

**The Lineage of Norse Mythology**  
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**Abstract:**

Several traditions are represented in Norse mythology as recorded in the Eddas. The earliest were Bertha, Heimdall, and Lodur (Heimdallic tradition). Then there arrived the god of light Baldr and the god of darkness Hod from Syria (Baldric tradition). Nanna came with the Baldr myth, but the identical goddess Idunn had already made her way into another tradition. Next came the gods of the sky represented by Tyr (Tyrpic tradition) and Thor (Thorric tradition). After this Odin (Odinic tradition) made his way into different regions, taking over for Tyr as the most important god. Then the trinity gods adapted though time into the Vanir Freyia, Frey and Od and as the Aesir Frigg, Fricco <Friggo> and Odin. Meanwhile in the north, the god Niord was introduced and became the father of Frey and Freyia. Then there was a final combination of the Aesir with the Vanir that is thought to have occurred during the Migration Age. The indigenous gods Forseti, Ull and Skadi lingered around, each adopted into one of the other traditions.

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## **Introduction**

The origin of gods must extend nearly back to the origin of humanity (roughly 40,000 years ago) along with the start of rudimentary science and philosophy. The era that followed involved an awakening to look for explanations, which is the origin not of abstract thinking but of abstract reasoning. Abstract reasoning relies upon understanding the purpose of something, which is required in order to have religious belief. However, without being able to perfect this understanding before continuing on with their lives, only a certain degree of proof is required to establish truth in most people's minds, often sustained through authority and tradition. This establishment leads to its acceptance and subsequent transmission from generation to generation. Lack of knowledge may have led to false conclusions, but behind it all human societies showed a recognition of the practical, of cause and effect, and of reducing risks while still attaining ends.

The establishment of myth does not reveal people prone to delusion and fantasy, but people who put forth their best theories about the universe and about themselves: a universe they barely understood. This initial practical approach then did not rely so strongly upon belief and ideology but upon observations and objectives, which is reflected in the wisdom shown in proverbs and statements about human nature from the earliest examples we have of them. Thus it is important not to see such people as inherently primitive, ignorant, or backward. Rather civilization has, if anything, isolated us from the outcome of our choices and the consequence of our beliefs far more than within societies in earliest human history, while placing a far greater emphasis upon principle than upon circumstance. The very dearth of information on the pagan religion owes itself to the establishment of truth upon the mere destruction of competing ideas, intimidation through threats of harm, and rule from an impenetrable and inaccessible seat of power.

With this in mind, it seems that any established gods and myths could continue for thousands of years, even if they shifted somewhat through time. It seems that new gods arise only when there is a significant change in the way of life of a people due to migrations, changing technology, and changing lifeways. This was particularly true for the humans who made the transition from a nomadic hunting or herding lifestyle into settled agricultural communities. Such a change required new mythologies to make sense of the new structure and cycles of life, which perhaps meant only adapting the traditional ones. Other than this it would be difficult to imagine how a god would just arise spontaneously within a culture.

The specific place that the gods held in the lives of these human tribes was one that extended back to the explanation of forces in the natural world as well as human experience and psychology. How mythology originates can be traced back to a first question; there is a curiosity about one thing or another and then there is an attempt at some level to provide an answer. Simple questions like “what are the Sun and Moon?” or “why do people feel love and rage?” are answered not by a process of pure fiction, but by making connections between what is known and what is experienced but not understood.

This arises by equating those things that resemble or share characteristics in some sense with the thing that one is seeking to understand—the sun shines like gold and travels through the sky on a journey, or that emotion and instinct are caused by the influence of an unseen god or goddess. Thus only the conscious mind is recognized as inherent to man, while feelings or powers that overwhelm a person are believed to arise from an outside source: the way one feels a surge of strength during a battle or paralysis of fear would be the intrusion of the god of battle that was helping him or binding him. Also he would seek to understand the whims of fate and the fortunes of existence. For them humans, being only one of many empowered forces in the

world, were vitally or fatally affected by these unseen forces. In addition cycles of human life are seen to match those cycles of the universe and the agricultural cycles they lived by, and the fertility of the earth was associated with human fertility. The gods were also used to explain where things came from and how things would end, and this again arose from an association between observations of birth and death.

These basic answers are then embellished and combined with other ideas into tales. For this reason, one can look for the root questions of any myth, which justifies its telling. More sophistication can create myths that are merely composed to tell a story, and other myths can have originated from legend; either of these can then be combined with an original etiological myth. The myth might also explain something that is not otherwise addressed in prior myths, such as the origin of mythical horses or weapons, and so on.

Although it is difficult to determine at what point an idea first germinated, Nordic myths were sure to have developed into their recognizable forms back at least as far as the early Iron Age. This is based upon the prior assumption that technological and societal change motivates change in mythology. However, consideration should still be given to the extent to which certain aspects or details extend back into the Stone Age, even to the advent of the origin of the gods themselves. There is the added benefit that the mythology of Northern Europe never became a sophisticated discipline as it did in the south, and a great amount of detail was passed along with little attempt to interpret or embellish it beyond what was communicated. This aided in the transmission of older information even though it had lost its original meaning.

The following theories are put together from the mythological material and historical records that refer to the Nordic religion without direct comparison to accumulated knowledge in the

fields of archaeology, history, and linguistics. The attempt is designed to follow consistent rules to arrive at conclusions, which might then be either corroborated or refuted by other lines of evidence. As any other speculative theory it will need to experience further scrutiny and modification through time.

## **Identifications**

The gods as they are revealed in the Viking Age have a past that passes back at least two thousand years before. By the time of the Romans the gods of the Germans were well established. Within this time the god Odin was on the rise, surpassing the god Tyr as the god of war. This indicates that Odin was gaining prominence, perhaps due to rising migrations or conflicts.

The details of the pre-Christian gods were not well attested until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, making a comparison with a reference made over one thousand years earlier seem suspect. However, what was recorded at that late time still contains details that must have arisen and been passed along from a very early time. They contain the characteristics of stellar bodies that later became descriptions of abstract gods: the description of the face that was said to have sliced into Heimdall seems not to have been understood in later times, yet accurately recalls a time when Heimdall and the Moon were the same. In addition, the Gaulic Mercury is regarded as “inventor of all crafts, the pathfinder and guide, and the most powerful patron of gain and trafficking” (Caesar 1957: 137), just as Odin later holds the epithets god of poetry, god of cargoes, and god of victory (Sturluson 1987: 64).

The difficulty with the Roman accounts is that they have not given names of the Germanic gods themselves, but only their Roman equivalents. This requires comparing the characteristics of the Roman gods, whose names are provided, with descriptions of Germanic gods not recorded until over a millennium later. So before anything can be gained from the state of affairs of Germanic religion during the Roman Empire, the issue as to which Roman god equated with which German one must be answered first. However, the inferences drawn may not be conclusive: the obvious assignment may not be the correct one, and there might not even be an obvious one. Further confusing the issue is that the gods given as the German gods by Tacitus in the first century AD: Mercury, Hercules, Mars and also Isis, bears more resemblance to the gods of the Gauls as given by Caesar in the first century BC: Mercury, Apollo, Mars, Jove, Minerva, and also Dis Pater, than to the ones he provides as the gods of the Germans: Sol, Luna and Vulcan.

Caesar writes in his *Gallic War*: “Apollo averts disease, Minerva initiates arts and crafts, Jove holds dominion over the heaven-dwellers, and Mars regulates war...The Gauls claim that they are all descended from Dis Pater, on the authority of Druid tradition.” (Caesar 1957: 137) Mercury is described as the greatest of the gods, and the Roman Mercury is an itinerant god of the underworld, and thus he can best be equated with Odin. As Caesar lists the gods in order of importance, Apollo is next, and is most well matched to Baldr, god of light and the sun. Mars is not Odin but Tyr, the god of war. Jove as the god of thunder and the god of supreme strength would be Thor. Minerva then most resembles Frigg, who is the goddess of spinning and weaving, just as the Roman Minerva is the goddess of spinning. However Minerva is also sometimes the goddess of war and in this resembles Frigg’s counterpart

Freyia, however Caesar only mentions her role as goddess of crafts, not war. Over a century on, Mercury again can be equated with Odin, Hercules with Thor and Mars with Tyr.

Dis Pater (Dis) was the Roman equivalent to the Greek Hades (underworld), who was brother of Zeus (thunder) and Poseidon (ocean). This god thus might be equivalent to Ymir, who in India is Yama, king of the underworld or is similar to Mannus, mentioned by Tacitus. Isis was originally the Egyptian mother goddess, but having spread into Europe became a goddess of love and fertility, and the common depiction of her with her infant son Horus was later adopted in portrayals of the Virgin Mary. In Germanic tradition the Virgin Mary is often equated with Frigg, but Tacitus says that the German Isis' symbol is a warship, which could connect her again to Freyia being a goddess of war or more likely Bertha's association with the ship.<sup>1</sup>

If the gods given by Tacitus are Odin, Thor, Tyr and Frigg, this corresponds well to Odin, Baldr, Tyr, Thor and Frigg as given by Caesar, with the notable absence of Baldr.<sup>2</sup> The results are shown in *Figure 1*. However, neither of these accounts mentions the gods Niord, Frey, Freyia, Heimdall, and Loki. Tacitus does provide the actual name of the goddess Nerthus, who is in form equivalent to the male deity Niord, god of water. (Although with the absence of the name this connection could never have been made.) Caesar's three Germanic gods Sol (sun), Luna (moon), and Vulcan (fire) can now be equated with Bertha (Freyia), Heimdall, and Lodur (Loki).

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<sup>1</sup> Isis cannot easily be equated with Nerthus, as Tacitus distinguishes them quite clearly.

<sup>2</sup> The reason for this seems to be that the god Baldr was a uniquely Gaulic deity, later introduced into Germanic mythology.

**Figure 1.**  
**Designations of Romanized gods from Caesar and Tacitus**

<b>Roman</b>	<b>Norse</b>	<b>German</b>	<b>Celtic</b>
Mercury – underworld	Odin	Wotan	Vellaunus
Apollo – sun, healing	Baldr	Palter	Belenus / Apollo Belenus
Mars – war	Tyr	Ziu	Teutates / Mars Teutates
Jupiter (Jove) – thunder	Thor	Donar	Taranus / Jupiter Taranis
Hercules – monster slayer	Thor	Donar	Ilunnus / Hercules Ilunnus
Minerva – spinning, war	Frigg	Frea	Sulis Minerva (Bricta) <sup>3</sup> or Brigantia
Isis – ship, fertility, marriage	Frigg	Frea	Bricta or Brigantia

Also to be considered is when an epithet for the deity (god or giant) would be used rather than his name. The epithet ‘Iarnsaxa’ (one with an iron knife) seems related to the German Berche, who was said to have a knife with which she would slit open the bellies of those who slighted or insulted her (Grimm 2004: 277). She was known as Iron Bertha and Wild Bertha (Grimm 2004: 277), whose name is related to that of the giantess Grid (Bryth).

### **Mythic Descent**

There may be something to be gained from basic guides that may be followed to interpret the descent of mythic traditions. First, that any tradition would only have one deity for each phenomenon (i.e. only one Sun god or water god, etc.). Thus once the god or goddess has been identified for one tradition, another god of that same phenomenon would have come from a different tradition. Second, that older gods in a region become the children of newer gods

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<sup>3</sup> Sulis might be the same as the Baltic Saule (Sol), said to sit on top of a tree. She was goddess of flax, the hearth fire, and the house-snake and is represented by the wheel, egg and golden apples (Jones 1995: 174). Saule is similar to Bricta, who herself appears identical with the Irish Brigit (Adkins 2000: 33), also known as Brighde (Jones 1995: 101). As Sulis is a goddess of hot springs this might be similar to the notion of the Sun residing beneath the earth during the night, rather like Grendel’s mother (also equivalent to Bertha) under the fens, but here heating the water.

introduced into it. This can be seen in noting how Ull is the son of Thor, and Thor is the son of Odin. This would then imply that Ull was the earlier god at this location, superseded by Thor and then Thor by Odin. This permits some idea of the order in which the traditions were combined, which can be compared to historical records. Another thing that should be noted are those gods that are strongly associated within the myths, to thus suggest which gods emerged from the same tradition. This cannot be wholly relied upon, given tendencies to transform the myths in later times, and because some deities also might have been established so early that they became universal (such as Loki and Bertha). However, strong associations between gods can be significant. Finally, that the further something is away from its source, the more divergent it becomes; thus myths evolve through time and are combined differently in different regions.

These rules would establish that since Baldr is the son of Odin, that the Odinic tradition arrived later. This is to some extent confirmed by the divergence between the Syrian and Nordic mythologies compared to the Indian and Nordic. However, there is no means to establish the expected degree or rate of change of myths through time, except when samples abound. The only thing that is suggested is that both the Odinic and Baldric traditions are far from their source, perhaps by a thousand years, but it cannot be concluded which is further in time from its source. Also beliefs and practices were adopted in different ways by different people and changed over time, making it very difficult to make any historical statements with exactness and specificity. However, mythological studies can be used with more established findings based upon linguistics, genetics, and archaeology to contribute to the establishment of beliefs along with our knowledge of objects, relations, and migrations.

Each tradition seems to have started with only a few gods, but allowed for the addition of gods with no need for an exclusive single God. If it were not for this insistence among the Christians, their gods would just have been added into the pantheon as any others would—as was first the case among many adherents to the old religion. As new gods were introduced into a region, they were simply added to the ones that were already revered. In this way, there is an accumulation of deities that permit people to either rely upon the traditional ones or hope for better luck with a new one. According to this theory of combination sometimes two gods remained distinct and would retain their individual existence (ex. Freyia and Frigg), some could be viewed as identical but would retain different names (ex. Lodur and Loki), sometimes one name won out over another (ex. Frey and Fricco<sup>4</sup>) or the god went by both names alternately (ex. Iarnsaxa and Grid).

This can be combined with the knowledge from Caesar, Tacitus and the *Beowulf* poet, along with the related mythologies of India and Syria to produce a defensible sequence of combination for what is present in the Eddas. Incorporated during this period were the gods Skadi, Ull and Forseti, who appear to have been local gods, each picked up by the Odinic, Thorric, and Baldric traditions respectively. Given this the Heimdallic, Tyrric, and Thorric existed independently for a time. The Baldric tradition was combined with the Heimdallic when used by the *Beowulf* poet. The Heimdallic was also the basis for the common tradition that later split into the Odinic and Vanaric. Subsequently the Odinic combined with the Tyrric (the Tyrric may have existed within the Vanaric as well, but then must have been lost). This combined tradition OT (Tyr becomes Odin's son) then became established in Europe and India.

In Europe the OT combined with the Baldric (Baldr becomes Odin's son) and Thorric (Thor becomes Odin's son), creating the OTBTh. This then would be how things stood when recorded

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<sup>4</sup> Two god that were apparently considered so close as to be identical (although it seems that Fricco was still in use at least to the 11<sup>th</sup> century in some parts of Germany when used by Adam of Bremen).

by Caesar (circa 50 BC). These gods also match those of Tacitus (circa 100 AD), with the notable absence of Baldr. After this the OTBTh combined with the V (Heimdall becomes Odin's son) and became the OTBThV as recorded in the Eddas (circa 1200 AD, but coming out of the Migration Age). *Figure 2* illustrates the order of assimilation from the perspective of the Odinic<sup>5</sup>:

**Figure 2.**  
**Combination of traditions from the Odinic perspective**



This can be compared to the Beowulf tradition wherein the gods referred to are Herebeald, Haethcyn, Grendel (Orendel), Grendel's mother (Bertha), and Hama (Heimdall). In the Indian the gods are Indra, Agni, Soma, Dyaus, and Prithvi while in the Syrian the gods are Bel, Inanna, and Hayk. Saxo appears to only be missing the Vanaric tradition.

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<sup>5</sup> As Caesar and Tacitus refer to the Germanic and not the Nordic, there is no reason why these gods might not have gone into the north sooner. It does permit the identification of traditions better than the sequence of accumulation.

The Heimdallic, Vanaric and Odinic each contain the same goddess as Bertha, Freyia and Frigg. The latter two appear to be closely related to the Indian Prithvi than to Bertha. This implies that these two traditions are closer to one another than to the Heimdallic. This indicates that the goddess became Bertha initially in Europe and then was reintroduced with Odin and Frigg, Od and Freyia.

In the Indian tradition Odin, Loki, and Haenir compare to Indra, Agni and Soma. The Indian equivalent to Tyr is Dyaus, who preceded Odin as god of the sky. Of interest is that Dyaus is associated with Prithvi, which implies that in the Tyrpic tradition an equivalent earth goddess was wife of Tyr. The Odinic also includes Loki and Logi, that resembles closely the Indian Agni, also appearing in the Heimdallic as Lodur (Lothar). This goddess also is associated with Loki, who spans all but the Syrian and Baldric. Heimdall (Hama) himself is the unique god, although he might be distantly related to Haenir and Soma.

To clarify the origins and spread of the deities involved, tentative universal equivalents for each is shown in *Figure 3*, while their appearance in different traditions and sources is shown in *Figure 4*.

**Figure 3.**  
**Corresponding deities with universal designations given**

*(No attempt has been made to follow any strict linguistic rules for deriving universal deity names.)*

<b>Lode</b>	Lodur, Lothar, Loki, Logi, Agni
<b>Od-Indr</b>	Od, Oedi, Odin, Wotan, Vindr, Indra
<b>Homa</b>	Heimdall, Humbli, Hoenir, Hama, Soma
<b>Breid</b>	Gerd, Gerutha, Bertha, Breide, Bricta, Grid, Grytha, Freyia, Frea, Frigg, Prithvi
<b>Orendil</b>	Aurvandil, Horwendillus, Orvendil, Orendel, Erentel, Grendel
<b>Nord</b>	Niord, Nerthus
<b>Thu</b>	Thor, Tyr, Dyaus, Zeus, Ju(piter)
<b>Frek</b>	Frey, Fricco, Fro
<b>(Herr)Beld</b>	Baldr, (Here)beald, Beal, Biel(bog), Bal, Bel, Belenus, Abel
<b>Inunna</b>	Nanna, Nana, Inanna, Idunna
<b>Had-Cin</b>	Hod, Hother, Hadu, Hayk, Haethcyn, Cernunnos, Chern(obog), Cain, Sin

**Figure 4.**  
**Universal gods that appear in each tradition**

	Heimdallic <sup>6</sup>	Syrian	Baldric	Beowulf <sup>7</sup>	Thorric	Tyrric <sup>8</sup>	Odinic <sup>9</sup>	Indian	Caesar/Tacitus	Vanaric <sup>10</sup>	Saxo
Lode	x			(x)	x		x	x	x	(x)	x
Bried	x			x	x	(x)	x	x	x	x	x
Homa	x			x			x	x	x	(x)	x
Orendil	(x)			x							x
(Herr)Beld		x	x	x					x		x
Inunna		x	x								x
Had-Cin		x	x	x							x
Thu					x	x		x	x		x
Od-Indr							x	x	x	x	x
Frek							(x)			x	x
Nord									x	x	

<sup>6</sup> Orendil here is implied if the association with Bried as indicated by *Beowulf* is correct.

<sup>7</sup> It is possible that in the story of Hama and the necklace, Iormenric (Great King) refers to Loki, god or king of the underworld.

<sup>8</sup> The presence of Bried is correct when compared to the association between Dyaus and Prithvi in Indian myth.

<sup>9</sup> Fricco <Friggo> can be considered the male counterpart of Frigg, just as Frey is of Freyia.

<sup>10</sup> The presence of Lod and Homa here is suggested by their role in the theft of Freyia's necklace. It could be that the goddess was Bertha and that Freyia was substituted, but this is no better than to assume that the gods were with Freyia right from the start.

## Conclusion

According to interpretations of mythology, several traditions are represented. The earliest gods among the Germans appear to have been the gods Bertha, Heimdall, and Lodur, the gods of the Sun, Moon and fire. Bertha certainly spread widely, from Hekate in the south to Freyia in the north. Loki too, as god of fire, may have extended back quite far into human prehistory.

Some of the older gods are the indigenous gods that still lingered on in the places where they had arisen. Those such as Forseti, Ull and Skadi fall into this category, who all resided around the Baltic peninsula Scandza.

Then there was the god of light Baldr and the god of darkness Hod, who from their origin in Syria extended up through Britain to Norway, from France to Russia, and from Anatolia down into Caanan. Nanna came with the Baldr myth, but the identical goddess Idunn had already made her way once to the north.

Next came the gods of the sky represented by Tyr and Thor. Thor appeared in the north and Ull was made his stepson, while Ull's mother Sif became his wife. After this Odin made his way into different regions, taking over for Tyr as the most important god.

Then the trinity gods in the north adapted though time into the Vanir Freyia, Frey and Od and the Aesir Frigg, Fricco <Friggo> and Odin (and in Germany as Frea, Fro and Wodan<sup>11</sup>). Thus Tyr, Thor, Heimdall and Baldr all become Odin's sons, and in which Lodur was equated with Loki.

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<sup>11</sup> Goden, another name for the Anglo-Saxon Woden, became the basis for the English word 'god'. Frigg was also known as Dame Gode (Grimm 2004: 253).

Meanwhile in the north, the god Niord was introduced and became the father of Frey and Freyia. Then there was a final combination of the Aesir with the Vanir that is thought to have occurred during the so-called Migration Age.

These traditions were only occasionally represented within the historical writings. The Odinic and Tyrric were already combined before it split from the Indian. The Heimdallic is represented in the writings of Caesar, while by this time the Baldric and Thorric appear to have already combined into the Odinic. Tacitus only represents the Odinic, Tyrric and Thorric while the Beowulf poet only contains the Heimdallic and the Baldric. However, simply because certain gods are not mentioned does not mean they were unknown, thus failing to provide a sure means of tracking the progression of deities through to their final form. However it could be matched up with other external evidence, now that the theory has been proposed and described.

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