thor resurrects them with his hammer, Mjöllnir, they are brought back to life the next day. According to the same source, Thor once stayed a night at the home of peasant farmers and shared with them his goat meal, yet one of their children, Þjálfi, broke one of the bones to suck out the marrow, resulting in the lameness of one of the goats upon resurrection. As a result, Thor maintains Þjálfi and his sister Röskva as his servants. Scholars have linked the ever-replenishing goats to the nightly-consumed beast Sæhrímnir in Norse mythology and Scandinavian folk beliefs involving herring bones and witchcraft.

Etymology

The Old Norse name *Tanngrisnir* translates to "teeth-barer, snarler" and *Tanngnjóstr* to "teeth-grinder". Scholar Rudolf Simek comments that the names were young when recorded, and may have been inventions of Snorri.^[1] *Tanngnjóstr* is sometimes modernly anglicized as **Tanngiost**.^[2]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

Thor's goats are mentioned in two poems in the *Poetic Edda*, though they are not referred to by name. In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Hymiskviða*, Thor secures the goats, described as having "splendid horns", with a human named Egil in the realm of Midgard before Thor and the god Tyr continue to the jötunn Hymir's hall.^[3] Later in the same poem Thor is referred to as "lord of goats".^[4]

After having killed Hymir and his many-headed army, Thor's goats collapse, "half-dead", due to lameness. The poem says that this is the fault of Loki, yet that "you have heard this already", and that another, wiser than the poet, could tell the story of how Thor was repaid by a lava-dweller with his children.^[5]

A stanza from the *Poetic Edda* poem *Brymskviða* describes Thor's goat-driven ride to Jötunheimr:



The goats Tanngrisnir and Tanngnjóstr pull the god Thor's chariot in an illustration from 1832.



Thor notices that one of his goats has a lame leg in an illustration (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Straightway were the goats homeward driven,
hurried to the traces; they had fast to run.
The rocks were shivered, the earth was in a blaze;
Odin's son drove to Jötunheim.^[6]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Then home the goats to the hall were driven,
They wrenched at the halters, swift were they to run;
The mountains burst, earth burned with fire,
And Odin's son sought Jotunheim.^[7]

Prose Edda

In chapter 21 of the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High divulges that the god Thor has two goats that drive his chariot and that these goats bear the names Tannngjóstr and Tanngrisnir.^[8]

In chapter 44, the enthroned figure of Third reluctantly relates a tale in which Thor and Loki are riding in Thor's chariot, pulled by his two goats. Loki and Thor stop at the home of a peasant farmer, and there they are given lodging for a night. Thor slaughters his goats, skins them and puts them in a pot. When the goats are cooked, Loki and Thor sit down for their evening meal. Thor invites the peasant family to share the meal with him and they do so.^[9]

At the end of the meal, Thor places the skins of the goat on the opposing side of the fire and tells the peasants to throw the bones of the goats on to the goatskins. The peasant's son Þjálfi takes one of the goat ham-bones and uses a knife to split it open, breaking the bone to get to the marrow.^[9]

After staying the night, Thor wakes up and gets dressed before the break of dawn. Thor takes his hammer Mjölnir, raises it, and blesses the goat skins. Resurrected, the goats stand, but one of the two goats is lame in the hind leg. Noting this new lameness, Thor exclaims that someone has mistreated the bones of his goats; that someone broke the ham-bone during the meal the night before. Third notes that there is no need to draw out the tale, for:

Everyone can imagine how terrified the peasant must have been when he saw Thor making his brows sink down over his eyes; as for what could be seen of the eyes themselves, he thought he would collapse at just the very sight. Thor clenched his hands on the shaft of the hammer so that the knuckles went white, and the peasant did as one might expect, and all his household, they cried out fervently, begged for grace, offered to atone with all their possessions.^[9]

At realizing how terrified he has made the peasants, Thor calms down and from them accepted a settlement of their children Þjálfi and Röskva. The two children become his servants and have remained so since. Leaving the goats behind, the four then set out for the land of Jötunheimr.^[9] The goats are again mentioned in chapter 48, where Thor is described as setting out to Midgard, the realm of mankind, in the form of a young boy, without goats or companions.^[10]

In chapter 75 of the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, the names of both goats appear among a list of names for goats.^[11]



Thor (1910) by Johannes Gehrts

Theories and interpretations

Scholar Rudolf Simek connects Tanngrisnir and Tanngnjóstr with the beast Sæhrímnir (consumed nightly by the gods and the einherjar and rejuvenated every day), noting that this may point to sacrificial rites in shamanic practices.^[12]

In Scandinavian folklore, witches who magically replenish food sometimes appear in tales, the food usually being herring. However, in fear that one would waste away if one were fed the same morsel again and again, folk tales describe the breaking of the herring bones when eating it as a form of precaution. Thematic similarities—bone breaking ending food rejuvenation—between this folk belief and the Old Norse tales of Tanngrisnir and Tanngnjóstr have led scholars Reimund Kvideland and Henning Sehmsdorf to highlight a connection between the two.^[13]

Modern influence

In the Marvel Comics adaptation of the god, Thor usually relies on his hammer to fly. However in situations where he must transport passengers and/or objects, Thor can summon Tanngrisnir and Tanngnjóstr who arrive already harnessed to his chariot, and can be dismissed with equal ease.^[14] The two goats were vital in a later Marvel Comics story, they believed a tale of danger to Odin and summoned reinforcements.^[15]

In the Yu-Gi-Oh Trading Card Game, both Tanngrisnir and Tanngnjóstr are represented as "Nordic Beast" Monster Cards. They are meant to be used in conjunction with other cards representative of other characters and creatures from Norse mythology, including their master Thor.

Notes

[1] Simek (2007:310).

[2] As can be seen in Faulkes (1995:254).

[3] Larrington (1999:79).

[4] Larrington (1999:81).

[5] Larrington (1999:83).

[6] Thorpe (1866:64-65).

[7] Bellows (1823:179).

[8] Faulkes (1995:22).

[9] Faulkes (1995:38).

[10] Faulkes (1995:46).

[11] Faulkes (1995:164).

[12] Simek (2007:273).

[13] Kvideland and Sehmsdorf (2010:170).

[14] Simonson, Walt. *Thor*, "Something Old, Something New". Marvel Comics, 1984, vol. 1, #339

[15] "New Mutants" vol. 1 #83-87 (1989-1990)

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Wōden

Woden or **Wodan** (Old English: *Pōden*,^[1] Old High German: *Wōdan*,^[2] Old Saxon: *Uuōden*^[3]) is a major deity of Anglo-Saxon and Continental Germanic polytheism. Together with his Norse counterpart^[4] Odin, Woden represents a development of the Proto-Germanic god *Wōdanaz.

Though less is known about the pre-Christian religion of Anglo-Saxon and continental Germanic peoples than is known about Norse paganism, Woden is attested in English, German, and Dutch toponyms as well as in various texts and pieces of archeological evidence from the Early Middle Ages.

Etymology and origins

**Wōdanaz* or **Wōdinaz* is the reconstructed Proto-Germanic name of a god of Germanic paganism. The name is connected to the Proto-Indo-European stem **wāt*,^[1] "inspiration",^[5] derived ultimately from the Indo-European theme **awē*, "to blow". **Wāt* continues in Old Irish *fáith*, "poet" or "seer"; Old High German *wut*, "fury"; and Gothic *wods*, "possessed".^[6] Old English had the noun *wōþ* "song, sound", corresponding to Old Norse *óðr*, which has the meaning "fury" but also "poetry, inspiration".^[7] It is possible therefore that **Wōdanaz* was seen as a manifestation of ecstasy, associated with mantic states, fury, and poetic inspiration.^[8] An explicit association of Wodan with the state of fury was made by 11th century German chronicler Adam of Bremen, who, when detailing the religious practices of Scandinavian pagans, described *Wodan, id est furor*, "Wodan, that is, the furious".^[9]

Woden probably rose to prominence during the Migration Period, gradually displacing Tyr as the head of the pantheon in West and North Germanic cultures -- though such theories are only academic speculation based on trends of worship for other Indo-European cognate deity figures related to Tyr.

He is in all likelihood identical with the Germanic god identified as "Mercury" by Roman writers^[10] and possibly with the *regnator omnium deus* (god, ruler of all) mentioned by Tacitus in his 1st century work *Germania*.^[11]

The earliest attestation of the name is as *Wodan* (𐀆𐀗𐀚𐀓) in an Elder Futhark inscription: possibly on the Arguel pebble (of dubious authenticity, if genuine dating to the early 6th century), and on the Nordendorf fibula (early 7th century). Only slightly younger than the runic testimony of the Nordendorf fibula is the *vita* of Saint Columbanus by Jonas of Bobbio, which gives the Latinized *Vodanus* (attested in the dative, as *Vodano*). A further runic inscription, on a brooch from Mülheim-Kärlich, purportedly reading *wodini hailag* "consecrated to Woden", has long been recognized as a falsification.^[12]

Continental Wodan

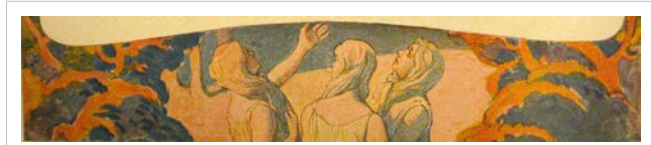
Details of Migration Period Germanic religion are sketchy, reconstructed from artifacts, sparse contemporary sources, and the later testimonies of medieval legends and place names.

According to Jonas of Bobbio, the 6th century Irish missionary Saint Columbanus is reputed to have interrupted an offering being made by the Suebi to "their God Wodan".^[13] "Wuodan" was the chief god of the Alamanni, his name appears in the runic inscription on the Nordendorf fibulae.



The Nordendorf II fibula.

The Langobard historian Paul the Deacon, who died in southern Italy in the 790s, was proud of his tribal origins and related how his people once had migrated from southern Scandinavia.^[14] In his work *Historia Langobardorum*, Paul states that "Wotan ... is adored as a god by all the peoples of Germania"^[15] and



The Winnili women wear their hair to look like long beards

relates how Godan's (Wotan's) wife Frea (Frijjō) had given victory to the Langobards in a war against the Vandals.^[14] The story is an etymology of the name of the Lombards, interpreted as "longbeards". According to the story, the Langobards were formerly known as the "Winnili". In the war with the Vandals, Godan favoured the Vandals, while Frea favoured the Winnili. After a heated discussion, Godan swore that he would grant victory to the first tribe he saw the next morning upon awakening—knowing full well that the bed was arranged so that the Vandals were on his side. While he slept, Frea told the Winnili women to comb their hair over their faces to look like long beards so they would look like men and turned the bed so the Winnili women would be on Godan's side. When he woke up, Godan was surprised to see the disguised women first and asked who these long bearded men were, which was where the tribe got its new name, the "longbeards".

Woden is mentioned in an Old Saxon baptismal vow in Vatican Codex pal. 577 along with Thunear (Thor) and Saxnōt. The 8th- or 9th-century vow, intended for Christianising pagans, is recorded as:

ec forsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum, Thunaer ende Uuöden ende Saxnote ende allum them unholdum the hira genōtas sint

I forsake all devil's work and words, Thunear and Wōden and Saxnōt and all the monsters that are their retainers.^[16]

Recorded during the 9th or 10th century,^[17] one of the two *Merseburg Incantations*, from Merseburg, Germany mentions Wodan who rode into a wood together with Phol. There Balder's horse was injured, and Wodan, together with goddesses, cured the horse with enchantments (Phol is usually identified as Baldr).

Woden in Anglo-Saxon England

"If a West Saxon farmer in pagan times had walked out of his *bury* or *ton* above the Vale of Pewsey some autumn day, and looking up to the hills had caught sight of a bearded stranger seeming in long cloak larger than life as he stalked the skyline through the low cloud; and if they had met at the gallows by the cross-roads where a body still dangled; and if the farmer had noticed the old wanderer glancing up from under a shadowy hood or floppy brimmed hat with a gleam of recognition out of his one piercing eye as though acclaimed a more than ordinary interest, a positive interest, in the corpse;... and if all this had induced in the beholder a feeling of awe; then he would have been justified in believing that he was in the presence of Woden tramping the world of men over his own Wansdyke."

Brian Branston, 1957.^[18]

Anglo-Saxon polytheism reached Great Britain during the 5th and 6th centuries with the Anglo-Saxon migration, and persisted until the completion of the Christianization of England by the 8th or 9th century.

For the Anglo-Saxons, Woden was the psychopomp or carrier-off of the dead, but not necessarily with exactly the same attributes of the Norse Odin. There has been some doubt as to whether the early English had the concepts of Valkyries and Valhalla in the Norse sense. The *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* refers to the *wælcyrrian*, "valkyries", but the term appears to have itself been a loan from Old Norse, and in the text is used to mean "(human) sorceress".^[19]

The Christian writer of the Maxims found in the Exeter Book (341, 28) records the verse *Wōden worhte weos, wuldor alwealda rīme roderas* ("Woden wrought the (heathen) altars / the almighty Lord the wide heavens"). The name of such *Wōdenes weohas* (Saxon *Wōdanes with*, Norse *Oðins ve*) or sanctuaries to Woden survives in toponymy as *Odinsvi*, *Wodenesweg*s.

Royal genealogy

As the Christianisation of England took place, Woden was euhemerised as an important historical king^[20] and was believed to be the progenitor of numerous Anglo-Saxon royal houses.^[21]

Discussing the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (completed in or before 731^[22]) writes that:

The two first commanders are said to have been Hengist and Horsa ... They were the sons of Victgilsus, whose father was Vecta, son of Woden; from whose stock the royal race of many provinces deduce their original.^[23]

The *Historia Brittonum*, composed around 830,^[24] presents a similar genealogy and additionally lists Woden as a descendent of Godwulf,^[25] who likewise in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* is said to be an ancestor of "Vóden, whom we call Odin".^{[26][27]}

According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, composed during the reign of Alfred the Great,^[28] Woden was the father of Wecta, Beldeg, Wihtgils and Wihtlaeg^[29] and was therefore an ancestor of the Kings of Wessex, Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia. As in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, a history of early Anglo-Saxon migration to Britain incorporating Woden as an ancestor of Hengist and Horsa is given:

These men came from three tribes of Germany: from the Old Saxons, from the Angles, and from the Jutes ... their commanders were two brothers, Hengest and Horsa, that were the sons of Wihtgils. Wihtgils was Witta's offspring, Witta Wecta's offspring, Wecta Woden's offspring. From that Woden originated all our royal family ...^[30]

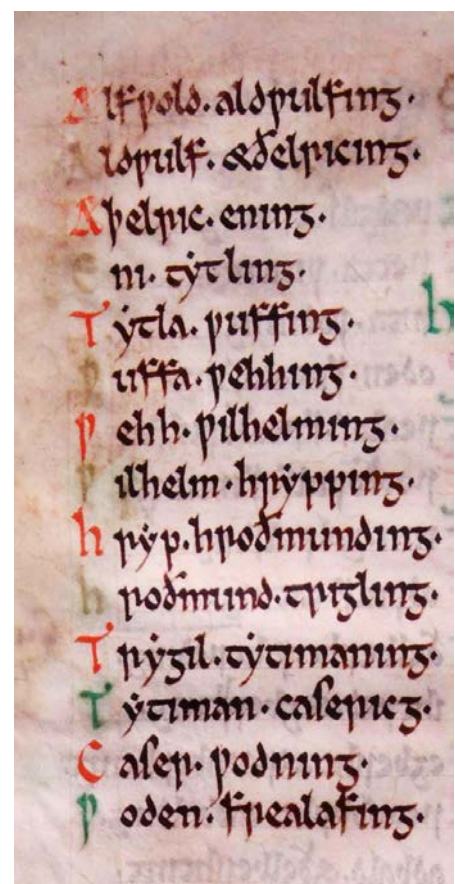
Descent from Woden appears to have been an important concept in Early Medieval England. According to N. J. Higham, claiming Woden as an ancestor had by the 8th century become an essential way of establishing royal authority.^[31] Richard North (1997) believes similarly that "no king by the late seventh century could do without the status that descent from Woden entailed."^[32]

Nine Herbs Charm

Recorded in the 10th century,^[33] the Old English *Nine Herbs Charm* contains a mention of Woden:

*A snake came crawling, it bit a man.
Then Woden took nine glory-twigs,
Smote the serpent so that it flew into nine parts.
There apple brought this pass against poison,
That she nevermore would enter her house.*^[34]

According to R. K. Gordon, the *Nine Herbs Charm* is an originally pagan spell altered by later Christian interpolation.^[35] Baugh and Malone (1959) write that "This narrative ... is a precious relic of English heathendom; unluckily we do not know the Woden myth which it summarizes."^[36] A charm from the same period, *Wið færstice*, refers to the *esa*^[37] ("gods",^[38] cognate of Norse *æsir*) but does not mention any deities by name.



Woden listed as an ancestor of Ælfwald of East Anglia in the *Textus Roffensis* (12th century).

Medieval and Early Modern folklore

Woden persisted as a figure in folklore and folk religion throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern period, notably as the leader of the Wild Hunt found in English, German, Swiss, and Scandinavian traditions.^[39]

Woden is thought to be the precursor of the English Father Christmas, or Father Winter, and the American Santa Claus.^{[40][41][42][43][44][45][46]}

A celebrated late attestation of invocation of Wodan in Germany dates to 1593, in Mecklenburg, where the formula *Wode, Hale dynem Rosse nun Voder* "Wodan, fetch now food for your horse" was spoken over the last sheaf of the harvest.^[47] David Franck adds, that at the squires' mansions, when the rye is all cut, there is *Wodel-beer* served out to the mowers; no one weeds flax on a Wodenstag, lest Woden's horse should trample the seeds; from Christmas to Twelfth-day they will not spin, nor leave any flax on the distaff, and to the question why? they answer, Wode is galloping across. We are expressly told, this wild hunter Wode rides a white horse. (34)

A custom in Schaumburg is reported by Jacob Grimm: the people go out to mow in parties of twelve, sixteen or twenty scythes, but it is managed in such a manner, that on the last day of harvest they are all finished at the same time, or some leave a strip standing which they can cut down at a stroke the last thing, or they merely pass their scythes over the stubble, pretending there is still some left to mow. At the last stroke of the scythe they raise their implements aloft, plant them upright, and beat the blades three times with the strop. Each spills on the field a little of the drink he has, whether beer, brandy, or milk, then drinks himself, while they wave their hats, beat their scythes three times, and cry aloud *Wôld, Wôld, Wôld!* and the women knock all the crumbs out of their baskets on the stubble. They march home shouting and singing. If the ceremony was omitted, the following year would bring bad crops of hay and corn. The first verse of the song is quoted by Grimm,

„Wôld, Wôld, Wôld!	“Wôld, Wôld, Wôld”!
Hävens wei wat schüt,	Heaven's giant knows what happens,
jümm hei dal van Häven süt.	He, looking down from heaven,
Vulle Kruken un Sangen hät hei,	Providing full jugs and sheaves.
upen Holte wässt manigerlei:	Many a plant grows in the woods.
hei is nig barn un wert nig old.	He is not born and grows not old.
Wôld, Wôld, Wôld! “	“Wôld, Wôld, Wôld”!

Grimm notes that the custom had died out in the fifty years preceding his time of writing (1835) *Deutsche Mythologie* (Göttingen) 1835, p. 105-6..

In England there are also folkloric references to Woden, including the "giants' dance" of Woden and Frigg in Dent^[48] as recorded by Grimm,^[49] and the Lincolnshire charm that contained the line "One for God, one for Wod and one for Lok".^[50] Other references include the Northumbrian *Auld Carl Hood* from the ballad *Earl Brand*,^[51] *Herla*,^{[52][53][54][55]} Woden's role as the leader of the Wild Hunt in Northern England^{[56][57][58][59]} and quite possibly *Herne*, the Wild Huntsman of Berkshire.^{[60][61][62][63]}

Legacy

Toponyms

Grimm (*Teutonic Mythology*, ch. 7^[64]) discusses traces of Woden's name in toponymy. Certain mountains were sacred to the service of the god. *Othensberg*, now *Onsberg*, on the Danish island of Samsø; *Odensberg* in Schonen. *Godesberg* near Bonn, from earlier *Wôdenesberg* (annis 947, 974). Near the holy oak in Hesse, which Boniface brought down, there stood a *Wuodenesberg*, still so named in a document of 1154, later *Vdenesberg*, *Gudensberg*; this hill is not to be confounded with *Gudensberg* by Erkshausen, nor with a *Gudenberg* by Oberelsungen and *Zierenberg* so that three mountains of this name occur in Lower Hesse alone; conf. *montem Vodinberg, cum silva*

eidem monti attinente, (doc. of 1265). In a different neighbourhood, a *Henricus comes de Wōdenesberg* is named in a doc. of 1130. A *Wōdnes beorg* in the Saxon Chronicle, later *Wodnesborough*, *Wanborough* in Wiltshire. A *Wōdnesbeorg* in Lappenberg's map near the *Bearucwudu*, conf. *Wodnesbury*, *Wodnesdyke*, *Wōdanesfeld*. To this we must add, that about the Hessian *Gudensberg* the story goes that King Charles lies prisoned in it, that he there won a victory over the Saxons, and opened a well in the wood for his thirsting army, but he will yet come forth of the mountain, he and his host, at the appointed time. The mythus of a victorious army pining for water is already applied to King Carl by the Frankish annalists, at the very moment when they bring out the destruction of the Irminsul; but beyond a doubt it is older : Saxo Grammaticus has it of the victorious Balder.

The *breviarium Lulli*, in names a place in Thuringia: *in Wudaneshusum*, and again *Woteneshusun*; in Oldenburg there is a *Wodensholt*, now *Godensholt*, cited in a land-book of 1428; *Wothenower*, seat of a Brandenburg family anno 1334; not far from Bergen op Zoom, towards Antwerp, stands to this day a *Woensdrecht*, as if *Wodani trajectum*. *Woensel* = *Wodenssele*, *Wodani aula*, a so-called stadsdeel of the city of Eindhoven on the Dommel in Northern Brabant. This *Woensel* is like the *Oðinssalr*, *Othänsäle*, *Onsala*; *Wunstorp*, *Wunsdorf*, a convent and small town in Lower Saxony, stands unmutilated as *Wodensdorp* in a document of 1179. Near Windbergen in the Ditmar country, an open space in a wood bears the name of *Wodenslag*, *Wonslag*. Near Hadersleben in Schleswig are the villages of *Wonsbeke*, *Wonslei*, *Woyens* formerly *Wodensyen*. An Anglo-Saxon document of 862 contains in a boundary-settlement the name *Wōnstoc* = *Wōdenesstoc*, *Wodani stipes*, and at the same time betrays the influence of the god on ancient delimitation (*Wuotan*, *Hermes*, *Mercury*, all seem to be divinities of measurement and demarcation)

Wensley,^{[65][66][67]} *Wednesbury*,^{[68][69]} *Wansdyke*^{[70][71]} and *Wednesfield*^[69] are named after Woden. Also, the *Woden Valley* in Canberra, Australia is named after Woden.

Wednesday

Wednesday (*Wēdnes dæg*, "Woden's day", interestingly continuing the variant **Wōdinaz* (with umlaut of *ō* to *ē*), unlike *Wōden*, continuing **Wōdanaz*) is named after him, his link with the dead making him the appropriate match to the Roman Mercury.

References

- [12] The brooch is genuine, but the inscription is modern; this is evident already on philological grounds as the dative of *Wodin* is wrong (should be *Wodinæ*), and the use of *hailag* is anachronistic, as the meaning of "consecrated" developed out of an earlier meaning "whole, healthy" only after Christianisation. See e.g. *Journal of English and Germanic philology* 56 (1957), p. 315; Walter Baetke, *Das Heilige im Germanischen*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1942, 155-165
- [14] Harrison, D. & Svensson, K. (2007). *Vikingaliv* Fälth & Hässler, Värnamo. ISBN 978-91-27-35725-9 p. 74
- [15] Rives states in his commentary: "Paul the Deacon (Hist. Lang. I. 9) ... says that 'Wotan ... is adored as a god by all the peoples of Germania'."
- [16] Thorpe, Benjamin. *Northern mythology : comprising the principal popular traditions and superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany, and The Netherlands* (1851).
- [18] Branston 1957. p. 93.
- [19] North states: " ... Wulfstan borrowed *wælcyrrie* apparently for a human 'sorceress' in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*."
- [23] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-book1.html>), Chapter XV. From the Internet Medieval Sourcebook.
- [25] *Nennius: Historia Brittonum* (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/nennius-full.asp>). From the Internet Medieval Sourcebook.
- [27] Prologue to *The Prose Edda* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/pre/index.htm>), translated by Arthur G. Brodeur (1916).
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- [34] Gordon, R.K. (1962) *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, page 93. Everyman's Library #794. M. Dent & Sons, LTD.
- [39] see e.g. Kelly (1863). see also Branston, Brian. 'The Lost Gods of England'. Thames and Hudson Ltd. ISBN 0-09-473340-6
- [40] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/572370.stm> BBC - New light on old Christmas traditions
- [41] McKnight, George Harley. *St. Nicholas - His Legend and His Role in the Christmas Celebration* (1917) Available on-line: (<http://books.google.com/books?id=S4MtGxqMEpEC&dq>)
- [42] *Encyclopedia Americana* (1920) (page 307) Available online: (<http://books.google.com/books?id=4hbhBsRAOAc&pg=PA307&dq=odin+wild+hunt#PPA307,M1>)

- [43] Whistler, Laurence. 'The English Festivals'. W. Heinemann, 1947. 241 pages
- [44] Muir, Frank 'Christmas Customs & Traditions'. Taplinger Pub. Co., 1977. ISBN 0-8008-1552-1, ISBN 978-0-8008-1552-3.111 pages.
- [45] Hole, Christina. 'English Custom & Usage'. Batsford 1950. 151 pages.
- [46] Mercatante, Anthony S. 'Good and Evil: Mythology and Folklore'. Harper & Row, University of Virginia 1978. 242 pages
- [47] *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* vol. 1 (1973), p. 99, s.v. "Agrarisches Brauchtum"
- [48] http://toolserver.org/%7Edispenser/cgi-bin/dab_solver.py?page=W%C5%8Dden&editintro=Template:Disambiguation_needed/editintro&client=Template:Dn
- [49] *Teutonic Mythology*, Volume 1 by Jacob Grimm, translated by James Steven Stallybrass, Courier Dover Publications, 2004, ISBN 0-486-43546-6, ISBN 978-0-486-43546-6
- [50] "*Father, Son and Holy Ghost*, Nail the Devil to the post, Thrice I strike with holy crook, One for God, one for Wod, And one for Lok!" *Encyclopedia of Superstitions* 1949, Edwin Radford, Kessinger Publishing, 2004 ISBN 1-4179-7655-1, ISBN 9781417976553
- [51] Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, v 1, p 98, Dover Publications, New York 1965
- [52] (<http://greenworldofthegods.wordpress.com/2009/04/29/odin-versus-woden/>)
- [56] Hole, Christina. *Haunted England: A Survey of English Ghost Lore*. p.5. Kessinger Publishing, 1941.
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- [59] Looking for the Lost Gods of England (<http://phoenixandturtle.net/excerptmill/godsofengland.htm>)
- [60] *The Quest for the Green Man* By John Matthews, Published by Quest Books, 2001 ISBN 0-8356-0825-5, ISBN 978-0-8356-0825-1, page 116
- [61] *Hero Tales and Legends of the Rhine* by Lewis Spence, BiblioBazaar, LLC, 2007, ISBN 1-4346-2755-1, ISBN 978-1-4346-2755-1, page. 68
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- [64] http://www.northvegr.org/lore/grimmst/007_08.php
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Legendary titles		
Preceded by Frithuwald	King of the Angles	Succeeded by Wihthlæg

Godesses

Bragi

Bragi is the skaldic god of poetry in Norse mythology.

Etymology

Bragi is generally associated with *bragr*, the Norse word for poetry. The name of the god may have been derived from *bragr*, or the term *bragr* may have been formed to describe 'what Bragi does'. A connection between the name Bragi and Old English *brego* 'chieftain' has been suggested but is generally now discounted. A connection between Bragi and the *bragarfull* 'promise cup' is sometimes suggested, as *bragafull*, an alternate form of the word, might be translated as 'Bragi's cup'. See **Bragarfull**.



Bragi is shown with a harp and accompanied by his wife Iðunn in this 19th-century painting by Nils Blommér.

Attestations

Snorri Sturluson writes in the *Gylfaginning* after describing Odin, Thor, and Baldr:

One is called Bragi: he is renowned for wisdom, and most of all for fluency of speech and skill with words. He knows most of skaldship, and after him skaldship is called *bragr*, and from his name that one is called *bragr*-man or -woman, who possesses eloquence surpassing others, of women or of men. His wife is Iðunn.

In *Skáldskaparmál* Snorri writes:

How should one periphrase Bragi? By calling him *husband of Iðunn*, *first maker of poetry*, and *the long-bearded god* (after his name, a man who has a great beard is called Beard-Bragi), and *son of Odin*.

That Bragi is Odin's son is clearly mentioned only here and in some versions of a list of the sons of Odin (see **Sons of Odin**). But "wish-son" in stanza 16 of the *Lokasenna* could mean "Odin's son" and is translated by Hollander as *Odin's kin*. Bragi's mother is never named. If Bragi's mother is Frigg, then Frigg is somewhat dismissive of Bragi in the *Lokasenna* in stanza 27 when Frigg complains that if she had a son in Ægir's hall as brave as Baldr then Loki would have to fight for his life.

In that poem Bragi at first forbids Loki to enter the hall but is overruled by Odin. Loki then gives a greeting to all gods and goddesses who are in the hall save to Bragi. Bragi generously offers his sword, horse, and an arm ring as peace gift but Loki only responds by accusing Bragi of cowardice, of being the most afraid to fight of any of the Æsir and Elves within the hall. Bragi responds that if they were outside the hall, he would have Loki's head, but Loki only repeats the accusation. When Bragi's wife Iðunn attempts to calm Bragi, Loki accuses her of embracing her brother's slayer, a reference to matters that have not survived. It may be that Bragi had slain Iðunn's brother.

A passage in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Sigrdrífumál* describes runes being graven on the sun, on the ear of one of the sun-horses and on the hoofs of the other, on Sleipnir's teeth, on bear's paw, on eagle's beak, on wolf's claw, and on several other things including on Bragi's tongue. Then the runes are shaved off and the shavings are mixed with mead and sent abroad so that Æsir have some, Elves have some, Vanir have some, and Men have some, these being beech runes and birth runes, ale runes, and magic runes. The meaning of this is obscure.

The first part of Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* is a dialogue between Ægir and Bragi about the nature of poetry, particularly skaldic



Bragi, holding a harp, sings before his wife Iðunn (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.



"Bragi" by Carl Wahlbom (1810-1858).

poetry. Bragi tells the origin of the mead of poetry from the blood of Kvasir and how Odin obtained this mead. He then goes on to discuss various poetic metaphors known as *kennings*.

Snorri Sturluson clearly distinguishes the god Bragi from the mortal skald Bragi Boddason whom he often mentions separately. Bragi Boddason is discussed below. The appearance of Bragi in the *Lokasenna* indicates that if these two Bragis were originally the same, they have become separated for that author also, or that chronology has become very muddled and Bragi Boddason has been relocated to mythological time. Compare the appearance of the Welsh Taliesin in the second branch of the Mabinogi. Legendary chronology sometimes

does become muddled. Whether Bragi the god originally arose as a deified version of Bragi Boddason was much debated in the 19th century, especially by the German scholars Eugen Mogk and Sophus Bugge. The debate remains undecided.

In the poem *Eiríksmál* Odin, in Valhalla, hears the coming of the dead Norwegian king Eric Bloodaxe and his host, and bids the heroes Sigmund and Sinfjötli rise to greet him. Bragi is then mentioned, questioning how Odin knows that it is Eric and why Odin has let such a king die. In the poem *Hákonarmál*, Hákon the Good is taken to Valhalla by the valkyrie Göndul and Odin sends Hermóðr and Bragi to greet him. In these poems Bragi could be either a god or a dead hero in Valhalla. Attempting to decide is further confused because *Hermóðr* also seems to be sometimes the name of a god and sometimes the name of a hero. That Bragi was also the first to speak to Loki in the *Lokasenna* as Loki attempted to enter the hall might be a parallel. It might have been useful and customary that a man of great eloquence and versed in poetry should greet those entering a hall.

Skalds named Bragi

Bragi Boddason

In the *Prose Edda* Snorri Sturluson quotes many stanzas attributed to **Bragi Boddason** the old (*Bragi Boddason inn gamli*), a Norwegian court poet who served several Swedish kings, Ragnar Lodbrok, Östen Beli and Björn at Hauge who reigned in the first half of the 9th century. This Bragi was reckoned as the first skaldic poet, and was certainly the earliest skaldic poet then remembered by name whose verse survived in memory.

Snorri especially quotes passages from Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa*, a poem supposedly composed in honor of the famous legendary Viking Ragnar Lodbrók ('Hairy-breeches') describing the images on a decorated shield which Ragnar had given to Bragi. The images included Thor's fishing for Jörmungandr, Gefjun's ploughing of Zealand from the soil of Sweden, the attack of Hamdir and Sorli against King Jörmunrekk, and the never-ending battle between Hedin and Högni.



"Loki Taunts Bragi" (1908) by W. G. Collingwood.

Bragi son of Hálfðan the Old

Bragi son of Hálfðan the Old is mentioned only in the *Skjaldskaparmál*. This Bragi is the sixth of the second of two groups of nine sons fathered by King Hálfðan the Old on Alvig the Wise, daughter of King Eymund of Hólmgard. This second group of sons are all eponymous ancestors of legendary families of the north. Snorri says:

Bragi, from whom the Bragnings are sprung (that is the race of Hálfðan the Generous).

Of the Bragnings as a race and of Hálfðan the Generous nothing else is known. However, *Bragning* is often, like some others of these dynastic names, used in poetry as a general word for 'king' or 'ruler'.

Bragi Högnason

In the eddic poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, **Bragi Högnason**, his brother Dag, and his sister Sigrún were children of Högne, the king of East Götaland. The poem relates how Sigmund's son Helgi Hundingsbane agreed to take Sigrún daughter of Högni as his wife against her unwilling betrothal to Hodbrodd son of Granmar the king of Södermanland. In the subsequent battle of Frekastein (probably one of the 300 hill forts of Södermanland, as *stein* meant "hill fort") against Högni and Grammar, all the chieftains on Granmar's side are slain, including Bragi, except for Bragi's brother Dag.

References

- *Prose Edda*
- *Poetic Edda*

Baduhenna

In Germanic paganism, **Baduhenna** is a goddess.^[1] Baduhenna is solely attested by Tacitus' *Annals* where Tacitus records that a grove in Frisia was dedicated to her, and that near this grove 900 Roman prisoners were killed in 28 CE.

The first part of the goddess' name, *Badu-*, may be cognate to Proto-Germanic **badwa-* meaning "battle." The second portion of the name *-henna* may be related to *-henaē*, which appears commonly in the names of matrons. Rudolf Simek states that, due to this etymology, Baduhenna appears to be a goddess of war, and points out that sacred groves are commonly associated with the Germanic peoples.^[2]

Notes

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[2] Simek (2007:26).

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Beyla

Beyla is one of Freyr's servants along with her husband, Byggvir, in Norse mythology. Beyla is mentioned in stanzas 55, 66, and the prose introduction to the Poetic Edda poem *Lokasenna*. Since this is the only mention of Beyla, scholars have turned to the etymology of Beyla's name for additional information about her.^[1] However, the meaning of her name is unclear and her name has been proposed as related to "cow," "bean," or "bee."^[1]

Lokasenna

In the prose introduction to *Lokasenna*, Beyla and Byggvir are cited as attending In stanza 55 of *Lokasenna*, after his verses with Sif, Loki accuses Beyla of being filthy but the reason for this is unclear.^[1]

Stanza 55:

Beyla qvaþ:	Beyla spake:
«Fioll a/ll scialfa,	"The mountains shake,
hygg ec a for vera	and surely I think
heiman Hlorriþa;	From his home comes Hlorrithi now;
hann reþr ró	He will silence the man
þeim er rogir her	who is slandering here
goð a/ll oc gvma.»	Together both gods and men." ^[2]

Stanza 56:

Loci qvaþ:	Loki spake:
«Þegi þv, Beyla!	"Be silent, Beyla!
þv ert Byggviss qven	thou art Byggvir's wife,
oc meini blandin mioc;	And deep art thou steeped in sin;
okynian meira	A greater shame
coma meþ asa sonom,	to the gods came ne'er,
a/ll ertv, deigia! dritin.»	Befouled thou art with thy filth." ^[2]

In relation to Loki's comments in *Lokasenna*, proposals have been made that Beyla and her husband are personifications of agriculture associated with Freyr: Beyla as the manure that softens the earth and develops the seed, Byggvir as the refuse of the mill, chaff.^[3]

Notes

[1] Lindow (2001:78).

[2] Henry Adams Bellows' 1936 translation of *Lokasenna*. Available online: (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe10.htm>)

[3] Thorpe (1851:198-199.)

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Ēostre

Ēostre or **Ostara** (Northumbrian Old English: *Ēostre*; West Saxon Old English: *Ēastre*; Old High German: **Ōstara*) is a goddess in Germanic paganism who, by way of the Germanic month bearing her name (Northumbrian: *Ēosturmōnaþ*; West Saxon: *Ēastermōnaþ*; Old High German: *Ōstarmânoth*), is the namesake of the festival of Easter. Ēostre is attested solely by Bede in his 8th-century work *De temporum ratione*, where Bede states that during *Ēosturmōnaþ* (the equivalent to the month of April) feasts were held in Eostre's honor among the pagan Anglo-Saxons, but had died out by the time of his writing, replaced by the Christian "Paschal month" (a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus). In her various forms, she is a "Spring-like fertility goddess" associated with dawn, and is connected to numerous traditions and deities indigenous to Northern Europe.

By way of linguistic reconstruction, the matter of a Proto-Germanic goddess called **Austrō* has been examined in detail since the foundation of Germanic philology in the 19th century by scholar Jacob Grimm and others. As the Germanic languages descend from Proto-Indo-European (PIE), linguists have traced the name to a Proto-Indo-European goddess of the dawn **H₂ewsōs* (→ **Ausōs*), from which descends the common Germanic goddess that Ēostre and Ostara are held to descend. Scholars have linked the goddess' name to a variety of Germanic personal names, a series of location names in England, over 150 2nd century BCE *Matronae* (the *matronae Austriahenea*) inscriptions discovered in Germany, and have debated whether or not Eostre is an invention of Bede's, and theories connecting Ēostre with records of Germanic Easter customs (including hares and eggs) have been proposed. Ēostre and Ostara are sometimes referenced in modern popular culture, and are venerated in some forms of Germanic Neopaganism.

Etymology

Ēostre derives from Proto-Germanic **Austrō*, ultimately from a PIE root **h₂ewes-* (→ **awes-*), "to shine", and therefore closely related to a reconstructed name of **h₂ewsōs*, the dawn goddess, which would account for Greek "Eos", Roman "Aurora", and Indian "Ushas".^[1] The modern English term "Easter" is the direct continuation of Old English *Ēastre*, whose role as a goddess is attested solely by Bede in the 8th century.^[2] *Ēostre* is the Northumbrian form, while *Ēastre* is more common West Saxon.^[3]



Ostara (1884) by Johannes Gehrts. The goddess flies through the heavens surrounded by Roman-inspired putti, beams of light, and animals. Germanic people look up at the goddess from the realm below.

De temporum ratione

In chapter 15 of his 8th-century work *De temporum ratione*, Bede describes the indigenous month names of the English people. After describing the worship of the goddess Rheda during the Anglo-Saxon month of Hrethmonath, Bede writes about Eosturmonath, the month of the goddess Ēostre:



Eástre (1909) by Jacques Reich. Directly derived from Gehrts' image (above), with the addition of Germanic worshipers replaced by a picturesque landscape

Original Latin:

Eostur-monath, qui nunc Paschalis mensis interpretatur, quondam a Dea illorum quæ Eostre vocabatur, et cui in illo festa celebrabant nomen habuit: a cuius nomine nunc Paschale tempus cognominant, consueto antiquæ observationis vocabulo gaudia novæ solemnitatis vocantes.^[4]

Modern English translation:

Eosturmonath has a name which is now translated "Paschal month", and which was once called after a goddess of theirs named Eostre, in whose honour feasts were celebrated in that month. Now they designate that Paschal season by her name, calling the joys of the new rite by the time-honoured name of the old observance."^[5]

Jacob Grimm, *Ostara, and Easter customs

In his 1835 *Deutsche Mythologie*, Jacob Grimm cites comparative evidence to reconstruct a potential continental Germanic goddess whose name would have been preserved in the Old High German name of Easter, *Ostara. Addressing skepticism towards goddesses mentioned by Bede, Grimm comments that "there is nothing improbable in them, nay the first of them is justified by clear traces in the vocabularies of Germanic tribes."^[6] Specifically regarding Ēostre, Grimm continues that:

We Germans to this day call April *ostermonat*, and *ôstarmânoth* is found as early as Eginhart (temp. Car. Mag.). The great christian festival, which usually falls in April or the end of March, bears in the oldest of OHG remains the name *ôstarâ* ... it is mostly found in the plural, because two days ... were kept at Easter. This Ostarâ, like the [Anglo-Saxon] *Eástre*, must in heathen religion have denoted a higher being, whose worship was so firmly rooted, that the christian teachers tolerated the name, and applied it to one of their own grandest anniversaries.^[7]

Grimm notes that "all of the nations bordering on us have retained the Biblical *pascha*; even Ulphilas writes *paska*, not *áustrô*, though he must have known the word" Grimm details that the Old High German adverb *ôstar* "expresses

movement towards the rising sun", as did the Old Norse term *austr*, and potentially also Anglo-Saxon *ēastor* and Gothic *áustr*. Grimm compares these terms to the identical Latin term *auster*. Grimm says that the cult of the goddess may have worshiped an Old Norse form, *Austra*, or that her cult may have already been extinct by the time of Christianization.^[7]

Grimm notes that the Old Norse *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning* attests to a male being called Austri, who Grimm describes as a "spirit of light." Grimm comments that a female version would have been **Austra*, yet that the High German and Saxon peoples seem to have only formed *Ostarâ* and *Eástre*, feminine, and not *Ostaro* and *Eástra*, masculine. Grimm additionally speculates on the nature of the goddess and surviving folk customs that may have been associated with her in Germany:

Ostara, Eástre seems therefore to have been the divinity of the radiant dawn, of upspringing light, a spectacle that brings joy and blessing, whose meaning could be easily adapted by the resurrection-day of the christian's God. *Bonfires* were lighted at Easter and according to popular belief of long standing, the moment the sun rises on Easter Sunday morning, he gives *three joyful leaps*, he dances for joy ... Water drawn on the Easter morning is, like that at Christmas, holy and healing ... here also heathen notions seems to have grafted themselves on great christian festivals. Maidens clothed in white, who at Easter, at the season of returning spring, show themselves in clefts of the rock and on mountains, are suggestive of the ancient goddess.^[8]

In the second volume of *Deutsche Mythologie*, Grimm picks up the subject of Ostara again, connecting the goddess to various German Easter festivities, including Easter eggs:

But if we admit, goddesses, then, in addition to Nerthus, *Ostara* has the strongest claim to consideration. To what we said on p. 290 I can add some significant facts. The heathen Easter had much in common with May-feast and the reception of spring, particularly in matter of bonfires. Then, through long ages there seem to have lingered among the people *Easter-games* so-called, which the church itself had to tolerate : I allude especially to the custom of *Easter eggs*, and to the *Easter tale* which preachers told from the pulpit for the people's amusement, connecting it with Christian reminiscences.^[9]

Grimm comments on further Easter time customs, including unique sword dances and particular baked goods ("pastry of heathenish form"). In addition, Grimm weights a potential connection to the Slavic spring goddess *Vesna* and the Lithuanian *Vasara*.^[9]

Locations, personal names, and the *matronae Austriahenea*

A cluster of place names in England contain and a variety of English and continental Germanic names include the element **ēoster*, an early Old English word reconstructed by linguists and potentially an earlier form of the goddess name *Ēostre*. These locations include Eastry (*Eastrgena*, 788 CE) in Kent, Eastrea (*Estrey*, 966 CE) in Cambridgeshire, and Eastrington (*Eastringatun*, 959 CE) in East Riding of Yorkshire.^[10]

The element **ēoster* also appears in the Old English name *Easterwine*, a name borne by Bede's monastery abbot in Wearmouth-Jarrow and which appears an additional three times in the Durham *Liber Vitae*. The name *Aestorhild* also appears in the *Liber Vitae*, and is likely the ancestor of the Middle English name *Estrild*. Various continental Germanic names include the element, including *Austrechild*, *Austrighysel*, *Austrovald*, and *Ostrulf*.^[11]

Over 150 Romano-Germanic votive inscriptions to the *matron Austriahenea* were discovered in 1958 near Morken-Harff, Germany. Most of these inscriptions are in an incomplete state, yet many are in a complete enough for reasonable clarity of the inscriptions. Some of these inscriptions refer to the *Austriates*, evidently the name of a social group.^[12]

Theories and interpretations

Dea ex Machina and the matron Austriahenea

Some debate has occurred over whether or not the goddess was an invention of Bede's, particularly in the 19th century prior to more widespread reconstructions of the Proto-Indo-European dawn goddess. Writing in the late 19th century, Charles J. Billson notes that scholars prior to his writing were divided about the existence of Bede's account of Ēostre, stating that "among authorities who have no doubt as to her existence are W. Grimm, Wackernagel, Sinrock [*sic*], and Wolf. On the other hand, Weinhold rejects the idea on philological grounds, and so do Heinrich Leo and Hermann Oesre. Kuhn says, 'The Anglo-Saxon Eostre looks like an invention of Bede;' and Mannhardt also dismisses her as an etymological *dea ex machina*." Billson says that "the whole question turns [...], upon Bede's credibility", and that "one is inclined to agree with Grimm, that it would be uncritical to saddle this eminent Father of the Church, who keeps Heathendom at arms' length and tells us less of than he knows, with the invention of this goddess." Billson points out that the Christianization of England started at the end of the 6th century, and, by the 7th, was completed. Billson argues that, as Bede was born in 672, Bede must have had opportunities to learn the names of the native goddesses of the Anglo-Saxons, "who were hardly extinct in his lifetime."^[13]

Writing in the late 20th century, Rudolf Simek says that, despite expressions of doubts, Bede's account of Eostre should not be disregarded. Simek opines that a "Spring-like fertility goddess" must be assumed rather than a "goddess of sunrise" regardless of the name, reasoning that "otherwise the Germanic goddesses (and matrons) are mostly connected with prosperity and growth". Simek points to a comparison with the goddess Rheda, also attested by Bede.^[14]

Scholar Philip A. Shaw (2011) writes that the subject has seen "a lengthy history of arguments for and against Bede's goddess Eostre, with some scholars taking fairly extreme positions on either side" and that some theories against the goddess have gained popular cultural prominence. Shaw, however, notes that "much of this debate, however, was conducted in ignorance of a key piece of evidence, as it was not discovered until 1958. This evidence is furnished by over 150 Romano-Germanic votive inscriptions to deities named the *matron Austriahenea*, found near Morken-Harff and datable to around 150-250 AD". Most of these inscriptions are in an incomplete state, yet most are in a complete enough for reasonable clarity of the inscriptions. As early as 1966 scholars have linked these names etymologically with *Eostre* and an element found in Germanic personal names.^[15] Shaw argues against a functional interpretation from the available evidence and concludes that "the etymological connections of her name suggests that her worshippers saw her geographical and social relationship with them as more central than any functions she may have had".^[16]

Hares and Freyja

In Northern Europe, Easter imagery often involves hares and rabbits. Citing folk Easter customs in Leicestershire, England where "the profits of the land called Harecrop Leys were applied to providing a meal which was thrown on the ground at the 'Hare-pie Bank'", late 19th-century scholar Charles Isaac Elton theorizes a connection between these customs and the worship of Ēostre.^[17] In his late 19th-century study of the hare in folk custom and mythology, Charles J. Billson cites numerous incidents of folk custom involving the hare around the period of Easter in Northern Europe. Billson says that "whether there was a goddess named Eostre, or not, and whatever connection the hare may have had with the ritual of Saxon or British worship, there are good grounds for believing that the sacredness of this animal reaches back into an age still more remote, where it is probably a very important part of the great Spring Festival of the prehistoric inhabitants of this island."^[13]

Some scholars have linked customs and imagery involving hares to Ēostre and the Norse goddess Freyja. Writing in 1972, John Andrew Boyle cites commentary contained within an etymology dictionary by A. Ernout and A. Meillet, where the authors write that "Little else [...] is known about [Ēostre], but it has been suggested that her lights, as goddess of the dawn, were carried by hares. And she certainly represented spring fecundity, and love and carnal pleasure that leads to fecundity." Boyle responds that nothing is known about Ēostre outside of Bede's single passage, that the authors had seemingly accepted the identification of Ēostre with the Norse goddess Freyja, yet that the hare is not associated with Freyja either. Boyle writes that "her carriage, we are told by Snorri, was drawn by a pair of cats — animals, it is true, which like hares were the familiars of witches, with whom Freyja seems to have much in common." However, Boyle adds that "on the other hand, when the authors speak of the hare as the 'companion of Aphrodite and of satyrs and cupids' and point out that 'in the Middle Ages it appears beside the figure of Luxuria', they are on much surer ground and can adduce the evidence of their illustrations."^[18]



An Easter postcard from 1907 depicting a rabbit

Modern popular culture and modern veneration

Jacob Grimm's reconstructed **Ostara* has had some influence in popular culture since. The name has been adapted as an asteroid (343 Ostara, 1892 by Max Wolf),^[19] a Mödling, Austria-based German nationalist book series and publishing house (1905, *Ostara*),^[20] and a date on the Wiccan Wheel of the Year (Ostara, 21 March).^[21] In music, the name *Ostara* has been adopted as a name by the musical group Ostara,^[22] and as the names of albums by :zoviet*france: (*Eostre*, 1984) and *The Wishing Tree* (*Ostara*, 2009). Eostre appears in Neil Gaiman's novel, *American Gods*.

In some forms of Germanic Neopaganism, Eostre (or Ostara) is venerated. Regarding this veneration, Carole M. Cusack comments that, among adherents, Eostre is "associated with the coming of spring and the dawn, and her festival is celebrated at the spring equinox. Because she brings renewal, rebirth from the death of winter, some Heathens associate Eostre with Idunn, keeper of the apples of youth in Scandinavian mythology".^[23]

Notes

- [1] Pokorny (1959), s.v. " aęes- (<http://www.indo-european.nl/cgi-bin/startq.cgi?flags=endnnl&root=leiden&basename=\data\ie\pokorny>)
- [2] Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1898), "Eástre, the goddess of the rising sun, whose festivities were in April. Hence used by Teutonic Christians for the rising of the sun of righteousness, the feast of the resurrection," noting Bede and Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* 1855 (on-line text (http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/html/oe_bosworthtoller/b0235.html))
- [3] OED
- [4] Giles (1843:179).
- [5] Wallis (1999:54).
- [6] Grimm (1882:289).
- [7] Grimm (1882:290).
- [8] Grimm (1882:291).
- [9] Grimm (1883:780-781).
- [10] Shaw (2011:59—60).
- [11] Shaw (2011:60).
- [12] Shaw (2011:52 and 63).
- [13] Billson (1892:448).
- [14] Simek (2007:74).
- [15] Shaw (2011:52).
- [16] Shaw (2011:70—71).
- [17] Elton (1882:408).
- [18] Boyle (1972:323—324).
- [19] Schmadel (2003:44).
- [20] Simek (2007:255).
- [21] Hubbard (2007:175).
- [22] Diesel, Gerten (2007:136).
- [23] Cusack (2008:354—355).

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Gersemi

In Norse mythology, **Gersemi** (Old Norse "treasure"^[1]) is the daughter of Freyja and Óðr, and sister of Hnoss.

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:54).

References

- Orchard, Andy (1997). *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*. Cassell. ISBN 0-304-34520-2

Gullveig

In Norse mythology, **Gullveig** is a being who was speared by the Æsir, burnt three times, and yet thrice reborn. Upon her third rebirth, Gullveig's name becomes **Heiðr** and she is described as a knowledgeable and skillful völva. Gullveig/Heiðr is solely attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional material. Scholars have variously proposed that Gullveig/Heiðr is the same figure as the goddess Freyja, that Gullveig's death may have been connected to corruption by way of gold among the Æsir, and/or that Gullveig's treatment by the Æsir may have led to the Æsir-Vanir War.

Etymology

The etymology of the Old Norse name *Gullveig* is problematic. The first element, *Gull-*, means "gold", yet the second element, *veig*, is murky (a situation shared with the Old Norse personal names *Rannveig*, *Sölveig*, and *Thórveig*). *Veig* may sometimes mean "alcoholic drink", "power, strength", and sometimes also "gold". The name *Heiðr* (Old Norse "fame", in adjective form "bright, clear") is semantically related; scholar Rudolf Simek comments that although Gullveig's name changes to *Heiðr*, the meaning still remains basically the same.^[1] *Heiðr* is sometimes anglicized as **Heith**, **Heid**, or **Heidi**.

Attestations

Gullveig is solely attested in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*. In the poem, a *völva* recalls that Gullveig was pierced by spears before being burnt three times in the hall of Hárr (*Hárr* is one of Odin's various names), and yet was three times reborn. The *völva* says that, presumably after Gullveig's burning, she was called *Heiðr* and that *Heiðr* was a knowledgeable *völva* who could perform great feats:



The Æsir lift Gullveig on spears over fire as illustrated by Lorenz Frølich (1895)

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

She that remembers, the first on earth,
 when Gullveig they with lances pierced,
 and in the high one's hall her burnt,
 thrice burnt, thrice brought forth, oft not seldom; yet she
 still lives.
 Heidi they called her, whitherso'er she came,
 the well-foreseeing Vala:
 wolves she tamed, magic arts she knew, magic arts
 practiced;
 ever she was the joy of evil people.^[2]

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

The war I remember, the first in the world,
 When the gods with spears had smitten
 Gollveig,
 And in the hall of Hor had burner her,—
 Oft and again, yet ever she lives.
 Heith they named her who sought their home
 The wide-seeing witch, in magic wise;
 Minds she bewitched that were moved by her
 magic,
 To evil women a joy she was.^[3]

A description of the Æsir–Vanir War follows and the poem continues thereafter.

Theories

Starting with scholar Gabriel Turville-Petre, scholars such as Rudolf Simek and John Lindow have theorized that Gullveig/*Heiðr* is the same figure as Freyja, and that her involvement with the Æsir somehow led to the events of the Æsir–Vanir War.^[4]

Notes

[1] Simek (2007:123—124).

[2] Thorpe (1907:4).

[3] Bellows (1923:10).

[4] Simek (2007:123—124), Lindow (2002:155), and Orchard (1997:67).

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- Simek, Rudolf (2007) translated by Angela Hall. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. D.S. Brewer. ISBN 0-85991-513-1

Hariasa

Hariasa is a Germanic goddess. Hariasa is attested on a (now lost) stone bearing a Latin dedication to her. The stone was found in Cologne, Germany and dated to 187 CE (CIL XIII 8185).^[1]

Etymology

Rudolf Simek says that like the Old Norse valkyrie name Herja, *Hariasa* derives from the Proto-Germanic word **Herjaza* and that both may refer to goddess of war, although an independent development among the North Germanic peoples and West Germanic peoples is possible. Alternately, the name *Hariasa* may mean "goddess with lots of hair."^[1]

Notes

[1] Simek (2007:131).

References

- Simek, Rudolf (2007) translated by Angela Hall. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. D.S. Brewer ISBN 0-85991-513-1
-

Hnoss

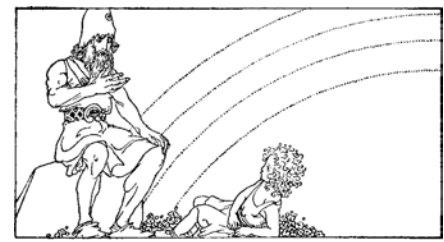
In Norse mythology, **Hnoss** (Old Norse "treasure"^[1]) is the daughter of Freyja and Óðr, and sister of Gersemi.

Notes

[1] Orchard (1997:87).

References

- Orchard, Andy (1997). *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*. Cassell. ISBN 0-304-34520-2



"Heimdall and little Hnossa - how all things came to be" (1920) by Willy Pogany.

Nerthus

In Germanic paganism, **Nerthus** is a goddess associated with fertility. Nerthus is attested by Tacitus, the first century AD Roman historian, in his ethnographic work *Germania*.

In *Germania*, Tacitus records that the remote Suebi tribes were united by their veneration of the goddess at his time of writing and maintained a sacred grove on an (unspecified) island and that a holy cart rests there draped with cloth, which only a priest may touch. The priests feel her presence by the cart, and, with deep reverence, attend her cart, which is drawn by heifers. Everywhere the goddess then deigns to visit, she is met with celebration, hospitality, and peace. All iron objects are locked away, and no one will leave for war. When the goddess has had her fill she is returned to her temple by the priests. Tacitus adds that the goddess, the cart, and the cloth are then washed by slaves in a secluded lake. The slaves are then drowned.

The name *Nerthus* is generally held to be a Latinized form of Proto-Germanic ***Nerþuz**, which is the Proto-Germanic precursor to the Old Norse deity name *Njörðr*, who is a male deity in works recorded in the 13th century. Various scholarly theories exist regarding the goddess and her potential later traces amongst the Germanic peoples.

Etymology

Nerthus is often identified with the Vanr Njörðr who is attested in various 13th century Old Norse works and in numerous Scandinavian place names. The connection between the two is due to the linguistic relationship between *Njörðr* and the reconstructed Proto-Germanic **Nerþuz*,^[1] *Nerthus* being the feminine, Latinized form of what *Njörðr* would have looked like around the first century.^[2] This has led to theories about the relation of the two, including that Njörðr may have once been a hermaphroditic deity or that the name may indicate an otherwise unattested divine brother and sister pair such as the Vanir deities Freyja and Freyr.^[3] Connections have been proposed between the unnamed mother of Freyja and Freyr and the sister of Njörðr mentioned in *Lokasenna* and Nerthus.^[4]



Nerthus (1905) by Emil Doepler.

Germania

In chapter 40 of his *Germania*, Roman historian Tacitus, discussing the Suebian tribes of Germania, writes that beside the populous Semnones and warlike Langobardi there are seven remoter Suebian tribes; the Reudigni, Aviones, Anglii, Varini, Eudoses, Suarines, and Nuitones. The seven tribes are surrounded by rivers and forests and, according to Tacitus, there is nothing particularly worthy of comment about them as individuals, yet they are particularly distinguished in that they all worship the goddess Nerthus, and provides an account of veneration of the goddess among the groups. The chapter reads as follows:

Latin:

A. R. Birley translation:

J. B. Rives translation:

*Contra Langobardos
paucitas nobilitat:
plurimis ac valentissimis
nationibus cincti non per
obsequium, sed proeliis
ac periclitando tuti sunt.
Reudigni deinde et
Aviones et Anglii et
Varini et Eudoses et
Suardones et Nuithones
fluminibus aut silvis
muniuntur. Nec quicquam
notabile in singulis, nisi
quod in commune
Nerthum, id est Terram
matrem, colunt eamque
intervenire rebus
hominum, inveni populis
arbitrantur. Est in insula
Oceani castum nemus,
dicatumque in eo
vehiculum, veste
contectum; attingere uni
sacerdoti concessum. Is
adesse penitenti deam
intellegit vectamque
bubus feminis multa cum
veneratione prosequitur.
Laeti tunc dies, festa
loca, quaecumque
adventu hospitioque
dignatur. Non bella
ineunt, non arma sumunt;
clausum omne ferrum;
pax et quies tunc tantum
nota, tunc tantum amata,
donec idem sacerdos
satiatam conversatione
mortalium deam templo
reddat. Mox vehiculum et
vestes et, si creder velis,
numen ipsum secreto lacu
abluitur. Servi ministrant,
quos statim idem lacus
haurit. Arcanus hinc
terror sanctaque
ignorantia, quid sit illud,
quod tantum perituri
vident.*^[5]

By contrast, the Langobardi are distinguished by being few in number. Surrounded by many might peoples they have protected themselves not by submissiveness but by battle and boldness. Next to them come the Ruedigni, Aviones, Anglii, Varini, Eudoses, Suarines, and Huitones, protected by river and forests. There is nothing especially noteworthy about these states individually, but they are distinguished by a common worship of Nerthus, that is, Mother Earth, and believes that she intervenes in human affairs and rides through their peoples. There is a sacred grove on an island in the Ocean, in which there is a consecrated chariot, draped with cloth, where the priest alone may touch. He perceives the presence of the goddess in the innermost shrine and with great reverence escorts her in her chariot, which is drawn by female cattle. There are days of rejoicing then and the countryside celebrates the festival, wherever she designs to visit and to accept hospitality. No one goes to war, no one takes up arms, all objects of iron are locked away, then and only then do they experience peace and quiet, only then do they prize them, until the goddess has had her fill of human society and the priest brings her back to her temple. Afterwards the chariot, the cloth, and, if one may believe it, the deity herself are washed in a hidden lake. The slaves who perform this office are immediately swallowed up in the same lake. Hence arises dread of the mysterious, and piety, which keeps them ignorant of what only those about to perish may see.^[6]

The Langobardi, by contrast, are distinguished by the fewness of their numbers. Ringed round as they are by many mighty peoples, they find safety not in obsequiousness but in battle and its perils. After them come the Reudingi, Aviones, Anglii, Varini, Eudoses, Suarini and Nuitones, behind their ramparts of rivers and woods. There is nothing noteworthy about these peoples individually, but they are distinguished by a common worship of Nerthus, or Mother Earth. They believe that she interests herself in human affairs and rides among their peoples. In an island of the Ocean stands a sacred grove, and in the grove a consecrated cart, draped with cloth, which none but the priest may touch. The priest perceives the presence of the goddess in this holy of holies and attends her, in deepest reverence, as her cart is drawn by heifers. Then follow days of rejoicing and merry-making in every place that she designs to visit and be entertained. No one goes to war, no one takes up arms; every object of iron is locked away; then, and only then, are peace and quiet known and loved, until the priest again restores the goddess to her temple, when she has had her fill of human company. After that the cart, the cloth and, if you care to believe it, the goddess herself are washed in clean in a secluded lake. This service is performed by slaves who are immediately afterwards drowned in the lake. Thus mystery begets terror and pious reluctance to ask what the sight can be that only those doomed to die may see.^[7]

Theories and interpretations

A number of theories have been proposed regarding the figure of Nerthus, including the location of the events described, relations to other known deities and her role amongst the Germanic tribes.

A number of scholars have proposed a potential location of Tacitus's account of Nerthus as on the island of Zealand in Denmark. Reasoning behind this notion is the linking of the name Nerthus with the medieval place name *Niartharum* (modern Naerum) located on Zealand. Further justification is given in that Lejre, the seat of the ancient kings of Denmark, is also located on Zealand. Nerthus is then commonly compared to the goddess Gefjon, who is said to have plowed the island of Zealand from Sweden in the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning* and in Lejre wed the legendary Danish king Skjöldr.^[8]

19th century scholar Jacob Grimm identified Nerthus as the Germanic earth-mother who appeared under such names as Erda, Erce, Fru Gaue, Fjörgyn, Frau Holda and Hluodana.^[9]

Nerthus typically is identified as a Vanir goddess. Her wagon tour has been likened to several archeological wagon finds and legends of deities parading in wagons. Terry Gunnell and many others have noted various archaeological finds of ritual wagons in Denmark dating from 200 AD and the Bronze Age. Such a ceremonial wagon, incapable of making turns, was discovered in the Oseberg ship find. Two of the most famous literary examples occur in the Icelandic family sagas. The Vanir god Freyr is said to ride in a wagon annually through the country accompanied by a priestess to bless the fields, according to a late story titled *Hauks þáttur hábrókar* in the 14th century *Flateyjarbók* manuscript. In the same source, King Eric of Sweden is said to consult a god named Lýtir, whose wagon was brought to his hall in order to perform a divination ceremony.^[10]

Hilda Davidson draws a parallel between these incidents and Tacitus's account of Nerthus, suggesting that in addition a neck-ring-wearing female figure "kneeling as if to drive a chariot" also dates from the Bronze Age. Davidson says that the evidence suggests that similar customs as detailed in Tacitus's account continued to exist during the close of the pagan period through worship of the Vanir.^[11]

While the connection between Nerthus and Njörðr is generally accepted, a few scholars have argued against it. Edgar Polomé argued that *Njörðr* and *Nerthus* come from different roots, adding that "Nerthus and Njörðr are two separate divine entities, whatever similarity their names show".^[12] Lotte Motz proposed that the Germanic goddess described by Tacitus may not have been called Nerthus at all, stating her opinion that Grimm selected the name Nerthus from among the manuscript readings precisely because it bore an etymological resemblance to *Njörðr*.^[13]

Modern influence

The minor planet 601 Nerthus is named after Nerthus.

Notes

[1] Simek (2007:234)

[2] Lindow (2001:237—238)

[3] Simek (2007:234). Note that Simek supports the notion of an unattested divine brother and sister pair.

[4] Orchard (1997:117—118).

[5] Stuart (1916:20).

[6] Birley (1999:58).

[7] Rives (2010). Pages unnumbered; chapter 40.

[8] Chadwick (1907:267—268, 289) and Davidson (1964:113).

[9] Grimm (1883:251—253).

[10] Davidson (1964:92—95).

[11] Davidson (1964:96).

[12] Polomé (1999:143—154).

[13] Motz (1992:1—18).

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Nótt

In Norse mythology, **Nótt** (Old Norse "night"^[1]) is night personified, grandmother of Thor. In both the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, Nótt is listed as the daughter of a figure by the name of Nörvi (with variant spellings) and is associated with the horse Hrímfaxi, while the *Prose Edda* features information about Nótt's ancestry, including her three marriages. Nótt's third marriage was to the god Dellingr and this resulted in their son Dagr, the personified day (although some manuscript variations list Jörð as Dellingr's wife and Dagr's mother instead). As a proper noun, the word *nótt* appears throughout Old Norse literature.

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In stanza 24 of the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*, the god Odin (disguised as "Gagnráðr") asks the jötunn Vafþrúðnir from where the day comes, and the night and its tides.

In stanza 25, Vafþrúðnir responds:

Delling hight he who the day's father is,
but night was of Nörvi born;



Nótt rides her horse in this 19th-century painting by Peter Nicolai Arbo.

the new and waning moons the beneficent powers created,
to count the years for men.^[2]

In stanza 14 of the *Vafþrúðnismál*, Odin states that the horse Hrímfaxi "draws every night to the beneficent gods" and that he lets foam from his bit fall every morning, from which dew comes to the valleys.^[3] In stanza 30 of the poem *Alvíssmál*, the god Thor asks the dwarf Alvíss to tell him what night is called in each of the nine worlds, whom "Nórr" birthed. Alvíss responds that night is referred as "night" by mankind, "darkness" by the gods, "the masker by the mighty Powers", "unlight" by the jötunn, "joy-of-sleep" by the elves, while dwarves call her "dream-Njörun" (meaning "dream-goddess").^[4]

In *Sigrdrífumál*, after the valkyrie Sigrdrífa is woken from her sleep curse by the hero Sigurd, Sigurd asks her name, and she gives him a "memory-drink" of a drinking horn full of mead, and then Sigrdrífa says a heathen prayer. The first verse of this prayer features a reference to the "sons of Dagr" and the "daughter of Nótt":

Hail to the Day! Hail to the sons of Day!
To Night and her daughter hail!
With placid eyes behold us here,
and here sitting give us victory.
Hail to the Æsir! Hail to the Asyniur!
Hail to the bounteous earth!
Words and wisdom give to us noble twain,
and healing hands while we live!^[5]

Prose Edda

In the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*, Nótt is again personified. In chapter 10, the enthroned figure of High states that Nótt is the daughter of a jötunn from Jötunheimr by the name of "Norfi or Narfi". Nótt is described as "black and swarthy", and has had three marriages. Her first marriage was with Naglfari, and the two produced a son by the name of Auðr. Nótt's second marriage was to Annar, resulting in their daughter Jörð, the personified earth. Finally, Nótt marries the god Dellingr, and the couple have Dagr, who takes after his "father's people" in brightness and fairness. Odin took Nótt and her son Dagr, placed them into the sky with a chariot and a horse each, and they ride around the earth every 24 hours. Nótt rides before Dagr, and foam from her horse Hrímfaxi's bit sprinkles the earth.^[6]

However, scholar Haukur Thorgeirsson points out that the four manuscripts of *Gylfaginning* vary in their descriptions of the family relations between Nótt, Jörð, Dagr, and Dellingr. In other words, depending on the manuscript, either Jörð or Nátt is the mother of Dagr and partner of Dellingr. Haukur details that "the oldest manuscript, U, offers a version where Jörð is the wife of Dellingr and the mother of Dagr while the other manuscripts, R, W and T, cast Nótt in the role of Dellingr's wife and Dagr's mother", and argues that "the version in U came about accidentally when the writer of U or its antecedent shortened a text similar to that in RWT. The results of this accident made their way into the Icelandic poetic tradition".^[7]

In the *Prose Edda* book *Skáldskaparmál*, means of referring to Jörð are provided, including "daughter of Nótt".^[8] Chapter 58 states that "Hrímfaxi or Fiorsvartnir draw the night",^[9] and in chapter 64, "nótt" is stated as one of various words for time and a version of the *Alvíssmál* passage is cited.^[10]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:120).
- [2] Thorpe (1907:13).
- [3] Larrington (1996:42).
- [4] Translation of all of this section minus "dream-Njörun" from Larrington (1996:113). Larrington glosses *draum-Njörun* (Jónsson (1931:84, Old Norse "dream-Njörun") as "dream-goddess".
- [5] Thorpe (1907:181).
- [6] Byock (2005:19).
- [7] Haukur (2008:159—168).
- [8] Faulkes (1995:90).
- [9] Faulkes (1995:137).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:144).

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Rheda (mythology)

In Anglo-Saxon paganism, **Rheda** (Latinized from Old English **Hrêðe* or **Hrêða*, possibly meaning "the famous" or "the victorious"^[1]) is a goddess connected with the month "'Rhedmonth'" (from Old English **Hrēþmōnaþ*). Rheda is attested solely by Bede in his 8th century work *De temporum ratione*. While the name of the goddess appears in Bede's Latin manuscript as *Rheda*, it is reconstructed into Old English as **Hrēþe* and is sometimes modernly anglicized as **Hretha** (also "Hrethe" or "Hrede"). *Hrēþmōnaþ* is one of three events (apart from the days of the week) that refer to deities in the Anglo-Saxon calendar—the other two being *Ēostermōnaþ* and *Mōdraniht*.

De temporum ratione

In chapter 15 of his work *De temporum ratione*, Bede provides information about English months and celebrations. Bede records that *Hrēþmōnaþ* is analogous to March, and details that "Hrethmonath is named for their goddess Hretha, to whom they sacrificed at this time" (*Rhed-monath a Dea illorum Rheda, cui in illo sacrificabant, nominatur...*). Bede notes that *Hrēþmōnaþ* occurs between *Solmōnaþ* (February), so named due to the offerings of cakes to the gods during the month, and *Ēostermōnaþ* (April), named after the goddess *Ēostre*.^[2]

Theories

19th century scholar Jacob Grimm notes, while no other source mentions the goddesses Rheda and *Ēostre*, saddling Bede, a "father of the church, who everywhere keeps heathenism at a distance, and tells us less than he knows" with the invention of the goddesses Rheda and *Ēostre* would be uncritical, and that "there is nothing improbable in them, nay the first of them [Rheda] is justified by clear traces in the vocabularies of the German tribes." Grimm proposes a connection between **Hrēþe* and the Old High German female personal name *Hruada*. Grimm theorizes that the Old High German form of the goddess name *Rheda* was **Hrouda*.^[3]

Rudolf Simek notes that Grimm's derivation of the name Rheda means that Rheda "could have a similar meaning to the eponymous Roman god of the same month, Mars."^[1] David Raoul Wilson comments that while "Bede gives us no clues as to the rituals involved during *Rhedmonath* and *Eosturmonath*, it is reasonable to assume that they related to the beginning of spring, the new growing season, and fertility."^[4]

Modern influence

Book three of scholar and author J. R. R. Tolkien's fiction work *The Lord of the Rings—The Return of the King*—contains an appendix (Appendix D) that provides a sample of the Shire calendar. Month three of the calendar is "Rethe", modeled after *Hrēþmōnab*, and spelled as if used in modern times; syllables are dropped and elements altered to reflect attempts by successive generations to guess what the name originally meant.^[5]

Notes

- [1] Simek (2007:159).
- [2] English translation by Wallis (1999:53–54). Original Latin from Giles (1843:179).
- [3] Grimm (1882:288–290).
- [4] Wilson (1992:36).
- [5] Staver (2005:209).

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Sága and Sökkvabekkr

In Norse mythology, **Sága** (Old Norse: [saːʝa], possibly meaning "seeress"^[1]) is a goddess associated with the location **Sökkvabekkr** (Old Norse: [sɔkːwabekːr]; "sunken bank", "sunken bench", or "treasure bank"^[2]). At Sökkvabekkr, Sága and the god Odin merrily drink as cool waves flow. Both Sága and Sökkvabekkr are attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, and in the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Scholars have proposed theories about the implications of the goddess and her associated location, including that the location may be connected to the goddess Frigg's fen residence Fensalir and that Sága may be another name for *Frigg*.

Etymology

The etymology of the name *Sága* is generally held to be connected to the Old Norse verb *sjá*, meaning "to see" (from Proto-Germanic **sehwan*). This may mean that Sága is to be understood as a seeress. Since Frigg is referred to as a seeress in the poem *Lokasenna*, this etymology has led to theories connecting Sága to Frigg. Rudolf Simek says that this etymology raises vowel problems and that a link to *saga* and *segja* (meaning "say, tell") is more likely, yet that this identification is also problematic.^[3]

Attestations

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál*, Sökkvabekkr is presented fourth among a series of stanzas describing the residences of various gods. In the poem, Odin (disguised as *Grímnir*) tells the young Agnar that Odin and Sága happily drink there from golden cups while waves resound:

Benjamin Thorpe translation:

Sökkvabekkr is fourth o'er which is named the gelid waves
resound

Odin and Sága there,

joyful each day,

from golden beakers quaff.^[4]



Sága pours Odin a drink in an illustration (1893) by Jenny Nyström.



Sága and Odin converse while holding cups in an illustration (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

Henry Adams Bellows translation:

Sökkvabekkr is the fourth, where cool waves
flow,

And amid their murmur it stands;

There daily do Othin and Sága drink

In gladness from cups of gold.^[5]

In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, the hero Sinfjötli references Sága in the name of a location found in a stanza where Sinfjötli flyts with Guðmundr. The location name, *nes Ságu*,^[6] has been variously translated as "Saga's Headland,"^[7] "Saga's Cape,"^[8] and "Saga's ness"^[9] Part of the stanza may be missing and, due to this, some editors have joined it with the stanza prior.^[8]

Sága is mentioned once in both the *Prose Edda* books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*, while Sökkvabekkr is only mentioned once, in *Gylfaginning*. In chapter 35 of *Gylfaginning*, High tells Gangleri (described as king Gylfi in disguise) about the ásynjur. High follows a description of Frigg and her dwelling Fensalir with "Second is Saga. She dwells in Sökkvabekkr, and that is a big place."^[10] In chapter 75 of the book *Skáldskaparmál*, Sága is present among a list of 27 ásynjur, but no information is provided about her there.^[11]

Theories

John Lindow says that due to similarity between Sökkvabekkr and Fensalir, "Odin's open drinking with Sága", and the potential etymological basis for Sága being a seeress has "led most scholars to understand Sága as another name for Frigg."^[12] Stephan Grundy states that the words *Sága* and *Sökkvabekkr* may be by-forms of *Frigg* and *Fensalir*, respectively, used for the purpose of composing alliterative verse.^[13]

Britt-Mari Näsström theorizes that "Frigg's role as a fertility goddess is revealed in the name of her abode, Fensalir [...]", that Frigg is the same as Sága, and that both the names *Fensalir* and *Sökkvabekkr* "imply a goddess [*sic*] living in the water and recall the fertility goddess Nerthus". Näsström adds that "Sökkvabekkr, the subterranean water, alludes to the well of Urd, hidden under the roots of Yggdrasil and the chthonic function, which is manifest in Freyja's character."^[14]

Rudolf Simek says that Sága should be considered "one of the not closer defined Asyniur" along with Hlín, Sjöfn, Snotra, Vár, and Vör, and that they "should be seen as female protective goddesses." Simek adds that "these goddesses were all responsible for specific areas of the private sphere, and yet clear differences were made between them so that they are in many ways similar to matrons."^[3]

19th century scholar Jacob Grimm comments that "the gods share their power and influence with goddesses, the heroes and priests with wise women." Grimm notes that Sökkvabekkr is "described as a place where cool waters rush" and that Odin and Sága "day to day drink gladly out of golden cups." Grimm theorizes that the liquid from these cups is:

the drink of immortality, and at the same time of poesy. *Saga* may be taken as wife or as daughter of Oðinn; in either case she is identical to him as god of poetry. With the Greeks the *Musa* was a daughter of Zeus, but often hear of three or nine Muses, who resemble our wise women, norms and schöpferins (shapers of destiny), and dwell beside springs or wells. The cool flood well befits the swanwives, daughters of Wish. *Saga* can be no other than our sage (saw, tale), the 'mære' [...] personified and deified.^[9]



Sága records while Odin dictates in an illustration (1919) by Robert Engels.

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:136).
- [2] Orchard (1997:152) and Lindow (2001:265) have "sunken bank". Byock (2005:175) has "sunken bank or bench". Simek (2007:297) has "sunken bank" or "treasure bank."
- [3] Simek (2007:274).
- [4] Thorpe (1866:21).
- [5] Bellows (1936:88–89).
- [6] Guðni Jónsson ed., verse 39, *á nesi Ságu*.
- [7] Larrington (1999:119).
- [8] Bellows (1923:112).
- [9] Grimm (1883:910).
- [10] Faulkes (1995:29).
- [11] Faulkes (1995:175).
- [12] Lindow (2001:265).
- [13] Grundy (1999:62).
- [14] Näsström (1996:88–89).

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Sandraudiga

Sandraudiga is a Germanic goddess, attested on a stone with a Latin inscription, found in North Brabant, the Netherlands. Today the stone is housed in the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, the Netherlands. The meaning of her name is still subject of discussion, but it has been suggested that it might mean "she who dyes the sand red".^[1]

Notes

[1] *Nordisk Familjebok* (1916:665).

References

- *Nordisk Familjebok* (1916). Available online. (<http://runeberg.org/nf/>) (Direct link to page). (<http://runeberg.org/nfcd/0355.html>)

Sinthgunt

Sinthgunt is a figure in Germanic mythology, attested solely in the Old High German 9th or 10th century "horse cure" Merseburg Incantation. In the incantation, Sinthgunt is referred to as the sister of the personified sun, Sunna (whose name is alliterative to *Sinthgunt*),^[1] and the two sisters are cited as both producing charms to heal Phol's horse, a figure also otherwise unattested. The two are then followed by *Friia* and *Uolla*, also alliterative and stated as sisters.

As Sinthgunt is otherwise unattested, her significance is otherwise unknown, but an amount of scholarly theories exist about her role in Germanic mythology based on proposed etymologies, and the potential significance of her placement within the incantation.

Etymology

The etymology of *Sinthgunt* is unclear. Within the original manuscript, *Sinthgunt* is spelled "Sin**ht**gunt" (emphasis added). Sticking directly to this reading has yielded interpretations such as "the night-walking one". As a result of the paring with Sunna, the personified sun, this etymology has been interpreted as a reference to the moon. However, this reading has yielded problems; the moon in Germanic mythology is considered masculine, exemplified in the personification of the moon in Norse mythology, Máni, a male figure. Interpretations from the amended "Sinthgunt" have resulted in readings such as "the one moving into battle" or "heavenly body, star".^[2]

Placement

The figures Fulla (*Uolla*) and Frigg (*Friia*) are attested together in later Old Norse sources (though not as sisters), and theories have been proposed that the Fulla may at one time have been an aspect of Frigg. As a result, this notion has resulted in theory that a similar situation may have existed between the figures of Sinthgunt and Sól, in that the two may have been understood as aspects of one another rather than entirely separate figures.^[3]

Notes

- [1] Orchard (1997:112).
- [2] Simek (2007:285-286).
- [3] Bostock (1976:29).

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Tanfana

Tanfana or **Tamfana** was a goddess of the Istvaeones in ancient Germanic paganism, the destruction of whose temple in the territory of the Marsi is mentioned in Tacitus' *Annals*.

Literary mentions

In *Annals* Book 1, chapter 51, Tacitus records a massacre of people of the Cherusci, Chatti and Marsi and total destruction of the *celeberrimum illis gentibus templum quod Tamfanæ vocabunt* ("the temple . . . of Tamfana, as they called it, the special resort of all those tribes").^[1] The previous chapter states that the location was in the territory of the Marsi.

There is no undisputed testimony of this goddess besides the passage in Tacitus. An inscription *Tamfanae sacrum* was found in Terni, but is considered a falsification by Pyrrhus Ligorius.^[2] She is also mentioned, as *Zamfana*, in the supposed Old High German lullaby, which was accepted by Jacob Grimm^[3] but is now also considered a forgery.

Theories

Since *fana* is Latin for "temples," it has been suggested that it was a temple to a god *Tan*, shortened from the German word for a pine-tree, *Tanne*, or that the first element meant "collective."^{[4][5]} The division of the word was rejected by Grimm among others;^[6] he called the name "certainly German," the *-ana* ending being also found in *Hludana*, *Bertana*, *Rapana*, and *Madana*.^{[2][7]}

The passage is one of few to contradict Tacitus' own statement in *Germania* that the Germanic tribes did not have temples.^{[8][9]} Wilhelm Engelbert Giefers proposed that *Tanfana* derived from *tanfo*, cognate with Latin *truncus*, and referred to a grove on the site of the Eresburg, related to the Irminsul.^[10]

Many suggestions have been made about the goddess' name and nature. Grimm was unable to interpret it, but suggested variously that it was connected to *Stempe*, a name of Berchte,^{[7][11]} that she was named for an association with a sieve,^[12] and, based on the now discredited lullaby, that her name meant "bountiful, merciful."^[13] Based on folklore and toponymy, Friedrich Woeste proposed that the name was cognate with German *zimmern* and meant

"builder" or "nourisher";^[14] based on the season at which the festival and the Roman attack took place, Karl Müllenhoff proposed she was a goddess of harvest plenty, properly **Tabana*, cognate with Greek words for "expenditure" and (hypothetically) "unthrifty"; others added Icelandic and Norwegian words for "fullness, swelling," "to stuff," and "large meal."^[15] A. G. de Bruyn, a scholar of Oldenzaal folklore, returned to splitting the name into *Tan* and *fana* on toponymic grounds and because of a stamp dated 1336 found near Ommen that shows a woman holding a fir tree flanked by a sun symbol and a catlike creature and a bird; he proposed that she was a moon or a mother goddess, perhaps related to the Carthaginian goddess Tanit.^[16] He and more recently Rudi Klijnstra relate Tanfana, or Tan, to legends surrounding *de Groote Steen te Oldenzaal* (the Big Stone at Oldenzaal) in the area of Overijssel; the stone was originally located on a hill called Tankenberg, the highest point in the area, but was later moved into the city.^{[16][17]}

References

- [1] Translation by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, online (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0078:book=1:chapter=51>) at Tufts University Perseus Project. The sole manuscript has *a* with a nasalization sign above it and can therefore be read either *Tamfanæ* or *Tanfana*.
- [2] Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, tr. James Steven Stallybrass, volume 1, London: Bell, 1882, p. 80, note 1 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=neQtAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA257&dq=Grimm,+Stallybrass,+Teutonic+Mythology+Tanfana&hl=en&ei=oelxTqjIYnkiAKpsOX7CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=the word is certainly German, and formed like Hludana, Sigana&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=neQtAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA257&dq=Grimm,+Stallybrass,+Teutonic+Mythology+Tanfana&hl=en&ei=oelxTqjIYnkiAKpsOX7CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=the%20word%20is%20certainly%20German,%20and%20formed%20like%20Hludana,%20Sigana&f=false)).
- [3] Jacob Grimm, "Über die Göttin Tanfana," *Monatsberichte der Berliner Akademie* March 10, 1859, pp. 254–58, repr. in *Kleinere Schriften*, ed. Karl Müllenhoff, volume 5 Berlin: Dümmler, 1871, pp. 418–21, p. 418
- [4] Thomas Smith, ed. Francis Smith, *Arminius: A History of the German People and of their Legal and Constitutional Customs, from the Days of Julius Caesar to the Time of Charlemagne*, London: Blackwood, 1861, OCLC 34219379, p. 126 (http://books.google.com/books?id=XVvHS-6riMsC&pg=PA126&dq=Tanfana&hl=en&ei=AflwTsXCFeRiALix8zbBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=Tanfana&f=false). Smith believes it was a *Wotanfana*, a temple of Wodan.
- [5] Johannes Bühler, *Deutsche Geschichte* volume 1 *Urzeit, Bauerntum und Aristokratie bis um 1100*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1934, repr. 1960, p. 371 note (http://books.google.com/books?ei=OPdwTrCdDenfiALLpv3kBg&ct=result&id=nwMoAQAAIAAJ&dq=Grimm,+Kleinere+Schriften+Tanfana&q=Tanfana#search_anchor)
- [6] "Über das Wort Liude," *Archiv für Geschichte und Alterthumskunde Westphalens* 1.4 (1826) 114, repr. in *Kleinere Schriften* volume 6 Berlin: Dümmler, 1882, p. 374 (http://books.google.com/books?id=Fj0CAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA374&dq=Grimm,+Kleinere+Schriften+Tanfana&hl=en&ei=VfZwTrW6B6fjiAKYpYmHBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CE0Q6AEwBg#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- [7] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* volume 1, p. 257 (http://books.google.com/books?id=neQtAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA257&dq=Grimm,+Stallybrass,+Teutonic+Mythology+Tanfana&hl=en&ei=oelxTqjIYnkiAKpsOX7CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false).
- [8] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* volume 1, pp. 79–80 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=neQtAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA257&dq=Grimm,+Stallybrass,+Teutonic+Mythology+Tanfana&hl=en&ei=oelxTqjIYnkiAKpsOX7CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The most weighty and significant passages relating to this part of the subject seem to be the following:&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=neQtAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA257&dq=Grimm,+Stallybrass,+Teutonic+Mythology+Tanfana&hl=en&ei=oelxTqjIYnkiAKpsOX7CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20most%20weighty%20and%20significant%20passages%20relating%20to%20this%20part%20of%20the%20subject%20seem%20to%20be%20the%20following&f=false)), 84 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=neQtAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA257&dq=Grimm,+Stallybrass,+Teutonic+Mythology+Tanfana&hl=en&ei=oelxTqjIYnkiAKpsOX7CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=In all probability the sanctuary of Tanfana which Germanicus demolished&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=neQtAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA257&dq=Grimm,+Stallybrass,+Teutonic+Mythology+Tanfana&hl=en&ei=oelxTqjIYnkiAKpsOX7CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=In%20all%20probability%20the%20sanctuary%20of%20Tanfana%20which%20Germanicus%20demolished&f=false)).
- [9] E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964, OCLC 3264532, p. 236.
- [10] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* volume 4 (Supplement), London: Bell, 1883, pp. 1311–12 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=xMAoAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1311&dq=Grimm,+Teutonic+Mythology,+Giefers&hl=en&ei=OfBxTsCOLIPkiALnhs2ICQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=that Tanfana may come from tanfo, truncus&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=xMAoAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1311&dq=Grimm,+Teutonic+Mythology,+Giefers&hl=en&ei=OfBxTsCOLIPkiALnhs2ICQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=that%20Tanfana%20may%20come%20from%20tanfo,%20truncus&f=false)).
- [11] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* volume 1, p. 278 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=YxwAAAAQAAJ&pg=PR6&dq=Grimm,+Stallybrass,+Teutonic+Mythology&hl=en&ei=lu9xTvi4EefmiAK9zbGECQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&sqi=2&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=Martin of Amberg&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=YxwAAAAQAAJ&pg=PR6&dq=Grimm,+Stallybrass,+Teutonic+Mythology&hl=en&ei=lu9xTvi4EefmiAK9zbGECQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&sqi=2&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=Martin%20of%20Amberg&f=false)).
- [12] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* volume 3, London: Bell, 1883, p. 1109, note 1 ([http://books.google.com/books?id=OREVAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1108&dq=grimm,+teutonic+mythology,+divination+sieve&hl=en&ei=E_NxTtz-IYjosQLy3JHKCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=that would look heathenish&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=OREVAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1108&dq=grimm,+teutonic+mythology,+divination+sieve&hl=en&ei=E_NxTtz-IYjosQLy3JHKCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=that%20would%20look%20heathenish&f=false)).
- [13] Grimm, "Über die Göttin Tanfana," p. 419.
- [14] Friedrich Woeste, "Spuren weiblicher Gottheiten in den Überlieferungen der Grafschaft Mark," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie* 1 (1853) 384–96, 2 (1855), 81–99, pp. 385–88

- [15] Karl Müllenhoff, "Verderbte Namen bei Tacitus," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 9 (1853) 223–61, pp. 258–59 and "Tanfana," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 23 (1879) 23–25 ; Rudolf Koegel, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, reported in Hans Krahe, "Tamfana," *PBB* 58 (1934) 282–87, p. 287
- [16] A. G. de Bruyn, *Geesten en goden in oud Oldenzaal*, n.p., 1929, OCLC 64372573
- [17] Rudi Klijnstra, *Tanfana, de Twentse Godin: haar mythen, legenden & heilige plaatsen*, Hengelo: Annwn, 2007, ISBN 978-90-902155-6-3, excerpts online at RunningFox.nl (<http://www.runningfox.nl/overigeartikelen/tanfana.html>)

Vanir

In Norse mythology, the **Vanir** (singular **Vanr**) are a group of gods associated with fertility, wisdom and the ability to see the future. The Vanir are one of two groups of gods (the other being the *Æsir*) and are the namesake of the location Vanaheimr ("Home of the Vanir"). After the *Æsir–Vanir War*, the Vanir became a subgroup of the *Æsir*. Subsequently, members of the Vanir are sometimes also referred to as members of the *Æsir*.



Freja by John Bauer (1882–1918).

The Vanir are attested in the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources; the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, both written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson; and in the poetry of skalds. The Vanir are only attested in these Old Norse sources, unlike the *Æsir*, who are attested widely among all tribes of the Germanic peoples. *Vanir* is sometimes anglicized to **Wanes** (singular **Wane**).

All sources describe the deities Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja as members of the Vanir. A Euhemerized prose account in *Heimskringla* adds that Njörðr's sister—whose name is not provided—and Kvasir were Vanir. In addition, *Heimskringla* reports a tale involving king Sveigðir's visit to Vanaheimr, where he meets a woman by the name of Vana and the two produce a child named Vanlandi (whose name means "Man from the Land of the Vanir").

While not attested as Vanir, the gods Heimdallr and Ullr have been theorized as potential members of the group. In the *Prose Edda*, a name listed for boars is "Van-child". Scholars have theorized that the Vanir may be connected to small pieces of gold foil found in Scandinavia at some building sites from the Migration Period to the Viking Age and occasionally in graves. They have speculated whether the Vanir originally represented pre-Indo-European deities or Indo-European fertility gods, and have theorized a form of the gods as venerated by the pagan Anglo-Saxons.

Etymology

Numerous theories have been proposed for the etymology of *Vanir*. Scholar R. I. Page says that, while there are no shortages of etymologies for the word, it is tempting to link the word with "Old Norse *vinr*, 'friend', and Latin *Venus*, 'goddess of physical love.'"^[1]

Attestations

Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, the Vanir, as a group, are specifically referenced in the poems *Völuspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Skírnismál*, *Þrymskviða*, *Alvíssmál* and *Sigrdrífumál*. In *Völuspá*, a stanza describes the events of the Æsir–Vanir War, noting that during the war the Vanir broke the walls of the stronghold of the Æsir, and that the Vanir were "indomitable, trampling the plain."^[2]

In *Vafþrúðnismál*, Gagnráðr (the god Odin in disguise) engages in a game of wits with the jötunn Vafþrúðnir. Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir where the Van god Njörðr came from, for though he rules over many hofs and högrs, Njörðr was not raised among the Æsir. Vafþrúðnir responds that Njörðr was created in Vanaheimr ("home of the Vanir") by "wise powers" and details that during the Æsir–Vanir War, Njörðr was exchanged as a hostage. In addition, when the world ends (Ragnarök), Njörðr "will return to the wise Vanir."^[3]

Alvíssmál consists of question and answer exchanges between the dwarf Alvíss and the god Thor. In the poem, Alvíss supplies terms that various groups, including the Vanir, use to refer to various subjects. Alvíss attributes nine terms to the Vanir; one for Earth ("The Ways"), Heaven ("The Weaver of Winds"), clouds ("Kites of the Wind"), calm ("The Hush of the Winds"), the sea ("The Wave"), fire ("Wildfire"), wood ("The Wand"), seed ("growth"), and ale ("The Foaming").^[4]

The poem *Þrymskviða* describes that the god Heimdallr possesses foreknowledge, "as the Vanir also can."^[5] *Sigrdrífumál* records that the Vanir are in possession of a "sacred mead". In the poem, the valkyrie Sigrdrífa provides mystical lore about runes to the hero Sigurd. Sigrdrífa notes that runes were once carved on to various creatures, deities and other figures, and then shaved off and mixed with a "sacred mead." This mead is possessed by the Æsir, the elves, mankind, and the Vanir.^[6]

In *Skírnismál*, the beautiful jötunn Gerðr first encounters the god Freyr's messenger Skírnir, and asks him if he is of the elves, of the Æsir, or of the "wise Vanir." Skírnir responds that he is not of any of the three groups.^[7] Later in the poem, Skírnir is successful in his threats against Gerðr (to have Gerðr accept Freyr's affections), and Gerðr offers Skírnir a crystal cup full of mead, noting that she never thought that she would love one of the Vanir.^[8]



The sun shining behind them, the Vanr god Freyr stands with his boar Gullinbursti (1901) by Johannes Gehrts.

Prose Edda

The Vanir are mentioned in the *Prose Edda* books *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*. In chapter 23 of *Gylfaginning*, the enthroned figure of High relates that Njörðr was raised in Vanaheimr. High says that during the Æsir–Vanir War, the Vanir sent Njörðr as a hostage to the Æsir, and the Æsir sent to the Vanir the god Hœnir. The sending of Njörðr as a hostage resulted in a peace agreement between the Æsir and the Vanir.^[9]

Chapter 35 provides information regarding the goddess Freyja, including that one of her names is "Dis of the Vanir." In the same chapter, High tells that the goddess Gná rides the horse Hófvarpnir, and that this horse has the ability to ride through the air and atop the sea.^[10] High continues that "once some Vanir saw her path as she rode through the air" and that an unnamed one of these Vanir says, in verse (for which no source is provided):

"What flies there?
What fares there?
or moves through the air?"^[11]

Gná responds:

"I fly not
though I fare
and move through the air
on Hofvarpnir
the one whom Hamskerpir got
with Gardrofa."^[11]

In chapter 57 of *Skáldskaparmál*, the god Bragi explains the origin of poetry. Bragi says the origin of poetry lies in the Æsir-Vanir War. During the peace conference held to end the war both the Æsir and the Vanir formed a truce by spitting into a vat. When they left, the gods decided that it shouldn't be poured out, but rather kept as a symbol of their peace, and so from the contents they made a man; Kvasir. Kvasir is later murdered by dwarves, and from his blood the Mead of Poetry is made.^[12]

In chapter 6, poetic names for Njörðr are provided, including "descendant of Vanir or a Van". As reference, a poem by the 11th century skald Þórðr Sjáreksson is provided where Njörðr is described as a Vanr. In chapter 7, poetic names for Freyr are listed, including names that reference his association with the Vanir; "Vanir god," "descendant of Vanir," and "a Van."^[13] Freyja is also repeatedly cited as a Vanr. In chapter 20, some of Freyja's names are listed and include "Van-deity" and "Van-lady," and chapter 37 provides skaldic verse referring to Freyja as "Van-bride."^[14] In chapter 75, names for pigs are provided, including "Van-child."^[15]



Flanked by her boar Hildisvini, the Vanr goddess Freyja (right) (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.



A wild boar in Northern Europe. In the *Prose Edda*, "Van-child" is listed as a name for boars. Both Freyja and Freyr are attested as accompanied by boars.

Heimskringla

The *Heimskringla* book *Ynglinga saga* (chapter 4) provides an Euhemerized account of the Æsir–Vanir War. As a peace agreement, the two sides agreed to trade hostages. The Vanir sent Njörðr and Freyr to the Æsir, and in turn the Æsir sent to the Vanir Hœnir and Mímir. Upon receiving Mímir, the Vanir sent the "cleverest amongst them," Kvasir. In Vanaheimr, the Vanir made Hœnir a chieftain. However, whenever Hœnir appeared at assemblies or meetings where the Vanir asked him his opinion on difficult issues, his response was "let others decide." The Vanir suspected that they had been cheated by the Æsir in the hostage exchange, and so grabbed hold of Mímir, cut off Mímir's head, and sent it to the Æsir.^[16]

The same chapter describes that while Njörðr lived among the Vanir, his wife (unnamed) was his sister, and the couple had two children; Freyr and Freyja. However, "among the Æsir it was forbidden to marry so near a kin." By Odin's appointment, Njörðr and Freyr became priests over offerings of sacrifice, and they were recognized as gods among the Æsir. Freyja was priestess at the sacrifices, and "it was she who first taught the Æsir magic as was practiced among the Vanir."^[16]

In chapter 15, the king Sveigðir is recorded as having married a woman named Vana in "Vanaland", located in Sweden. The two produced a child, who they named Vanlandi (Old Norse "Man from the Land of the Vanir"^[17]).^[18]

Archaeological record

Small pieces of gold foil decorated with pictures of figures dating from the Migration Period into the early Viking Age (known as *gullgubber*) have been discovered in various locations in Scandinavia, in one case almost 2,500. The foil pieces have been found largely at sites of buildings, only rarely in graves. The figures are sometimes single, occasionally an animal, sometimes a man and a woman with a leafy bough between them, facing or embracing one another. The human figures are almost always clothed and are sometimes depicted with their knees bent. Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson says that it has been suggested that the figures are partaking in a dance, and that they may have been connected with weddings and linked to the Vanir, representing the notion of a divine marriage, such as in the *Poetic Edda* poem *Skírnismál*; the coming together of the Vanir god Freyr and his love, Gerðr.^[19]

Scholarly theories

Like the Vanr goddess Freyja, the Vanir as a group are not attested outside Scandinavia. Traditionally, following *Völuspá* and Snorri Sturluson's account in the *Prose Edda*, scholarship on the Vanir has focused on the Æsir–Vanir War, its possible basis in a war between tribes, and whether the Vanir originated as the deities of a distinct people. Some scholars have doubted that they were known outside Scandinavia; however, there is evidence that the god Freyr is the same god as the Germanic deity Ing (reconstructed as Proto-Germanic **Ingwaz*), and that, if so, he is attested as having been known among the Goths.^[20] More recently, the view put forward by Georges Dumézil based on Indo-European parallels has dominated, wherein the Vanir, like



Odin throws his spear at the Vanir host, illustration (1895) by Lorenz Frølich



A leafy bough between them, two figures embrace on a small piece of gold foil dating from the Migration Period to the early Viking Age

the *Æsir*, derive from the pre-Germanic heritage of Germanic religion and embody the third of the three "functions" in his trifunctional hypothesis: chthonic and fertility deities.^{[21][22][23]}

Hilda Ellis Davidson theorizes that all of the wives of the gods may have originally been members of the Vanir, noting that many of them appear to have originally been children of *jötnar*.^[19] Davidson additionally notes that "it is the Vanir and Odin who seem to receive the most hostile treatment in Christian stories about mythological personages."^[24] Alaric Hall has equated the Vanir with the elves,^[25] and Joseph S. Hopkins and Haukur Þorgeirsson, building on suggestions by archaeologist Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and others, link the Vanir to ship burial customs among the North Germanic peoples, proposing an early Germanic model of a ship in a "field of the dead" that may be represented both by Freyja's afterlife field *Fólkvangr* and by the Old English *Neorxnawang* (the mysterious first element of which may be linked to the name of Freyja's father, *Njörðr*).^[26]

Richard North theorizes that glossing Latin *vanitates* ("vanities", "idols") for "gods" in Old English sources implies the existence of **uuani* (a reconstructed cognate to Old Norse *Vanir*) in Deiran dialect and hence that the gods that Edwin of Northumbria and the northern Angles worshiped in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England were likely to have been the **uuani*. He comments that they likely "shared not only the name but also the orgiastic character of the [Old Icelandic] *Vanir*."^[27]

In 2010 Rudolf Simek, building on an analysis by Lotte Motz, argued that *vanir* was originally nothing more than a general term for deities like *æsir*, and that its employment as a distinct group of deities was Snorri's invention, and the Vanir are therefore "a figment of imagination from the 13th to 20th centuries".^[28] Simek's argument is supported by a statistical analysis in the same academic newsletter of the small corpus of poetic usages, which suggests that the term *Vanir* was a "suspended archaism" used as a metrical alternative to *Æsir*.^[29] In contrast, in a concurrently published response, Clive Tolley argues that the term must have originated in historical usage, and as such "it is something of a misrepresentation of the evidence to suggest that Snorri is the main source for the *vanir*."^[30] Returning to the Indo-European origins theory, he argues that the Vanir strengthen the *Æsir* by contributing their relationality, their ability to absorb the other and their receptivity to sacrifice.^[31] In contrast, continuing the same journal thread, Leszek P. Słupecki argues that the Vanir remained distinct from the *Æsir*—except for Freyja and Freyr, whom he follows Snorri in seeing as having been born after *Njörðr* became a hostage among the *Æsir*, and thus regards as *Æsir*—and therefore that Ragnarök "[has] no importance for their world".^[32]

Modern influence

The Vanir are featured in the poem *Om vanerne in Nordens Guder* (1819) by Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger.^[33] Some Germanic Neopagans refer to their beliefs as *Vanatrú* (meaning "those who honor the Vanir").^[34]

Notes

[1] Page (1990:27).

[2] Larrington (1999:7).

[3] Larrington (1999:46).

[4] Bellows (1923:186–187, 189–193).

[5] Larrington (1999:99).

[6] Larrington (1999:169).

[7] Larrington (1999:64).

[8] Larrington (1999:67).

[9] Faulkes (1995:23).

[10] Byock (2005:43).

[11] Byock (2005:44).

[12] Faulkes (1995:61–62).

[13] Faulkes (1999:57).

[14] Faulkes (1995:86–99).

[15] Faulkes (1999:164).

[16] Hollander (2007:8).

- [17] McKinnell (2005:70).
- [18] Hollander (2007:15).
- [19] Davidson (1988:121).
- [20] Grundy (1998:65).
- [21] Dumézil (1959).
- [22] Dumézil, trans. Lindow (1973)
- [23] Tolley (2011:22).
- [24] Davidson (1969:132).
- [25] Hall (2007:26, 35–36), cited in Tolley (2011:23)
- [26] Hopkins and Haukur (2011).
- [27] North (1998:177–178).
- [28] Simek comments: "I believe that these are not mistakes that we are dealing with here, but a deliberate invention on the part of Snorri."
Simek (2010:18).
- [29] Frog and Roper (2011:30 and 35).
- [30] Tolley (2011:20–22).
- [31] Tolley (2011:24).
- [32] Słupecki (2011).
- [33] Simek (2007:352).
- [34] Harvey (2000:67).

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Wōdanaz

Wōdanaz or *Wōdinaz* is the reconstructed Proto-Germanic name of a god of Germanic paganism, known as *Óðinn* in Norse mythology, *Wōden* in Old English, *Wodan* or *Wotan* in Old High German and *Godan* in Lombardic. The name may be written with an asterisk in front, to indicate that the form is not directly attested; see also historical linguistics, comparative method.

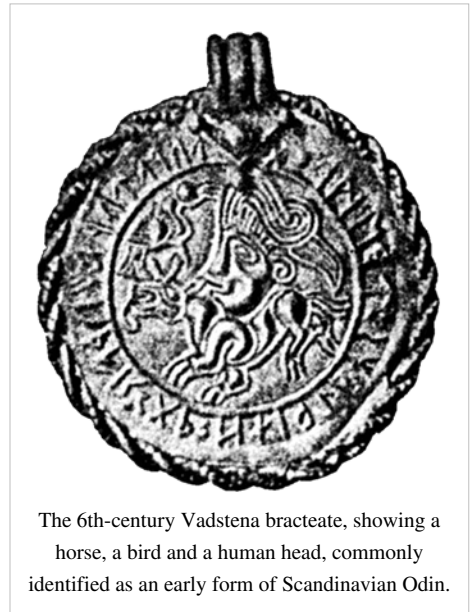
He is in all likelihood identical with the Germanic god identified by Roman writers as Mercury and possibly with Tacitus' *regnator omnium deus*. Wodanaz may have risen to prominence during the Roman Iron Age, perhaps gradually displacing a hypothetical *Tīwaz* (later Tyr) as a major deity in West and North Germanic cultures.

Testimonies of the god are scattered over a wide range, both temporally and geographically. More than a millennium separates the earliest Roman accounts and archaeological evidence from the beginning of the Common Era from the Odin of the Edda and later medieval folklore.

Wōdanaz is associated with poetic or mantic qualities, his name being connected with the concept of **wōþuz*, "*furor poeticus*" (poetic fury), and is thus the god of poets and seers. He is a shapeshifter and healer, and thus a god of magicians and leeches. He is associated with the Wild Hunt of dead, and thus a death deity. He is also a god of war and bringer of victory.

The time periods distinguished in this article are

- Proto-Germanic period, c. 2nd century BC to 2nd century AD: **Wodanaz* and "Germanic Mercury";



The 6th-century Vadstena bracteate, showing a horse, a bird and a human head, commonly identified as an early form of Scandinavian Odin.

- Migration Period, c. 3rd to 7th centuries: *Woden*, *Wodan* and Proto-Norse **Wodinaz*; the earliest records of the name *Wodan* date to the 6th-century Hiberno-Scottish mission;
- Viking Age, c. 8th to 12th centuries: Scandinavian *Óðinn*;
- Medieval to Early Modern periods, c. 13th to 18th centuries: Germanic folklore (Wild Hunt);
- Modern period, c. 1800 to present: Romanticist Viking revival, Neopagan reconstructions and references in popular culture.



7th-century depiction of Odin on a Vendel helmet plate, found in Uppland.

Etymology

The attested forms of the theonym are traditionally derived from Proto-Germanic **Wōdanaz*[1] (in Old Norse word-initial **w-* was dropped before rounded vowels and so the name became *Óðinn*). Adam von Bremen etymologizes the god worshipped by the 11th-century Scandinavian pagans as "*Wodan id est furor*" ("*Wodan*, which means 'fury'"). An obsolete alternative etymology, which has been adhered to by many early writers including Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa in his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, is to give it the same root as the word *god* itself, from its Proto-Germanic form **gud-*. This is not tenable today according to most modern academics, except for the Lombardic name *Godan*, which may go back to **gudanaz* (see also *goði*, *gaut*, *god*).

It should be noted at this point that Old Norse had two different words spelled *óðr*, one an adjective and the other a noun. The adjective means "mad, frantic, furious, violent",[2] and is cognate with Old English *wōd*. [3] The noun means "mind, wit, soul, sense" and "song, poetry",[4] and is cognate with Old English *wōþ*. In compounds, *óð-* means "fiercely energetic" (e.g. *óð-málugr* "speaking violently, excited").

Both Old Norse words are from Proto-Germanic **wōþuz*[5], continuing Pre-Germanic **wātus*. [6] Two extra-Germanic cognates are the Proto-Celtic **wātus* "mantic poetry" (continued in Irish *fáith* "poet" and Welsh *gwawd* "praise-poetry") and the Latin *vātes* "prophet, seer" (a possible loan from Proto-Celtic **wātis*, Gaulish *ouatec*). A possible, but uncertain, cognate is Sanskrit *api-vat-* "to excite, awaken" (RV 1.128.2). The Proto-Indo-European meaning of the root is therefore reconstructed as relating to spiritual excitation. The Old Norse semantic split is reflected in Adam von Bremen's testimony of the synchronic understanding of the name as "fury", rather than "poetry" or similar.

Meid[7] suggested Proto-Germanic **-na-* as a suffix expressing lordship ("Herrschersuffix"), in view of words such as Odin's name *Herjann* "lord of armies", *drótinn* "lord of men", and *þjóðann* "lord of the nation", which would result in a direct translation of "lord of spiritual energy", "lord of poetry" or similar. It is sufficient, however, and more common, to assume a more general meaning of pertinence or possession for the suffix, inherited from PIE **-no-*, to arrive at roughly the same meaning. (If it originally started out in a laryngeal consonant, the suffix could be the thematic variant of the famous "Hoffmannsches Possessivsuffix" or more succinctly "Hoffmann-Suffix", named after its discoverer Karl Hoffmann, and nowadays commonly reconstructed as **-h₃on-* ~ **-h₃n-*, i. e., **-h₃n-o-*, also found in Latin *Neptūnus* and *Portūnus*, theonyms likely derived from **neptu-* "moist substance" and *portus* "port" respectively.)

Rübekeil (2003:29)[8] draws attention to the suffix variants **-ina-* (in *Óðinn*) vs. **-ana-* (in *Woden*, *Wotan*). This variation, if considered at all, was dismissed as "suffix ablaut" by earlier scholars. There are, however, indications

from outside Old Norse of a suffix **-ina-*: English *Wednesday* (rather than **Wodnesday*) via umlaut goes back to **wōdīna-*. Rūbekeil concludes that the original Proto-Germanic form of the name was **Wōdīnaz*, yielding Old Norse *Óðinn* and unattested Anglo-Saxon **Wēden*, and that the attested West Germanic forms are early medieval "clerical" folk etymologies, formed under the impression of synchronic association with terms for "fury".

The pre-Proto-Germanic form of the name would then be **Wātinōs*. Rūbekeil suggests that this is a loan from Proto-Celtic into pre-Proto-Germanic, referring to the god of the **wātis*, the Celtic priests of mantic prophecy, so that the original meaning of the name would be "he [the god/lord] of the Vates" (p. 33), which he tentatively identifies with Lugh (p. 40).

Schaffner,[9] however, has drawn attention to a third suffix variant **-una-* in Old Danish **Óðon* (< **Óðunn*), attested in Old English as *Ōdon*. He argues that this is the original form of the name: **Wōdūnaz*, derived from the above-mentioned noun **wōþuz* with the above-mentioned ("lordship"?) suffix **-na-*. The other suffix variants **Wōdīnaz* and **Wōdanaz* would then both be secondary reformations. (The lack of the expected umlaut in Old Norse *Óðinn* does suggest that this form arose due to secondary replacement of the suffix, and thus, contra Rūbekeil, cannot be original, regardless of whether the original suffix had *a* or *u*.) The pre-Proto-Germanic form would then be **Wātunos* or perhaps **Wātūnos* < **Wātuh₂nos*, should the Hoffmann suffix be involved. (In any case, the original accent could not have been on the first syllable, as the **þ* appears voiced to **ð* due to Verner's law.)

W. S. W. Anson's 1880 *Asgard and the Gods* Wikipedia:Identifying reliable sources surmises that "Wuotan" was originally a fully abstract cosmic force, whose name meant not "fury" originally but etymologically, quite literally, meant "what was pervasive" with the second element, "-an", issuing a meaning that renders it to be construed as signifying a single pervasive principle. According to Anson, *wuot-* meant "...to force one's way through anything, to conquer all opposition..." and *Wuotan* solidifying such as "...the all-penetrating, all-conquering Spirit of Nature...". The name *Wuotan* being related to, in their interpretation "(t)he modern German water, and the English wade". Anson considered those two words to be more "restricted in meaning" than was *wuot* itself. The less restricted implications so grew as the attribute inherent in the meaning of the name for the god. The suffix "-an" personifying, but not then anthropomorphizing, the prefix element as the absolute definitive instance, and front-head, of anything thus resembling the meaning that such said prefix element '*wuot-*' would have had in nature, toward one unique divine origination of that as a general qualification.^[10]

Odin and Mercury

Less is known about the role of Odin as receiver of the dead among the more southern Germanic tribes. The Roman historian Tacitus probably refers to Odin when he talks of Mercury. The reason is that, like Mercury, Odin was regarded as Psychopompos, "the leader of souls".

Julius Caesar states in *De Bello Gallico* 6.17.1 that for the Gauls the worship of Mercury was the most important, or perhaps most widespread, out of all the gods.

Paulus Diaconus (or Paul the Deacon), writing in the late 8th century, tells that Odin (*Guodan*) was the chief god of the Lombards and, like earlier southern sources, he identifies Odin with Mercury (*History of the Lombards*, I:9). Because of this identification, Paulus adds that the god *Guodan*, "although held to exist [by Germanic peoples], it was not around this time, but long ago, and not in Germania, but in Greece" where the god originated. Wace also identifies Wotan with Mercury. Viktor Rydberg, in his work on Teutonic Mythology, draws a number of other parallels between Odin and Mercury, such as the fact that they were both responsible for bringing poetry to mortals.

Similarly, Ammianus Marcellinus most likely references Odin and Thor in his history of the later Roman Empire as Mercury and Mars, respectively, though a direct association is not made. This, however, underlines a particular problem concerning ancient Greek and Roman sources. Historians from both cultures, during all periods, believed the deities of foreign cultures to merely be their own gods under different names (see *interpretatio graeca*). Such an example may be found in Herodotus' association of an Egyptian Ram-headed god (most probably Amun) with Zeus. Later, Medieval historians followed the older tradition and likewise made such associations. However, there is no

historical evidence to suggest that these are valid connections and as such they should not be taken as historical fact.

Celtic parallels

Parallels between Odin and Lugus have often been pointed out: both are intellectual gods, commanding magic and poetry and both have ravens and a spear as their attributes. Julius Caesar (*de bello Gallico*, 6.17.1) mentions Mercury as the chief god of Celtic religion. However, most of our sources concerning Celtic Lugus are Insular Celtic, while sources discussing Gaulish Lugus are rare, although his importance is manifest from the numerous toponyms containing the name (*Lugdunum* etc.). Lucanus mentions three Celtic gods: Teutates, Esus, and Taranis. Teutates is identified with Mars or Mercury, and he receives as human sacrifices drowned captives and fallen warriors. Esus is also identified with Mercury but also with Mars, and he accepts as human sacrifices prisoners who are hanged on trees and then dismembered. Taranis is identified with Jupiter, as a warlord and a sky god. Human sacrifices to Taranis are made by burning prisoners in wooden casks. Lugus is not mentioned by Lucanus at all. The suggestion of Rūbekeil (2003:38), in view of his hypothesis of a Celtic origin of the Germanic god discussed above, is that Lugus refers to the trinity Teutates-Esus-Taranis considered as a single god.

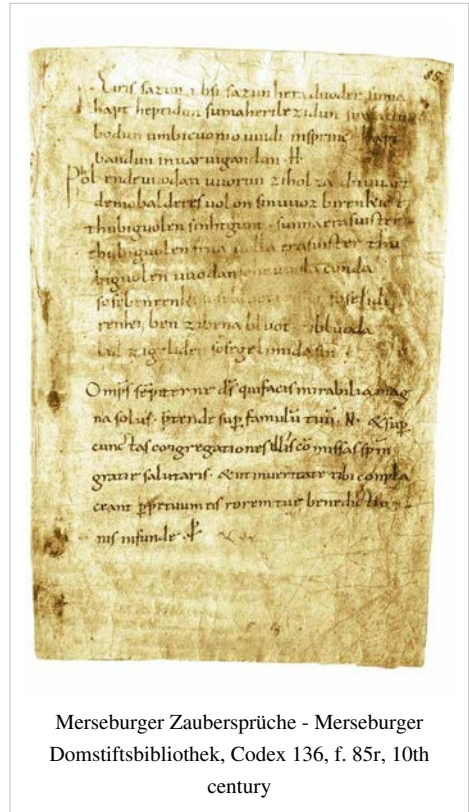
An etymological reflex of Celtic *Lugus* is possibly found in *Loki* (a Germanic god described as a "hypostasis of Odin" by Folke Ström). A likely context of the diffusion of elements of Celtic ritual into Germanic culture are tribes such as the Chatti, who lived at the Celtic-Germanic boundary in Hesse during the final centuries BC. (The Chatti are traditionally considered a Germanic tribe, but many of their leaders and their settlements had Celtic names.)

Shamanic traits

The goddess Freyja is described as an adept of the mysteries of *seid* (shamanism), a *völva*, and it is said that it was she who initiated Odin into its mysteries. In *Lokasenna*, Loki verbally abuses Odin for practising *seid*, condemning it as an unmanly art. A justification for this may be found in the *Ynglinga saga* where Snorri opines that in following the practice of *seid*, the practitioner was rendered unmanly. Another explanation is that its manipulative aspects ran counter to the male ideal of forthright, open behaviour.

Odin was a compulsive seeker of wisdom, consumed by his passion for knowledge, to the extent that he sacrificed one of his eyes (which one this was is unclear) to Mímir, in exchange for a drink from the waters of wisdom in Mímir's well.

Some German sacred formulae, known as the "Merseburger Zaubersprüche" ("Merseburg Charms") were written down in c AD 800 and survived to the present time. One (this is the second of the two) describes Wodan in the role of a healer:



Merseburger Zaubersprüche - Merseburger
Domstiftsbibliothek, Codex 136, f. 85r, 10th
century

Original:

*Phol ende UUodan vuorun zi holza.
du uuart demo Balderes volon sin vuoz birenkit
thu biguel en Sinhtgunt, Sunna era suister;
thu biguel en Friia, Volla era suister
thu biguel en Uuodan, so he uuola conda
sose benrenki, sose bluotrenki
sose lidirenki: ben zi bena
bluot zi bluoda, lid zi geliden
sōse gelīmida sin!*

English translation:

Phol (Balder) and Wodan were riding in the forest
Balder's foal dislocated its foot
Sinhtgunt, sister of Sunna (Sol), tried to cure it by magic
Frige, sister of Fulla, tried to cure it by magic
it was charmed by Wodan, like he well could:
be it bonesprain, be it bloodsprain
be it limbsprain, bone to bones
blood to blood, limb to limbs
like they are glued!

Further, the creation of the runes is attributed to Odin and is described in the *Rúnatal*, a section of the *Hávamál*. He hanged himself from the tree called *Yggdrasill* whilst pierced by his own spear in order to acquire knowledge. He remained thus for nine days and nights, a significant number in Norse magical practice (there were, for example, nine realms of existence), thereby learning nine (later eighteen) magical songs and eighteen magical runes. The purpose of this strange ritual, a god sacrificing himself to himself because there was nothing higher to sacrifice to, was ostensibly to obtain mystical insight through mortification of the flesh.

Some scholars see this scene as influenced by the story of Christ's crucifixion; and others note the similarity to the story of Gautama Buddha's enlightenment. It is in any case also influenced by shamanism, where the symbolic climbing of a "world tree" by the shaman in search of mystic knowledge is a common religious pattern. We know that sacrifices, human or otherwise, to the gods were commonly hung in or from trees, often transfixing by spears. (See also: Peijainen) Additionally, one of Odin's names is *Ygg*, and the Norse name for the World Ash—*Yggdrasill*—therefore means "Ygg's (Odin's) horse". Another of Odin's names is *Hangatýr*, the god of the hanged. Odin's desire for wisdom can also be seen in his work as a farmhand for a summer, for *Baugi*, in order to obtain the mead of poetry. See *Fjalargal* and *Galar* for more details.

Worship

Details of the Migration period of Germanic religion are sketchy, reconstructed from artifacts, sparse contemporary sources, and the later testimonies of medieval legends and placenames. It was common, particularly among the Cimbri, to sacrifice a prisoner to Odin before or after a battle. Steve Pollington suggests that worship of Wōdanaz became popular as the leaders of Germanic warbands (who would naturally favour a god that might bring victory) gained prominence over the traditional kings in a period of increased militarisation in response to Roman expansionism. Pollington also notes another theory, that Wōdanaz is a mythological representation of the actual elder leaders of groups of youth who practiced a particularly wild style of fighting, a practice which later evolved into that of the berserkers.^[11]



Odin entering Valhalla riding on Sleipnir, welcomed by a Valkyrie as depicted on the 8th-century Tjängvide image stone.

According to Jonas Bobiensis, the 6th-century Irish missionary Saint Columbanus is reputed to have disrupted a Beer sacrifice to Wuodan (*Deo suo Vodano nomine*) in Bregenz, Alemannia. Wuodan was the chief god of the Alamanni, his name appears in the runic inscription on the Nordendorf fibula.

Pagan worship disappeared with Christianization, between the 6th and 8th centuries in England and Germany, lingering until the 11th or 12th century in Iceland and Scandinavia. Remnants of worship were continued into modern times as folklore (see Germanic Christianity).

It has been argued that killing a combatant in battle was to give a sacrificial offering to Odin. The fickleness of Odin in battle was well-documented, and in Lokasenna, Loki taunts Odin for his inconsistency.

Adam of Bremen in the 12th century relates that every ninth year, people assembled from all over Sweden to sacrifice at the Temple at Uppsala. Male slaves and males of each species were sacrificed and hanged from the branches of the trees. As the Swedes had the right not only to elect a king but also to depose a king, the sagas relate that king Domalde and king Olof Trätälja were sacrificed to Odin after years of famine. Sometimes sacrifices were made to Odin to bring about changes in circumstance. A notable example is the sacrifice of King Víkar that is detailed in Gautrek's Saga and in Saxo Grammaticus's account of the same event. Sailors in a fleet being blown off course drew lots to sacrifice to Odin that he might abate the winds. The king drew the lot and was hanged. Sacrifices were probably also made to Odin at the beginning of summer, since Ynglinga saga states one of the great festivals of the calendar is *at sumri, þat var sigrblót* "in summer, that is the sacrifice for victory".

Migration period

The Anglo-Saxon tribes brought their pagan faith to England around the 5th and 6th centuries and continued in that form of worship until nearly all were converted to Christianity by the 8th century. The Anglo-Saxon kings claimed descent from Woden. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the *Historia Britonum*, Woden had the sons Wecta, Baeldaeg, Casere and Wihtlaeg, who in turn were ancestors of the royal houses of the Heptarchy. Other manifestations of Woden in England are confined to a scattering of place-names and an even smaller number of literary mentions in the Old English poems *Maxims I* (line 132) and in the so-called *Nine Herbs Charm* (line 32).

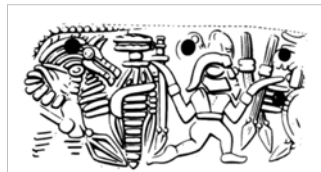
Lombardic *Godan* appears in the 7th century *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*. According to the legend presented there, Godan's wife, Frea favoured the Lombards, at the time still called *Winnili*, and tricked Godan into helping them by having the women of the Winnili tie their hair in front of their faces. Godan thought that they were warriors with impressive beards and named them *Langobardi* ("longbeards").

Depictions of warriors in the 6th to 7th century, performing a ritual dance show one dancer in a wolf-costume and another wearing a helmet with two birds' heads (in Anglo-Saxon iconography, two dancers with such helmets are attested on the Sutton Hoo helmet, but not the warrior in wolf-costume). Both figures are armed with spears and swords. The scene is mostly associated with the cult of Wodan/Wodin. The horned helmet has precedents in similar ritual dances in depictions dating to the Nordic Bronze Age, but the re-interpretation of the "horns" as birds of prey appears to be a development original to the 6th century. The twin dancers may correspond to the twin sons of the sky-god, known to Tacitus as Alcis. With the rise of the cult Wodan/Wodin in place of Teiwaz in the course of the Migration period, Tyr ultimately became a son of Odin in Eddaic mythology (and both Tyr and Odin remain associated with wolves). The two birds' heads on the dancers' helmets have a parallel in the two ravens of Eddaic Odin, Hugin and Munin.

Another recurring scene shows a warrior fighting two wild beasts (wolves or bears, compared to the Eddaic Geri and Freki). Thus, Spiedel (2004) connects Geri and Freki with archaeological finds depicting figures wearing wolf-pelts and frequently found wolf-related names among the Germanic peoples, including Wulfhroc ("Wolf-Frock"), Wolfhetan ("Wolf-Hide"), Isangrim ("Grey-Mask"), Scrutolf ("Garb-Wolf") and Wolfgang ("Wolf-Gait"), Wolfdregil ("Wolf-Runner"), and Vulfolaic ("Wolf-Dancer") and myths regarding wolf warriors from Norse mythology (such as the *Úlfhéðnar*). Parallels in the 6th- to 7th-century iconography of Vendel period Sweden (Öland; Ekhammar), in Alemannia (Gutenstein; Obrigheim) as well as in England (Sutton Hoo; Finglesham, Kent) suggest a persisting "pan-Germanic" unity of a wolf-warrior band cult centered around Wodan/Wodin in Scandinavia, in Anglo-Saxon England and on the Continent right until the eve of Christianization of England and Alemannia in the 7th century.^[12]



Öland foil (late
6th-century
Sweden)



Obrigheim foil (late 6th- or early
7th-century Alemannia)



Gutenstein
scabbard
mount
(7th-century
Alemannia)



Öland foil (late
6th-century
Sweden)



Sutton Hoo "king's purse"
ornament (early 7th-century
England)



decorative plaque from the
Sutton Hoo helmet (7th century;
reconstruction)



The late
7th-century
Frankish
gravestone from
Niederdollendorf
is the last known
depiction of the
"birds' heads
helmet" motif on
the continent.

Viking Age



Odin with his ravens and weapons

Scandinavian *Óðinn* emerged from Proto-Norse **Wōdin* during the Migration period, Vendel artwork (bracteates, image stones) depicting the earliest scenes that can be aligned with the High Medieval Norse mythological texts. The context of the new elites emerging in this period aligns with Snorri's tale of the indigenous Vanir who were eventually replaced by Aesir intruders from the Continent.[13]

According to the Prose Edda, Odin was a son of Bestla and Borr and brother of Vé and Vili and together with these brothers he cast down the frost giant Ymir and created the world from Ymir's body.

Attributes of Odin are Sleipnir, an eight-legged horse, and the severed head of Mímir, which foretold the future. He employed Valkyrjur to gather the souls of warriors fallen in battle (the Einherjar), as these would be needed to fight for him in the battle of Ragnarök. They took the souls of the warriors to Valhalla (the hall of the fallen), Odin's residence in Ásgarðr. One of the

Valkyries, Brynhildr, was expelled from his service but, out of compassion, Odin placed her in a hall surrounded by a ring of fire to ensure that only the bravest man could seek her hand in marriage. She was rescued by Sigurd. Höðr, a blind god who had accidentally killed his brother, Baldr, was then killed by another of Odin's children, Váli, whose mother was Rindr, a giantess who bore him fully grown and vowing not to even bathe before he had exacted vengeance on Höðr.

According to the Hávamál Edda, Odin was also the creator of the Runic alphabet. It is possible that the legends and genealogies mentioning Odin originated in a real, prehistoric Germanic chieftain who was subsequently deified, but this is impossible to prove or disprove.

Medieval reception

As the chief god of the Germanic pantheon, Odin received particular attention from the early missionaries. For example, his day is the only day to have been renamed in the German language from "Woden's day", still extant in English *Wednesday* (compare Norwegian, Danish and Swedish *onsdag*, Dutch *woensdag*) to the neutral *Mittwoch* ("mid-week"), while other gods were not deemed important enough for propaganda (*Tuesday* "Tiw's day" and *Friday* "Frige's day" remained intact in all Germanic languages, except Icelandic).^[14] "Woden's day" translates the Latin *Dies Mercurii*, "day of Mercury". This *interpretatio romana* of the god is due to his role as the psychopomp.

For many Germans, St. Michael replaced Wotan, and many mountain chapels dedicated to St. Michael can be found, but Wotan also remained present as a sort of demon leading the Wild hunt of the host of the dead, e.g. in Swiss folklore as *Wuotis Heer*. However, in some regions even this mythology was transformed so that Charlemagne led the hunt, not Odin.

In Anglo-Saxon England, Woden was more often euhemerised than demonised. In Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Woden appears as a perfectly earthly king, only four generations removed from Hengest and Horsa, though up to the Norman conquest and after there remained an awareness that he had once been "mistaken" for a god.

Snorri Sturluson's record of the Edda is striking evidence of the climate of religious tolerance in medieval Iceland, but even he feels compelled to give a rational account of the Aesir in his preface. In this scenario, Snorri speculates

that Odin and his peers were originally refugees from Troy, etymologizing *Aesir* as derived from Asia. Some scholars believe that Snorri's version of Norse mythology is an attempt to mould a more shamanistic tradition into a Greek mythological cast. In any case, Snorri's writing (particularly in *Heimskringla*) tries to maintain an essentially scholastic neutrality. That Snorri was correct was one of the last of Thor Heyerdahl's archeo-anthropological theories (see *The search for Odin*).

Revivals

With the Romantic Viking revival of the early-to-mid 19th century, Odin's popularity increased again. Wotan is a lead character in Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, written between 1848 and 1874.

His name provides the root for 19th-century conceptions of "Od", a hypothetical vital energy that permeates all living things.

Ásatrú, "faith in the Aesir", is an officially recognised religion in Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Spain.

Odin is frequently referred to in popular culture.

Notes

- ¹ ^ Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 2nd Revised Edition (1963)
- ² ^ Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. (1874; online editions: [15] [16])
- ³ ^ T. Northcote Toller, Ed. *An Anglo-Saxon dictionary, based on the manuscript collections of the late* ^[17] Joseph Bosworth, *and Old English Made Easy*. ^[18]
- ⁴ ^ Cleasby-Vigfusson.
- ⁵ ^ Toller, and *Old English Made Easy*. Later Old English orthography did not consistently differentiate between 'þ' and 'ð'. They were not confused with 'd', however.
- ⁶ ^ Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*
- ⁷ ^ Meid, Wolfgang, *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 8 (1957)
- ⁸ ^ Rübkeil, Ludwig. *Wodan und andere forschungsgeschichtliche Leichen: exhumiert*, *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 38 (2003), 25–42.
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- [11] Pollington, S., "Origins of the Warband" in *TYR*, vol. 2 (Ultra Press, 2004), pp. 131-138.
- [12] Spiedel, Michael (2004). *Ancient Germanic Warriors: Warrior Styles from Trajan's Column to Icelandic Sagas*. Routledge. ISBN 0-415-31199-3, 24—28). "This is why Geri and Freki, the wolves at Woden's side, also glowered on the throne of the Anglo-Saxon kings. Wolf-warriors, like Geri and Freki, were not mere animals but mythical beings: as Woden's followers they bodied forth his might, and so did wolf-warriors."
- [13] <http://www.algonet.se/~arador/postfestum.html>
- [14] Ström (1975:83).
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External links

- Neolithic Odin? (http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/ancient/AncientRepublsh_1187944.htm)

Zisa (goddess)

Zisa or **Cisa** is a potential goddess in Germanic paganism associated with the Suevi in the area of Augsburg, Germany. Zisa is mentioned in manuscripts from the 12th to 14th centuries which reference a victory against the Roman Empire attributed to the goddess. The anniversary of this victory was celebrated on the festival day of September 28 and involved games and merrymaking.^[1]

19th century scholar Jacob Grimm proposes a connection between Cisa and to the "Isis" of the Suebi attested by Tacitus in his 1st century CE work *Germania* based on the similarity of their names, if not their functions. *Zisa* is as an etymological double of Tyr or Ziu and Grimm suggests that Zisa may be the same figure as Tyr's unnamed wife, mentioned by Loki in the 13th century Poetic Edda poem *Lokasenna*.^[1] Grimm also references a record of a pagan Duke of Swabia named *Esenerius* who established a chapel in his castle in Kempten (then known as *Hillomondt*) with a venerated image of Zisa.^[2]

Scholar Rudolf Simek dismisses Zisa, explaining that "today the supposition of the goddess Cisa is rejected because the source text does not stand up to critical examination" and cites a work from 1936. On the other hand, scholar Stephan Grundy, and authors Nigel Pennick and Prudence Jones, present the source as potentially valid.^[3]

Pennick references two Medieval manuscripts which mention Zisa, *Codex Monac* circa 1135 and *Codex Emmeran* circa 1135, along with a corroborating third source, Melchior Goldast's *Suevicarum rerum scriptores*. These three are based on a first century BCE record of a Swabian military victory over Roman forces. The record mentions a city where the inhabitants worshipped Zisa "with extreme reverence". Pennick identifies this city as ancient Augsburg, and further identifies the depiction of the red-dressed woman in the Golden Hall of the Augsburg Town Hall as one of Zisa.^[4]

Notes

[1] Grimm (1882:201—299)

[2] Pennick (2002:109)

[3] For Simek, see Simek (2007:52). For Stephan Grundy, see Grundy (1998:85). For Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, see Jones and Pennick (1995:160).

[4] Pennick (2002:107-108)

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