

High Gods of the Northland  
**BOOK I: GODS**

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## HEAVENS

*I know that an ash-tree stands called Yggdrasill,  
a high tree, soaked with shining loam;  
from there come the dews which fall in the valley,  
ever green, it stands over the well of fate.*

This stanza from *Voluspa* (Prophecy of the Seeress) refers to the World Tree, which is not only the largest of trees but also that it is superior to all others in every regard. The canopy of its branches spread far and wide over the world. It's existence seems not to have arisen in the beginning, but always to have been. The creation of the world speaks of only three places: Muspellheim (or Muspell), Niflheim and Ginnungagap. As it says in *Gylfaginning*:

*First there was the world in the southern region called Muspell. It is bright and hot. That area is flaming and burning and it is impassable for those that are foreigners there and are not native to it. There is one called Surt (soot) who is stationed there at the frontier to defend the land with his flaming sword.*

*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 flow the rivers called Svól, Gunnthra, Fiorm, Fimbulthul, Slidr and Hrid, Sylg and Ylg, Vid, and Leiptr; Gioll is next to Hel's gates.*

*These rivers, which are called Elivagar, when they had got so far from their source that the poisonous flow that accompanied them began to harden, it turned to ice; and when this ice came to a halt and stopped flowing, the vapor that was rising from the poison froze on the top in the same direction and turned to rime, and this rime increased layer upon layer right across Ginnungagap.*

*Ginnungagap, the part that faces in a northerly direction, was filled with the weight and heaviness of ice and rime and there was vapor and a blowing inwards from it. But the southerly part of Ginnungagap cleared up in the face of the sparks and molten particles that came flying out of the world of Muspell.*

*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. It became the form of a man, and he was given the name Ymir.*

Muspellheim was in the south, a land of light and heat from where the warm breezes blew, and so that if one sailed south they would increasingly feel its heat. Niflheim was the realm to the north, a land of dark and ice from where blew the cold winds. These were only two of the nine worlds said to exist, and the World Tree was to have spread its roots into all of them. As it says in *Gylfaginning*:

Three of the tree's roots support it and extend very, very far. One is among the gods, the second among the frost-giants, where Ginnungagap once was. The third extends over Niflheim, and under that root is Hvergelmir (boiling spring), and Nidhogg (terrible striker) gnaws the bottom of the root. But under the root that reaches towards the frost-giants, there is where Mimir's well is, which has wisdom and intelligence contained in it, and the master of the well is called Mimir. The other root of the ash extends to heaven, and beneath that root is a well which is very holy, called the Well of Urd (fate). There the gods have their court.

There is an eagle that sits in the branches of the ash, and it has knowledge of many things, and between its eyes sits a hawk called Vedrfolnir. A squirrel called Ratatosk runs up and down through the ash and carries malicious messages between the eagle and Nidhogg. Four stags run in the branches of the ash and feed on the foliage. Their names are Dain, Dvalin, Duneyr, and Durathror. And there are so many snakes in Hvergelmir with Nidhogg that no tongue can enumerate them.

It is also said the ash Yggdrasill has on its branches golden fruit (or nuts). The ballad *Svipdagsmal*, which refers to Yggdrasill as Mimir's tree<sup>1</sup>, says that if a woman eats its cooked fruit during childbirth she will have a safe delivery. The god's are able to stave off old age by eating golden apples, which may have been the fruit from this tree.<sup>2</sup> The basic notion is that although the necessities of life such as food and water are available on earth, other things that seem necessary such as what will ease childbirth, grant wisdom, or bestow eternal life exist only in the domain of the gods.

*Svipdagsmal* also says that Surt and his wife Sinmora guard the sword Laevateinn (wounding wand), made by Loki at the gates of Niflheim. The sword was kept in Laegiarn's chest that had nine locks. Sinmora will only give up the sword in return for the tail feather of the cock Vidofnir (Vedrfolnir), who sits on the topmost bough of the World Tree, adorned with gold. He is said to illuminate Yggdrasill's branches like lightning and is a burden to Surt and Sinmora.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the specific story within *Svipdagsmal* called "Fiolsvinnsmal" the tree is called Mimameidr (Mimi's tree) and would seem to be Yggdrasill. Here the giant is called Fiolsvidr (knows-much), which would be an epithet for Mimir.

<sup>2</sup> In the German fairy tale "The White Snake" the Tree of Life stands at the end of the world, adorned with golden apples.

<sup>3</sup> Grimm writes: "Of the longest *tail-feathers* of a cock pull out the *right one*, and you'll open any lock that you touch with it, walk invisible, and see everything."

*'Three roots there grow in three directions  
under the ash of Yggdrasill;  
Hel lives under one, under the second, the frost-giants,  
the third, humankind.'*

As it says in *Kalevala* recalling the three roots of the Tree:

*'There's no getting the Sampo  
and no bringing the bright-lid  
out of dark Northland  
from dreary Sariola!  
There the Sampo's been taken  
the bright-lid carried  
into Northland's rocky hill  
inside the slope of copper  
locked behind nine locks;  
in there roots have been rooted  
to a depth of nine fathoms  
with one root in mother earth  
and one in a riverbank  
and a third in the home-hill.'*

Two old Christian songs recorded by Grimm also contain similar descriptions:

*A noble tree in a garden grows,  
and high the skill its making shows;  
its roots the floor of hell are grasping,  
its summit to the throne extends,  
where bounteous God requiteth friends,  
its braches broad the wide world clasping;  
thereon sit birds that know sweet song*

*The cross's top points to heaven,  
The arms and hands to the world's ends,  
The stem looks to this earthly plain,  
**The hardy stalk** stands in the ground,  
Thereby is signified, that for it is designed,  
all in earth and heaven and the abyss beneath.*

There are three maidens who are said to live in a beautiful hall by the Well of Fate. Their names are Urd (fate/past), Skuld (necessity/future), and Verdandi (becoming/present) and they are the Fates or Norns who determine the destinies of both gods and men.<sup>4</sup> Every day these maidens take water from the well and pour it over the branches of the World Tree so that it will not be corrupted. The water from this well is so holy, it makes things that are put into it go pure white. It drips down the leaves and falls to

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<sup>4</sup> Wolves were known as the hounds of the Norns.

earth as honeydew from which bees make honey.<sup>5</sup> This well also feeds two swans, from whom come all swans on Earth.

The creation of a tree very similar to the World Tree is told in the *Kalevala*:

*At that old Väinämöinen  
sings and practices his craft:  
He sang a spruce topped with flowers  
topped with flowers and leaved with gold;  
the top he pushed heavenward  
through the clouds he lifted it  
spread the foliage skyward  
across heaven scattered it.  
He sings, practices his craft—  
sang the moon to gleam  
on the gold-topped spruce, he sang  
the Great Bear on to its boughs.*

The World Tree itself is a representation of the night sky, the vast darkness being the canopy of its branches and the stars are its shining golden fruit. The stags said to run through its branches refer to constellations of stars in the shape of deer.<sup>6</sup> The notion of a hawk or rooster on the top-most branch of the World Tree may refer to the North Star.<sup>7</sup> The Sami believed that the sky was supported by a pillar and held in place with an iron nail (*veraldarnagli*), that is the Pole Star.

In the myth relating the theft of Idunn's apples, Odin gives the daughter of Thiassi compensation for the death of her father by throwing his eyes into the heavens as two stars, which would be the Gemini stars Castor and Pollux. In the story recounting Thor's duel with Hrungnir, Thor relates how he threw Aurvandil's frozen toe into the heavens to make a star out of it. In this case, the oblong shape of a toe means that this is the morning star Venus, the only object in the sky that always appears as a crescent from Earth. In addition, the Anglo Saxon version of the name Aurvandil is Earandel, that has been interpreted to mean 'morning star'.

According to other traditions that Grimm records, in Sweden Orion's Belt was known as *Friggerock* 'Frigg's distaff' (alternately 'Mary's distaff'). The Great Bear or Big Dipper was known as Odin's Wain (Charles's Wain). The Milky Way in the north is called Winter Way or Irmin's Way and in Welsh tradition was Gwydion's Way (Woden's Way). Although the Pleiades is not specifically mentioned in the north, it was

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<sup>5</sup> Grimm writes: "Natural history tells us that clouds of bees fall upon the sweet juice of the ash-tree".

<sup>6</sup> Four possibilities are those visible in Ursa Major, Cepheus, Perseus/Auriga, and Hercules. Accordingly the eagle, Ratatosk and Nidhogg too would have been constellations (perhaps Cygnus, Cassiopeia, and Scorpius), with the Milky Way being the root of Yggdrasil that extends into heaven. In Northern Siberia the constellation Ursa Major was known as a stag.

<sup>7</sup> *Vidfiolnir* would mean "the one who sees very far" and this could be an original name for Vidofnir and Vedrfolnir, who are both variations on a single idea.

known throughout most of Europe as being a hen with seven chicks, but in Lithuania as a ploughman with his oxen (so that when rising lets the ploughmen know it is time to look after their oxen).<sup>8</sup>

*Skaldskaparmal* lists nine heavens above the world: the lowest is known as Vindblain (wind-dark), Heidthornir (clouded-brightness), and Hregg-Mimir (storm-Mimir), the second is Andlang (extended), the third is Vidblain (wide-dark), the fourth is Vidfedmir (wide-embracer), the fifth is Hriod (coverer), the sixth is Hlyrnir (twin-lit), the seventh is Gimir (fiery or jewelled), the eighth is Vet-Mimir (winter-Mimir), and the ninth is Skatyrnir (rich-wetter), that is higher than the clouds and beyond all worlds.<sup>9</sup>

***When Ymir slept, he sweated. Then there grew under his left arm a male and a female, and one of his legs begot a son with the other, and descendants came from them. These are frost-giants.***

***The next thing, when the rime dripped, was that there came into being from it a cow called Audhumla, and four rivers of milk flowed from her teats, and it fed Ymir. She licked the rime-stones, which were salty. And the first day as she licked stones there came from the stones in the evening a man's hair, the second day a man's head, the third day there was a complete man there. His name was Buri.***

***He was beautiful in appearance, big and powerful. He begot a son called Bor. He married a wife named Bestla, daughter of the giant Bolthorn, and they had three sons. One was called Odin (influence), the second Vili (will), the third Ve (holiness).***

***Bor's sons killed the giant Ymir. And when he fell, so much blood flowed from his wounds that with it they drowned all the race of frost-giants, except that one escaped with his household. Giants call him Bergelmir. He went up on to his ark with his wife and was preserved there, and from them are descended the families of frost-giants.***

The progenitor giant is sometimes referred to as Aurgelmir and in *Voluspa* as Brimir. Aurgelmir was the father of Thrudgelmir and grandfather of Bergelmir, who all lived before the world was made.

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<sup>8</sup> At midnight the 'seven chicks' reaches its peak in the middle of November, the constellation 'Frigg's distaff' in the middle of December, 'Thiassi's eyes' in the middle of January, and 'the wagon' in the middle of March. 'Winter Way' is most prominent during the winter and at midnight creates a path from east to west in the middle of October.

<sup>9</sup> These levels might correspond to natural phenomena: storms, day, night, Milky Way, clouds, sun and moon, stars, ice (firmament), and water.

Odin is said to be the chief god and is oldest among them, known for his great knowledge by which he is able to outsmart others, both mortal and divine. He is called High One, Terrible One, and Helblindi. And because of his status as father among the gods, he is also known as All-father. He uses many other names that he adopts upon his travels.

Wearing a broad-brimmed hat that covers his identity he thus can wander as a stranger over the earth, which gives him great advantage over the unwary. He could still be recognized by his appearance, for he is known for his long beard and moustache (from where he gets his nicknames 'graybeard' and 'long-beard'), a blue cloak, his golden spear Gungnir (or Gaupnir) and his golden arm ring Draupnir. He also rode a gray eight-legged steed, the best horse in the world, called Sleipnir. But the most prominent feature about this god is that he possessed only a single eye.<sup>10</sup>

It is now told that when people were sitting by the fires in the evening a man came into the hall. He was not known to the men by sight. He was dressed in this way: he wore a mottled cape that was hooded; he was barefoot and had linen breeches tied around his legs. As he walked to Barnstock he held a sword in his hand while over his head was a low-hanging hood. He was very tall and gray with age, and he had only one eye.

The battle had been going on for some time, when a man came into the fight. He had a wide-brimmed hat that sloped over his face, and he wore a black hooded cloak. He had one eye, and he held a spear in his hand.

The reason for this is that Odin sought knowledge and went to drink from Mimir's well. The giant Mimir was considered to be of great wisdom because he drank from the well every morning from a drinking horn called Giallarhorn.<sup>11</sup> Mimir granted Odin a single draught of the well, but only if he offered one of his eyes in return. This arose from belief that the Sun was an eye for its roundness, and that it appeared to be looking down upon the earth. One of Odin's names was Baleygr (furnace eye).

*The sun looks down from where he rides the heavens,  
Sees everything and with a single eye.*

They saw the Moon as the other eye (but not a living eye like the Sun) which followed its own path due to the eye having been sacrificed.<sup>12</sup> Someone had regarded the way that light cast into a well by the Sun begins as a crescent and then grows until the Sun is overhead and then diminishes again, and thought this looked like the changing phases of the Moon, thus believing the other eye must have been left in a well.

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<sup>10</sup> An old Norse riddle ran: "Who are the two who ride to the Thing? Three eyes have they together, ten feet, and one tail: and thus they travel through the lands."

<sup>11</sup> The name Mimir also appears as the master smith who made incredible swords with special powers: Mimir in Thidriks-saga, Miming in Saxo, and Mime the old in the German hero-saga Biterolf, although there is no direct connection to the giant here.

<sup>12</sup> Snorri records that poetic terms for the eyes are sun or moon.

*Through our whole lives we strive towards the sun;  
That burning forehead is the eye of Odin.  
His second eye, the moon, shines not so bright;  
It has he placed in pledge in Mimer's fountain,  
That he may fetch the healing waters thence,  
Each morning, for the strengthening of this eye.*

The god that they formed out of this was the god of the passing day. His cloak was the azure blue of the sky and his passage was made swift from the incomparable horse he rode, so that none on earth could keep pace with the speed with which it moved, no matter how good his mount. In *Gesta Denorum* Odin, after saving Hading in flight after military defeat, returns him on his horse:

With these words he set the young man on his horse and brought him back to the place where he had found him. Hading hid trembling beneath his cloak, but in intense amazement kept casting keen glances through the slits and saw that the sea lay stretched out under the horse's hoofs. Being forbidden to gaze, he turned his wondering eyes away from the terrible view of his journey.

Snorri records a poem by Ref where Odin is referred to the "practiced controller of the wave-horse's (ship's) snow-road's (wind's) hall." The 'wind's hall' is a poetic term for the sky. In *Skaldskaparmal* he is said to ride sea and sky wearing his golden helmet. Odin's name Atridi could mean "the one who rides up" (into the sky). Odin's golden spear and ring also may represent characteristics of the Sun.<sup>13</sup>

Odin in *Gesta Danorum* is described in similar fashion, where the sun is not equated with his eye but with his shield:

*"If I should set eyes on the fearsome husband of Frigg,  
though he is protected by his white shield, and maneuvers  
his tall horse, he shall not go unhurt from Leire;  
it is right to lay low the warrior god in battle."*

It seems that the notion of a mythic well was used twice: once in the case of the Well of Fate and then again with Mimir's Well. The third was located beneath the earth from which sprung Hvergelmir.<sup>14</sup> This arose from a belief that all ground water, rivers and springs arose from a single source of water.<sup>15</sup>

Odin was not only a god of the Sun, but of the sky and the weather. He was called Vidrir as a god of storms, Thund as a god of thunder, and was praised for a favorable wind. A howling wind or any such noise was attributed to Odin's wagon. Mountains, often thought to be the origin of

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<sup>13</sup> Guerber associates Odin's spear with Jupiter's thunderbolt.

<sup>14</sup> Hvergelmir might have been the same as Mimir's well, when it was in the underworld.

<sup>15</sup> As it says in the Norwegian folk tale "Boots and His Brothers": "Have you never heard how water rises from a spring in the earth?"

winds, were considered sacred to Odin. The Germanic god Wotan was a storm god whose name Grimm says to be related to *wetan* (weather); he was also known as Voma, a word for the sound of wind.

*They took Ymir and transported him to the middle of Ginnungagap, and out of him made the earth, out of his blood the sea and the lakes. The earth was made of the flesh and the rocks of the bones, stone and scree they made out of the teeth and molars and of the bones that had been broken. Out of the blood that came from his wounds and was flowing unconfined, out of this they made the sea with which they encompassed and contained the earth, and they placed this sea in a circle round the outside of it, and it will seem an impossibility to most to get across it.*

*They also took his skull and made out of it the sky and set it up over the earth with four points, and under each corner they set a dwarf. Their names are Austri (east), Vestri (west), Nordri (north), and Sudri (south). Then they took molten particles and sparks that were flying uncontrolled and had shot out of the world of Muspell and set them in the middle of the firmament of the sky both above and below to illuminate heaven and earth. They fixed all the lights, some in the sky, some moved in a wandering course beneath the sky, but they appointed them positions and ordained their courses. Thus it is said in ancient sources that by means of them days were distinguished and also the count of years.*

*The earth is a circular circumference, and around it lies the deep sea, and along the shore of this sea they gave lands to the races of giants to live in. But on the earth on the inner side they made a fortification round the world against the hostility of giants, and for this fortification they used the giant Ymir's eyelashes, and they called the fortification Midgard (middle world). They also took his brains and threw them into the sky and made out of them the clouds.*

Thus Odin was seen as a creator of the world in addition to a god of sorcery, mysticism, and healing. He was likewise known as the god of runes and poetry<sup>16</sup>, and hung himself on the World Tree for nine nights in order to learn the runes. As it says in *Havamal* (Sayings of the High One):

*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.*

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<sup>16</sup> The Norse word *odr* means poetry.

*No bread did they give me nor a drink from a horn,  
downwards I peered;  
I took up the runes, screaming I took them,  
then I fell back from there.*

This is why the World Tree is known as Odin's horse (Ygg-drasill).<sup>17</sup>

He is also Hanga-god (god of the hanged), Hapta-god (god of prisoners) and Farma-god (god of cargoes), but his most significant role became god of battle and death. As Valkiosandi (chooser of the slain) and Val-fadir (father of the slain) he welcomes those who fall in battle into Valhall (hall of the slain) and Vingolf (hall of friends) as his adopted sons, and as Sig-fadir (father of victory) his caprices determine who will emerge with heroism and who will meet his end.<sup>18</sup> He invests them with strength, but just as soon as it appears that he has granted one side victory, it is taken away and bestowed upon the other. Known for his granting of fortune, Wuotan was known as the inventor of gaming and specifically of dice. In *Hyndluliod* it says of him:

*'He gives victory to some, to some riches,  
eloquence to many, and common sense to men;  
he gives following winds to sailors, turns of phrase to poets,  
he gives manliness to many a warrior.'*

His chief weapon was the spear and thus he was also god of the spear; he had two wolves, Geri (greedy) and Freki (glutton)<sup>19</sup>; and two ravens, Hugin (thought) and Munin (memory), from which he is called raven-god. He sends his ravens out every morning and they return at dinner time to provide him with information on all matters of the world. Wolves and ravens are those creatures that emerge onto the battlefield and thus were viewed to be his creatures, as it says in the poem *Beowulf*:

*Many a spear  
Dawn-cold to the touch will be taken down  
and waved on high; the swept harp  
won't weaken warriors, but the raven winging  
darkly over the doomed will have news,  
tidings for the eagle of how he hoked and ate,  
how the wolf and he made short work of the dead.<sup>20</sup>*

In *Hattatal* Snorri writes:

*The young battle-leader lets the raven fully sate its hunger.  
The eagle is able to tread underfoot the completely dead skull.*

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<sup>17</sup> Ygg-drasill means 'the Terrible One's steed'. The tree is actually *Ask Yggdrasils* (the ash of Odin's steed). The hanged man was thought to ride as if on a horse.

<sup>18</sup> Grimm records that the god of victory in battle can be recognized by his tall white horse.

<sup>19</sup> Grimm states that in Sweden sundogs are known as *solvart* or *solulf* (sun-wolf).

<sup>20</sup> *Beowulf* also says that the raven heralded the rising sun.

*But the gray wolf climbs the battle-wounded will-stronghold.  
The she-wolf is often able to drink blood, the good prince wishes it so.*

Odin might have been associated with battle through his association with the horse, and thus this god became the god of warriors, or through his association with death.<sup>21</sup>

***As Bor's sons walked along the sea shore, they came across two logs and created people out of them. The first gave breath and life, the second consciousness and movement, the third a face, speech and hearing and sight. They gave them clothes and names. The man was called Ask (ash), the woman Embla (elm), and from them were produced the mankind to whom the dwelling-place under Midgard was given.***

Midgard was also known as *Manheim* (the world of men). The poetic terms for mankind such as “stave of the sea” and “wide ocean’s tree” refer to their creation.<sup>22</sup> Also ‘tree’ or any of various types of trees are used as a substitute term for man or woman. The reason for this is because the color of driftwood is very similar to that of white skin, and it also has the shape and roundness of human limbs. The term ‘wooden’ also seems to have been used to mean naked, as it says in *Havamal*:

*My clothes I gave along the way  
To two wooden men;  
Champions they thought themselves when they had clothing,  
The naked man is ashamed*

As in *Voluspa*, the gods bestow onto lifeless forms the three signs of life: Odin gives *önd*, Haenir gives *ôd*, and Lodur gives *lâ* and *lit*. These correspond to spirit (breath), soul (beating heart and blood), and spark (warmth and complexion). Odin was a god of wind and the lungs were sacred to him. Based upon what they bestow unto man, Lodur then is a fire god and Haenir seems to be a god of water.<sup>23</sup> Haenir was also known as ‘silent one’, swift, long-legged, and ‘mud-king’.<sup>24</sup> The Gothic word for soul, *saivala*, is related to the word for sea, *saivs*.<sup>25</sup> The association between water and blood is given in a verse from *Kormak’s Saga*.

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<sup>21</sup> This might be seen as the Sun going down into the underworld at night and its red color at sunset.

<sup>22</sup> Grimm records that giants spring from stone, men from diamond, peasants from flint.

<sup>23</sup> The name Lodur is related to *Luhdurar* (fire-bringer).

<sup>24</sup> Haenir’s epithets might relate to water. Calling him ‘silent one’ might refer to the fact that whereas wind and fire always makes a sound, still water is silent. ‘Long-legged’ means swift and thus could apply to running water. Haenir is like the Indian Soma, who is said to be swift as steeds and king of rivers, but unlike him is said to have a sound like thunder.

<sup>25</sup> Other traditions make fire the source of blood, wind of the heart, and the sea of thought. Ovid mentions that life arose from a combination of fire and water. Plutarch mentions the

*Of little gain in combat  
my staff of slaughter proved  
when I hewed shield rims; the hand's  
sharp-toothed bear charged into battle.  
There was clamor when the bruin of blood,  
unwilling for truce, left its lair,  
its slender scabbard, on its way  
to the dwelling of the sea-king (Ati).<sup>26</sup>*

*Of little gain in combat  
my sword proved  
when I hewed shield rims;  
the sword charged into battle.  
There was clamor when the sword,  
unwilling for truce, left its lair,  
its slender scabbard, on its way  
to the body's blood.*

Also the relationship between the rhythmic pounding of the sea and that of the heart is given:

*God of the clash of Odin's griddle,  
I thought I was thrusting my sword,  
with its greed for blood, even nearer  
to where the blood-tracks meet;  
but the launcher of the sea's horse  
could not bite with murderous mouth  
the mate of the pounding sea;  
my mind is set on her*

*Warrior of battle,  
I thought I was thrusting my sword,  
with its greed for blood, even nearer  
to the heart  
but the man  
could not bite with blade  
the pounding heart;  
my mind is set on her*

This also answers the question as to why Odin gives *önd* and Haenir *ôd*. It arises because Odin as a god of wind is associated with the breath, and not with the heart that was held the power to drive a person into passion, since the heart was more closely equated with the sea.

For this role Odin is also known as 'father of mankind', but there is another god that shares this role of creation. The god Heimdall too was known as the progenitor of humankind, under the name of Rig in *Rigsthula* (List of Rig), and in the opening verse of *Voluspa*. A complete description of Heimdall is given in *Gylfaginning*:

Heimdall is known as the white god. He is great and holy. Nine maidens bore him as their son, all of them sisters. He is also called Hallinskidi (skew-horned) and Gullintanni (golden-toothed). His horse is called Gulltopp (golden-mane). He lives in a place called Himinbiorg (high heaven) by Bifrost (shimmering way). He is the gods' watchman and sits there at the edge of heaven to guard the bridge against mountain giants. He needs less sleep than a bird. He can see, by night just as well as by day, a distance of a hundred leagues. He can also hear grass growing on the earth and wool on sheep and everything that sounds louder than that. He has a trumpet called Giallarhorn (loud horn) and its blast can be heard in all worlds. The head is referred to as Heimdall's sword.

Heimdall is also referred to as Vindhler (wind-shield), sverdas (sword god), and 'spear-magnificent man'. Giallarhorn is also the horn that Mimir uses

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three components of mankind as spirit, soul and body. The Indian *manas* were heart, mind, and life-spirit and the elements of life are breath, blood and the soul of the earth.

<sup>26</sup> Along with Ati, Snorri includes the name Haemir in his list of sea-kings.

to drink from his well, which means this horn of Mimir was equated with the horn of Heimdall.<sup>27</sup>

In both the following passages from *Voluspa*, there is a close association made between Heimdall and Odin:

*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*

*The sons of Mim are at play and fate catches fire  
at the ancient Giallar-horn  
Heimdall blows loudly, his horn is in the air.  
Odin speaks with Mim's head.*<sup>28</sup>

Here Mimir is seen as being only a head and so it seems that the visible 'Man in the Moon' was Mimir's head in the well, with the drinking horn clearly visible touching his lips.<sup>29</sup> Also the ear of Heimdall is matched with the eye of Odin, and while the Moon was seen to be Odin's eye within a well, the horn and ear of Heimdall were also associated with the Moon. The word 'hearing' is said by Snorri to be a poetic term for 'ears'. In this case the phases of the Moon were perceived as distinct objects: the half-moon resembling a human ear and the crescent moon appearing as a great horn. So, like Odin, Heimdall had left his ears as a pledge under the World Tree. But although the sacrifice of Odin's eye is clearly stated in *Voluspa*, there is no myth about its sacrifice, nor any further details concerning "Heimdall's hearing".

The name Heimdall could mean 'one who illuminates the world', that applies well to the Moon, and its white glow explains why he was known as the white god. The reference to his superior hearing arose because the half-moons were thought to be his large ears. His need for little sleep relates to how the Moon is often out during the night when everyone else needs to sleep, just as when the Sun was out it was said to be awake. Because the crescent moon was also likened to the ram's horn (often blown by shepherds) this animal was then considered sacred to Heimdall.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This simple equation might have been Snorri's, since the *Poetic Edda* is not so clear on this point.

<sup>28</sup> Odin is referred to as 'Mim's friend', implying that Mim is Odin's friend because he consults him.

<sup>29</sup> It seems the term for heaven 'storm-Mimir' means rain, and 'winter-Mimir' means ice, and the term for a sword 'flesh-Mimir' means blood. So the name Mimir is used as a substitute for 'water'. His name also arises in the German river Mimling and the Swedish river Mimeså near Mimesjö. Grimm writes: "It is the vulgar belief in Norway, that whenever people at sea go down, a *söedrouen* (sea sprite) shews himself in the shape of a headless old man".

<sup>30</sup> Snorri gives *Heimdali* as a ram's name and Heimdall's name Hallinskidi (skew-horned) is used for a ram in *Thulur*. The ram's curving horns were called "crooked horns".

*All men are of one kindred stock, though scattered far and wide;  
For one is father of us all—one doth for all provide.  
He gave the sun his golden beams, the moon her silver horn;  
He set mankind upon the earth, as stars the heavens adorn.*

It is also said that just as the sword was referred to as “man’s doom” the head was known as “Heimdall’s doom” or “Heimdall’s sword”, because it is said that he was pierced with a man’s head. If Heimdall was the ‘Man in the Moon’, the head that pierced him is the one seen in profile on the Moon’s surface.<sup>31</sup>

All of this means that the Moon was Heimdall and thus also the father of mankind.<sup>32</sup> Læstradius offers that the Sami *stallo* (giants) of myth were actually raiders (vikings) from Birka, Sweden. Among the stories he gives about the *stallo*, this one is from the *Petrus Læstadius Chronicles*.

The *stallo* had once set up a net in order to catch beavers, made a fire in the forest close by, and taken off his clothes in order to rest. But he had tied a string to the beaver net and fastened a sleigh bell at the other end of it. That he placed beside him near the fire so that when a beaver got caught in the net and started tugging it, the bell would start ringing and wake him up. Thus the *stallo* would be able to go and catch it immediately. One Lapp had seen this and when everything had been properly set in place, he went and tugged at the rope. The *stallo* dashed to the net and found nothing. But as he came back all his clothes had been burnt because the Lapp had meanwhile hurried there and thrown them into the fire. The *stallo* was annoyed at having dashed away so heedlessly that his clothes had fallen into the fire. However, he sat down again near the fire and warmed himself until the bell rang again. Then he again dashed to the net, but the net was empty as it had been the previous time. Worst of all, the fire had gone out when he returned. Now the *stallo* began to freeze and in his agony he turned to the moon that was shining on the horizon. “Look, father, your son is freezing!” he shouted as he walked towards the moon. That did not help him, however, and he froze to death.

Given that Heimdall was believed to be the progenitor of mankind in parts of Scandinavia and that he was also unquestionably a god of the Moon, would seem to support the notion that the *stallo* of the story was a Swede.

Since Heimdall was to have been born of nine sisters, the poem *Hyndluliod* is thought to describe his mythical origins:

*One was born in bygone days,  
with enormous power of the sons of men;  
then nine women gave birth to him,  
to the spear-magnificent man,*

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<sup>31</sup> In *Lokasenna* Heimdall is said to have muddy back, although it is unclear what this means. It could be a mere insult, but knowing Heimdall is a god of the Moon, it could refer to the dark back of the Moon.

<sup>32</sup> According to Grimm, the new moon was addressed by the Germans as “gracious lord”.

*daughters of giants, at the edge of the earth.  
Gialp bore him, Greip bore him,  
Eistla bore him and Eyrgiafa;  
Ulfrun and Angeyia,  
Imd and Atla and Iarnsaxa.  
He was empowered with the strength of earth,  
the cool waves of the sea, and sacrificial blood.*

The nine sisters that bore Heimdall could have become the nine daughters of the sea giant Aegir and his wife Ran. Aegir variously went by the names of the sea: Aegir (ocean), Gymir (engulfer), and Hler (bellow); was said to live on the island Hlesey (Laesso in Kattegat); and was a skilled practitioner of magic and brewer of the gods. The sea was known as Aegir's cauldron and its sound was said to be his song. Ran (take) was the hostess of the drowned and was to take them down with her net. According to Swedish folk belief she was also known as Sjörå (lady of the sea). It says of them in *Skaldskaparmal*:

Aegir had glowing gold brought into the middle of the hall which illuminated and lit up the hall like fire, and this was used as lights at his feast just as in Valhall there had been swords instead of fire. Then Loki wrangled with all the gods there and killed a slave of Aegir's called Fimafeng. The name of another of his slaves is Eldir. Ran is the name of Aegir's wife, and the names of their nine daughters are Himinglaeva (bright-heaven), Dufa (dipping), Blodughadda (bloody-haired), Hefring (raising), Unn (or Ud; wave), Hronn (wave), Bylgia (billow), Bara (wave) or Drofn (comber), and Kolga (cold one). At this feast everything served itself, both food and ale and all the utensils that were needed for the feast. Then the Aesir discovered that Ran had a net in which she caught everyone that went into sea. So this is the story of the origin of gold being called fire or light or brightness of Aegir, Ran or Aegir's daughters.

Thus gold was thought to be associated with the sea and was called 'fire of the sea'.<sup>33</sup> But although there is a familial relationship between Aegir, Ran and the nine sisters, they might have been different terms that simply meant 'ocean', although the waves specifically have been referred to as 'daughters of Aegir'. This implies that Heimdall was thought to be born from the sea, and this could relate to the image of the world wherein the land was surrounded by a sea of water round about. Thus the Moon was born out of this world ocean every time it rose.

Heimdall was also said to guard Bifrost (or Bilrost), which is the rainbow. Bifrost is also called the Asbru (As-bridge), because this is the bridge upon which one can cross into the abode of the gods. It was the strongest and greatest of bridges, and to any other construction in the nine

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<sup>33</sup> Perhaps a reference to the Sun's reflection upon the waves. Snorri records a poetic term for gold was "prow land's (sea's) flashes". In Fridthiof's saga, the hero says: "Seems the ocean to me like embers all blazing. High dash the breakers; hows are tossed up by the swan-feathered billows. On the rising ridges now Ellide rides."

worlds it was considered second to none. Of its three colors, the red was thought to be a protective fire, whereby it could not be crossed by frost and mountain giants. Heimdall had his hall close to this bridge to act as the gods' watchman, due to his association with the horn.

The name 'Heimdall' would have been the word for Moon, with Hallinskidi, Gullintanni (golden teeth), and Vindhler simply being other names for it. However, having golden teeth does not appear to fit the Moon but instead perhaps fire. However, as has been seen, gold is applied to anything that appeared to emit light, and so is synonymous with 'shining'. The term 'golden teeth' then well represents the quarter-phase of the moon, that looks like a bright smile.

The Sun and the Moon were also seen not as the god's themselves, but of objects that the gods put in their proper place, and the world was a creation of the gods.

*Norfi or Narfi was the name of a giant who lived in Giantland. He had a daughter called Night. She was black and dark in accordance with her ancestry. She was married to a person called Naglfari. Their son was called Aud. Next she was married to someone called Annar. Their daughter was called Iord (Earth). Her last husband was Delling, he was of the race of the Aesir. Their son was Day. He was bright and beautiful in accordance with his father's nature.*

*Then All-father took Night and her son Day and gave them two horses and two chariots and set them up in the sky so that they have to ride around the earth every twenty-four hours. Night rides in front on the horse called Hrimfaxi or Fiorsvartnir, and every morning he bedews the earth with the drips from his bit. Day's horse is called Skinfaxi (shining-mane) or Glad, and light is shed over all the sky and sea from his mane.*

*There was a person whose name was Mundilfreri who had two children. They were so fair and beautiful that he called the one Moon and his daughter Sol (sun), and gave her in marriage to a person called Glen. But the gods got angry at this arrogance and took the brother and sister and set them up in the sky; they made Sol drive the horses that drew the chariot of the sun which the gods had created, to illuminate the worlds, out of the molten particle that had flown out of the world of Muspell. The names of these horses are Arvak and Alsvinn. Under the shoulders of the horses the gods put two bellows to cool them, and in some sources it is called ironblast.*



Moon



two swans in the Well of Fate



Mimir with Giallarhorn



Hiuki and Bil with the tub Saeg



Heimdall



Heiddraupnir's skull



Heimdall's Doom



Moongarm

*Moon guides the course of the moon and controls its waxing and waning. He took two children from the earth called Bil and Hiuki as they were leaving a well called Byrgir, carrying between them on their shoulders a tub called Saeg; their carrying-pole was called Simul. Their father's name is Vidfinn. These children go with Moon, as can be seen from earth.*<sup>34</sup>

Here too the source of the dew is given as that from the foam on the bit of Night's horse, whereas before it was said to be from the World Tree. Further, the reason why the Sun and the Moon continue their course with such great speed is that there are two wolves who are chasing close behind them, pressing them on their way. A wolf called Skoll follows after the Sun and another called Hati Hrodvitrnisson chases the Moon.

*A certain giantess lives east of Midgard in a forest called Ironwood. In that forest live trollwives called Iarnvidiur. The ancient giantess breeds as sons many giants and all in wolf shapes, and it is from them that these wolves are descended. And they say that from this clan will come a most mighty one called Moongarm. He will fill himself with the lifeblood of everyone that dies, and he will swallow heavenly bodies and spatter heaven and all the skies with blood. As a result the sun will lose its shine and winds will then be violent and will rage to and fro.*

Odin's foe is also said to be a wolf, who will consume him at the end of the world. They would have believed that the Sun or Moon was swallowed by such a beast during an eclipse and noise was made to frighten it away.

The gods had their own habitation in Asgard, which was above Midgard and accessible from Bifrost:

*They made themselves a city in the middle of the world which is known as Asgard. There the gods and their descendants lived and there took place as a result many events and developments both on earth and aloft. In the city there is a seat called Hlidskialf, and when Odin sat in that throne he saw over all worlds and every man's activity and understood everything he saw.*

*All-father established rulers and bade them decide with him the destinies of men and be in charge of the government of the city. This was in the place called Idavoll in the center of the city.<sup>35</sup> It was their first act to build the temple that their thrones stand in,*

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<sup>34</sup> The figures Hiuki and Bil are equivalent to those familiar ones of Jack and Jill. The figure of Jack on the Moon appears to be holding a lantern in his left hand and Jill a bunch of straw in hers, so they appear equivalent to 'Jack o' the Lantern' and 'Will o' the Wisp'.

<sup>35</sup> Tacitus recorded that the Cheruskans called this field of battle Idistaviso.

*twelve in addition to the throne that belongs to All-father. This building is the best that is built on earth and the biggest. Outside and inside it seems like nothing but gold. This place is called Gladsheim (bright home).*

*They built another hall, this was the sanctuary that belonged to the goddesses, and it was very beautiful. This building is called Vingolf (hall of friends). The next thing they did was lay forges and for them they made hammer and tongs and anvil, and with these they made all other tools. After that they worked metal and stone and wood, using so copiously the metal known as gold that they had all their furniture and utensils of gold, and that age is known as the golden age, until it was spoiled by the arrival of the women. They came from Giantland.*

*Next the gods took their places on their thrones and instituted their courts and discussed where the dwarfs had been generated from in the soil and down in the earth like maggots in flesh. The dwarfs had taken shape first and acquired life in the flesh of Ymir and were then maggots, but by decision of the gods they became conscious with intelligence and had the shape of men though they live in the earth and in rocks. Modsognir was a dwarf and the second was Durin.*

*There is one place that is called Alfheim (elf land). There live the folk called light-elves, but dark-elves live down in the ground, and they are unlike them in appearance, and even more unlike them in nature. Light-elves are fairer than the sun to look at, but dark elves are blacker than pitch. One place there is called Breidablik (far-shining), and no fairer place is there. Also there is the one called Glitnir (shining), and its walls and columns and pillars are of red gold, and its roof of silver. There also is a place called Himinbiorg. It stands at the edge of heaven at the bridge's end where Bifrost reaches heaven. There also is a great place called Valaskjalf. This place is Odin's. The gods built it and roofed it with pure silver, and it is there in this hall that Hlidskjalf is, the throne of that name. And when All-father sits on that throne he can see over all the world.*

The fall of heroic men was explained as due to Odin's need of them for his own army. Valkyries (choosers of the slain) were the ones who determined death or victory for each man in battle, and were to carry the slain warriors in their arms up to Valhall. These are the Einheriar (heroes).

Each day after they have got dressed they put on war-gear and go out into the courtyard and fight each other and they fall each upon the other. This is their sport. And when dinner-time approaches they ride back to Valhall and sit down to drink.

In Valhall they are served drink by beautiful Valkyries, who also manage the drinking vessels and tableware. Valkyries sometimes have swan garments like swan-maidens and in their determination of fate have some similarity to the Norns, but were involved specifically in battle.<sup>36</sup> As it says in *Gylfaginning*:

Odin sends them to every battle. They allot death to men and govern victory. Gunn and Rota and the youngest norn, called Skuld, always ride to choose who shall be slain and to govern the killings.

The cook Andhrimnir each day boils the boar Saehrimnir in the cauldron Eldhrimnir and the warriors are never in want.<sup>37</sup> Odin gives his food to his wolves and the only thing that he ever takes is wine.

There is a goat called Heidrun standing on top of Valhall feeding on the foliage from the branches of that tree whose name is well known, it is called Lerad, and from the goat's udder flows mead with which it fills a vat each day. This is so big that all the Einheriar can drink their fill from it.

The stag Eikthyrnir which stands on Valhall and feeds on the branches of this tree, and from its horns comes such a great dripping that it flows down into Hvergelmir, and from there flow rivers, whose names are: Sid, Vid, Sekin, Ekin, Svol, Gunnthro, Fiorm, Flmbulthul, Gipul, Gopul, Gomul, and Gelrvlmul; these flow through where the Aesir live. These are the names of others: Vin, Tholl, Boll, Grad, Gunnthrain, Nyt, Not, Nonn, Vina, Veg, Svinn, and Thiodnuma.

Nearby Valhall is the tree with golden leaves called Glasir.<sup>38</sup>

The Valkyries were also known as wish-maidens, shield-maidens, battle-maidens, or helmet-maidens and are typically described as radiant and dressed in gold. Sometimes Valkyries come out of the south and in *Volundarkvitha* three sisters come from Myrkwood in the south. An Anglo-Saxon charm says of them: "Loud were they, yea, loud as they rode over hills; haughty were they as they rode over lands." Lightning was to have accompanied them as they rode, sparks were to flash out of their spears and water drop from their horses' manes.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The Valkyries and Norns are eminently confounded, but the association between Valkyries and Swan Maidens might have arisen much later.

<sup>37</sup> The Celtic Manannan had swine that were killed one day and came alive the next, which when consumed by the gods made them immortal.

<sup>38</sup> The trees Glasir, Lerad and Yggdrasill might all refer to the same tree, but also could be mythical trees that each came from a different tradition. Each tree is located in the Otherworld, which would mean they are all equivalent to the World Tree idea.

<sup>39</sup> They may have been associated with thunderstorms coming up from the south.

The god of storms and the strongest and most powerful god of them all was the god Thor (thunder). He was also known as Vingthor (wind-Thor) and Hlorridi (loud rider), as his foster parents were Vingnir and Hlora. Among his many names are Atli (terrible or grandfather), Asabrag, Ennilang, Eindridi, Biorn, Hardveur, Sonnung, Veud and Rym. He was to have been large and strong, with a red beard (from where he gets his nickname 'redbeard') and a fierce look in his eyes. Also the patron of farmers and sailors and formerly a god of war and the sky. He was said to be son of the earth (Iord) and Odin. It says this of him in *Gylfaginning*:

Thor is the most outstanding of the Aesir; he is known as Asa-Thor (Aesir-Thor) or Oku-Thor (driving-Thor). He is strongest of all the gods and men. His realm is a place called Thrudvangar (power-field), and his hall is called Bilskirnir (bright lightning). In that hall there are five hundred and forty apartments. It is the biggest building that has ever been built.

Thor has two goats whose names are Tanngniost (teeth-gnasher) and Tanngrinnir (teeth-grinder), and a chariot that he drives in, and the goats draw the chariot.<sup>40</sup> From this he is known as Oku-Thor. He also has three special possessions. One of them is the hammer Miollnir (lightning)<sup>41</sup>, well known to frost-giants and mountain-giants when it is raised aloft, and that is not to be wondered at: it has smashed many a skull of their fathers and kinsmen. He has another possession that is very valuable, a girdle of might (*megingjord*), and when he buckles it on his As-strength is doubled. He has a third thing that is a most important possession. This is a pair of iron gloves (*iarngreipr*). He must not be without these when he grips the hammer. But there is no one so wise that can recount all his exploits, though I can tell you so many stories about him that much time will be taken up before all I know is told.

Thor's wife was the goddess Sif (wife) or the giantess Iarnsaxa (one with an iron knife)<sup>42</sup>, and Thor's children were Modi (angry), Magni (strong) and Thrud (powerful), all personifying his characteristics. Thrud is the child of Sif and Magni of Iarnsaxa. The god Ullr (majestic) is another son of Sif and the stepson of Thor.<sup>43</sup> He is god of the sky and the shield, skiing, hunting and the bow—which is why his hall is called Yewdale—and is said to own many horses. The shield was known as 'Ullr's ship'. Because he was seen to be crossing water upon his shield, this seems to be another

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<sup>40</sup> Guerber states that sparks shoot from the goats' gnashing teeth and hooves as they pull Thor's chariot.

<sup>41</sup> Grimm states that 'Miolnir' sounds quite like the Slavic word for lightning: *molniya* and *munya*. In Servian songs, Munya (lightning) is the bride of Miesets (Moon), and the sister of Grom (Thunder).

<sup>42</sup> The German Berche was said to have a knife with which she would slit open the bellies of those who slighted or insulted her. She was known as Iron Bertha and Wild Bertha.

<sup>43</sup> According to Guerber, in some parts of Germany Ullr was known as Holler and was husband of the goddess Holda.

vision of the sun traversing the ocean-sky. In *Gesta Danorum* Oller (Ullr) is the one that takes Odin's place during his exile.<sup>44</sup>

He is such a good archer and skier that no one can compete with him. He is also beautiful in appearance and has a warrior's accomplishments. He is a good one to pray to in single combat.

Thor is directly associated with the thunderstorm and each time he threw his hammer it would return to his hand, allowing him to use it many times, creating one lightning bolt after another.<sup>45</sup> Then there is the rumbling sound that his wagon makes when it is passing over the ground.<sup>46</sup> Thor was also once the god of war and 'thunder' was used as a poetic term for battle.<sup>47</sup>

*The ground was depressed beneath the trample of horses'  
hoofs, the hurrying wagons creaked  
along, wheels groaned, the chariot drivers chased  
the wind, matching the noise of thunder.*

Thor was called Reidartyr or Reidityr (wagon-god) and Vagna-verr (wagon-man). In Sweden when they heard thunder used to say "the good old fellow drives" (*godgubben åker*) and in Gothland "Thor's driving" (*Thors akan*). They would also say "the gracious god is angry" and Thor's tendency to be quick to anger and quick to lose it again might have something to do with the passing nature of powerful storms. In Norse legend, according to Grimm, he was to have provided rain when asked but would send a storm when he was angry.<sup>48</sup> In southern Germany he was known as 'kettle-vendor' because they imagined his brazen chariot must have been filled with copper kettles to produce such a noise.

Thor's association with the goat would arise from the similarity between the cracking of thunder and the crack of two billy goats butting horns.<sup>49</sup>

*Shields and helms  
Rang out as they were hit, and the fierce fight  
Mounted as when a storm out of the west—  
When the Young Goats, the rainy stars, arise—  
Lashes the earth, or as when clouds descend  
In thick hail on the deep, and Jupiter*

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<sup>44</sup> Adam of Bremen in his *History of the Archbishops* says those in the north did not understand the cause for the lengthening and shortening of days, and so placed a great deal of meaning to it, possibly providing a motive for thinking of Odin as going into exile.

<sup>45</sup> The Indian sky god Indra has a spear that he throws that never misses its mark. It will also return to his hand whether he throws it or someone else does.

<sup>46</sup> Wheels with iron rims and iron horse-shoes were known to occasionally spark when going fast over stone.

<sup>47</sup> The Germans believed that the war god was within the storm cloud.

<sup>48</sup> Grimm writes: "The peasant in Vermland calls the south-west corner of the sky, whence the summer tempests mostly rise, *Thorshåla*". According to Guerber, Thor was said to travel from west to east, along the direction of the spring storms.

<sup>49</sup> An Indian thunder deity was represented as a one-footed goat.

*Goes round with southwind, making the downpour veer,  
And bursts the cloudy arches of the sky.*

This association between Thor and the goat would also have been the motive behind thinking that Thor was the god of the peasants. Odin, on the other hand, was associated with the horse, and thus Odin was seen as the god of the nobles. Odin makes sure Thor remembers this in *Harbardzliod*, by taunting him:

*'Odin has the nobles who fall in battle  
and Thor has the breed of serfs.'*

The connection of Thor with the hammer also makes him the god of the blacksmith. The typical depiction of Thor's hammer puts most of the mallet's weight close to the handle and the description of his hammer as having a short handle, both features that make an ideal hammer for metal-working on an anvil. Hammers of this design were used by smiths during the Viking age. Lars Levi Læstradius in *Fragments of Lappish Mythology* says that thunder is called *Pajan* (blacksmith). This too is told in *Gesta Danorum* when Magnus Nilsson in 1125 AD sacked a pagan temple in Sweden—in this case Jupiter being Thor:

He made sure that he brought home some hammers of an unusual weight, which they call Jupiter's, used by the people of the island in the ancient religion. For the men of old, seeking to understand the causes of thunder and lightning through the equation of things, took huge heavy hammers of bronze, by which they thought the crashing in the sky might have been caused, reckoning that the mighty and powerful noise might (as it were) very possibly be imitated by the labors of a smith.

The sound of a hammer striking an anvil and the production of sparks would have been connected to the thunderclap of the god's hammer striking and the lightning as the sparks shoot from it.<sup>50</sup> So Thor was associated not only with lightning but with sparks as well. He was even said to have a piece of whetstone lodged in his head. And a whetstone would have been known to spark when sharpening an axe or blade.<sup>51</sup>

Thor's adversaries are the giants of winter, ice and frost. The storms of the spring are the coming of the god to fight back the winter. His relation to storms caused Thor to also be god of the wind and rain, and thus fertility.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The thunderhead resembles an anvil and today are called 'anvil clouds'. Guerber states that the thunderhead was known as 'Thor's hat'.

<sup>51</sup> For a time prehistoric hand-axes found in Europe were called 'thunder bolts' or 'lightning stones' because they were thought to be the result of lightning strikes, especially because they would have been made of flint and produced sparks when struck.

<sup>52</sup> According to Grimm, a he-goat was hung from the mast of a ship to appeal for a favorable wind.

From these concepts arose several more specific stories that detail his conflicts with notable giants, as well as his greatest adversary, the Midgard Serpent. This serpent, called Iormundgand (great monster), was thought to inhabit the world ocean that surrounded the continent, and it was so long that its mouth bit at its own tail.<sup>53</sup> Thor's confrontation with this beast was the most famous of his battles.

This is what is says in *Gylfaginning* of the origin of summer and winter, and of wind:

Svasud (mild one) is the name of the one that is father of Summer, and he is so blissful in his life that it is from his name that what is pleasant is called *svaslig* (delightful). And Winter's father is called either Vindloni or Vindsval (wind-cool). He is Vasad's son, and members of this family have been grim and cold-hearted, and Winter inherits their nature.

At the northern end of heaven there sits a giant called Hraesvelg. He has eagle form. And when he starts to fly winds arise from beneath his wings.

According to Grimm, in Norway a whirlwind was thought to be a giant stirring his pots, and oxen were thought to dig up hurricanes with their horns.

There is also an As called Tyr. He is the bravest and most valiant and he has great power over victory in battles. It is good for men of action to pray to him. There is a saying that a man is ty-valiant who surpasses other men and does not hesitate. He was so clever that a man who is clever is said to be ty-wise. It is one proof of his bravery that when the Aesir were luring Fenriswolf so as to get the fetter Gleipnir on him, he did not trust them that they would let him go until they placed Tyr's hand in the wolf's mouth as a pledge. And when the Aesir refused to let him go then he bit off the hand at the place that is now called the wolf-joint (wrist), and he is one-handed and he is not considered a promoter of settlements between people.

Tyr was also a god of battle, the sword, and the sky who was known for having only one hand.<sup>54</sup> While a missing hand being not an uncommon sight among warriors, the loss of the hand was a common punishment for perjury, thus depicted in the explanation that he lost it as a consequence of a pledge to trick the wolf-monster Fenrir into being bound. Tyr's name means and was used to designate 'god'. Tyr's animal was the bull.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> He may have been source of the ocean waves.

<sup>54</sup> Tyr might have been said to have lost his hand because there is only Tyr's shield in the sky (sun) and not a sword. Or it could possibly relate to the apparent image of a hand within the figure Moongarm on the Moon.

<sup>55</sup> The bull would have related to the association between a bull's bellow and thunder, as well as Tyr's role as god of battle, due to the bulls strength and aggression, noted for charging towards one another like two warring armies. Bull horns were also used to lead the charge and some war gear was fashioned from bull's hide.

## EARTH

Of the earth goddesses, the first to be mentioned is Frigg, who is the wife of Odin and daughter of Fiorgyn (or Fiorgvin). They and their children who dwell in Asgard are known as the Aesir<sup>56</sup> or As. Her dwelling there is called Fensalir (fen hall) and her handmaids were Hlin and Gna. Frigg is also considered a goddess of spinning and weaving and was known to Snorri as 'queen of falcon form'.

Another is Iord, who is the female personification of the earth but not a mythical goddess. She is mother of Thor and Meili (lovely one), and her father is Onar (or Ionakr). Iord is called Onar's 'tree-grown only daughter' or 'oak-green daughter' and also 'pine-haired'. Other names for Iord are Fiorgyn and Hlodyn.

Baldr was a god of light, associated with the day, and thus the dew portends his return from the depths of the underworld, which could be seen as a daily or a seasonal phenomenon. His adversary Hod (warrior) is associated with darkness. Here is what is said of Baldr and Hod in *Gylfaginning*:

Odin's second son is Baldr, and there is good to be told of him. He is best and all praise him. He is so fair in appearance and so bright that light shines from him, and there is a plant so white that it is called after Baldr's eyelash (ox-eye daisy). It is the whitest of all plants, and from this you can tell his beauty both of hair and body. He is the wisest of the Aesir and most beautifully spoken and most merciful, but it is one of his characteristics that none of his decisions can be fulfilled. He lives in a place called Breidablik. This is in heaven. No unclean thing is permitted to be there, as it says here: It is called Breidablik where Baldr has made himself a dwelling, in that land where I know to be fewest evil intents.

Hod is the name of one As. He is blind. Only too strong is he. And the gods would prefer that this As did not need to be named; for the work of his hands will long be kept in mind among gods and men.

The association of Baldr with mistletoe, of which the dart that brought him down was made, must go to a deeper association not captured in the story. Since mistletoe is a plant that grows and thrives even during the winter season it would have been viewed as a sign of the redemption of life and the promise of spring.

*Like mistletoe that in the woods in winter  
Thrives with yellowish berries and new leaves—  
a parasite on the trunk it twines around*

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<sup>56</sup> The name appears to arise from a combination of *As* with *Ir*, so "High Great-Ones" or "High Ones" is appropriate (possibly "Holy Ones"), thus a term distinguishing the most important gods. It carries the same denotation as *ginn-regen* ("high gods" or "holy gods").

Among fertility gods are a trio associated with another line of gods called the Vanir<sup>57</sup> or Van: Niord and his twin children Freyr and Freyia. These three were sent as hostages from Vanaheim to the Aesir as a pledge of peace. In *Lokasenna* they were said to have come east from the direction of the ocean. Niord was a god of chariots and a god of the sea, and a particular water plant (*spongia marina*) was called 'Niord's glove'. Here is how he is described:

Niord lives in heaven in a place called Noatun (shipyard). He rules over the motion of wind and moderates sea and fire. It is to him one must pray for voyages and fishing. He is so rich and wealthy that he can grant wealth of lands or possessions to those that pray to him for this.<sup>58</sup> Niord is not of the race of the Aesir. He was brought up in the land of the Vanir, but the Vanir gave him as hostage to the gods and took in exchange as an Aesir-hostage the one called Haenir. He came to be the pledge of truce between the gods and the Vanir.

Niord has a wife called Skadi, daughter of the giant Thiassi. Skadi wants to have the home her father had had—this is in some mountains, a place called Thrymheim—but Niord wants to be near the sea. They agreed on this, that they should stay nine nights in Thrymheim and then an alternate nine at Noatun.

But when Niord returned from the mountains after nine nights he said he could not stand living in the mountains, and preferred the call of the swan to the howling of wolves. While Skadi could not tolerate the screeching gulls that would wake her in the morning, and so she returned to the mountain to live in Thrymheim where she hunts with a bow on skis, and is known as a ski goddess.<sup>59</sup>

Niord of Noatun had two children by his sister. The son was called Freyr and the daughter Freyia. They were beautiful in appearance and mighty. Freyr is the most glorious of the Aesir. He is ruler of rain and sunshine and thus of the produce of the earth, and it is good to pray to him for prosperity and peace. He also rules over the wealth of men.

Freyia is the most glorious of the Asyniur. She has a dwelling in heaven called Folkvangar (folk field), and wherever she rides to battle she gets half the slain, and the other half Odin. Sessrumnir (plentiful space), her hall, is large and beautiful. And when she travels she drives two cats and sits in a chariot. She is the most approachable one for people to pray to, and from her name is derived the honorific title whereby noble ladies are called *frovur* (noble ladies). She was very fond of love songs. It is good to pray to her concerning love affairs.

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<sup>57</sup> Vanir might mean "bright ones" or "shining ones".

<sup>58</sup> Hence the old Icelandic phrase "as rich as Niord".

<sup>59</sup> The Baltic peninsula was often thought by Europeans to be an island, called variously Thule, Scandza, Scadanon, and Scadinavia by ancient historians. The local name for it may have thus been Skadi, represented by the goddess of snow.

Freyia is highest in rank next to Frigg. She was married to someone called Od (influence). Hnoss is the name of their daughter. She is so beautiful that from her name whatever is beautiful and precious is called *hnossir* (treasures). Od went off on long travels, and Freyia stayed behind weeping, and her tears are red gold. Freyia has many names, and the reason for this is that she adopted various names when she was travelling among strange peoples looking for Od. She is called Mardoll (gold) and Horn (flax), Gefn (giver), and Syr (sow). Freyia owned the Brisings' necklace. She is known as Lady of the Vanir.

Guerber adds this about Freyia's search for her husband Od (Oedi):

Far away in the sunny South, under the flowering myrtle-trees, Freya found Odur at last, and her love being restored to her, she was happy and smiling once again, and as radiant as a bride. It is perhaps because Freya found her husband beneath the flowering myrtle, that Northern brides, to this day, wear myrtle in preference to the conventional orange wreath of other climes.

Hand in hand, Odur and Freya now gently wended their way home once more, and in the light of their happiness the grass grew green, the flowers bloomed, and the birds sang, for all Nature sympathized as heartily with Freya's joy as it had mourned with her when she was in sorrow.

Freyia and Freyr are the two principle gods of the Vanir, for their names mean simply 'lady' and 'lord'.<sup>60</sup> Both too were associated with the boar: Freyia possessed one named Hildisvin (battle-swine) and Freyr one named Slidrugtanni or Gullinbursti (golden-bristles).<sup>61</sup> Freyr was the chief god of fertility, wealth, the harvest, also marriage and the birth of children. Freyr too is often referred to as 'shining' and thus represents light. He is possessor of a horse Blodughofi and an incredible ship called Skidbladnir, the best ship in the nine worlds and second in size only to Naglfari.

It was certain dwarfs, sons of Ivaldi, that made Skidbladnir and gave Freyr the ship. It is big enough for all the Aesir to be able to go aboard it with weapons and war gear, and it gets a fair wind as soon as the sail is hoisted, wherever it is required to go. And when it is not to be taken to sea, then it is made of so many parts and with such great art that it can be folded up like a cloth and put in one's pocket.

Both his ship and boar are fertility symbols. Freyr gave up his sword in order to win the love of Gerd.

There was someone called Gymir, and his wife Aurboda. She was of the race of mountain-giants. Gerd was their daughter, the most beautiful of all women. It happened one day that Freyr had gone into Hlidskialf and was

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<sup>60</sup> The Sanskrit word for wife is 'priya' (beloved). The name of Wotan's wife is Frea, which might too have originally meant simply 'wife'. The word 'bride' might have come from Bridget (Brid), a goddess closely related to Frea and thus to Freyia and Frigg.

<sup>61</sup> Boar tusks may have been used to break the soil, when used as an adze, and thus symbolic of fertility.

looking over all worlds, and when he looked to the north he saw on a certain homestead a large and beautiful building, and to this building went a woman, and when she lifted her arms and opened the door for herself, light was shed from her arms over both sky and sea, and all worlds were made bright by her. And his punishment for his great presumption in having sat in that holy seat was that he went away full of grief. And when he got home he said nothing, he neither slept nor drank; no one dared to try to speak with him. Then Niord sent for Freyr's servant Skirnir, and bade him go to Freyr and try to get him to talk and ask who he was so angry with that he would not talk to anyone. Skirnir said he would go though he was not eager, and said unpleasant answers were to be expected from him. And when he got to Freyr he asked why Freyr was so downcast and would not speak to anyone. Then Freyr replied and said he had seen a beautiful woman and for her sake he was so full of grief that he would not live long if he were not to have her.

“And now you must go and ask for her hand on my behalf and bring her back here whether her father is willing or not, and I shall reward you well for it.”

Then Skirnir replied, saying that he would undertake the mission, but Freyr must give him his sword. This was such a good sword that it would fight on its own. But Freyr did not let the lack of that be an obstacle and gave him the sword. Then Skirnir went and asked for the woman's hand for him and received the promise from her, and nine nights later she was to go to the place called Barey and enter into marriage with Freyr. But when Skirnir told Freyr the result of his errand he said this:

“Long is a night, long is a second, how can I suffer for three? Often has a month seemed shorter to me than half this wedding-eve.”

This is the reason for Freyr so being unarmed when he fought Beli, killing him instead with a stag's antler.

Idunn (renewal) was a goddess of fertility who is custodian of a casket of apples which are the fruit that returns the gods' youth to them when they age.<sup>62</sup> She lived near Brunnakr's brook and was married to Bragi, the credited inventor of poetry and thus kin to Odin (and described as his son).

Another goddess of this sort was Gefion, who was associated with oxen and the plow.

King Gylfi was ruler in what is now called Sweden. Of him it is said that he gave a certain vagrant woman, as a reward for his entertainment, one plough-land in his kingdom, as much as four oxen could plough up in a day and a night. Now this woman was one of the race of the Aesir. Her name was Gefion.

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<sup>62</sup> The World Tree's golden fruit and Idunn's golden apples both appear to be variants of the notion that the fruit provides some cure that has escaped mankind's reach (easing pain in childbirth or eternal life). There is, however, no direct connection between Idunn and the World Tree.

She took four oxen from the north, from Giantland, the sons of her and a certain giant, and put them before the plough. But the 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. There Gefion put the land and gave it a name and called it Zealand. Where the land had been lifted from there remained a lake; this is now called Lake Mälär in Sweden. And the inlets in the lake correspond to the headlands in Zealand.

She has a necklace, like Freyia, that she also received as a gift for her favors, in her case from an enchanted youth. As it says in *Lokasenna*:

*'Be silent, Gefion, I'm going to mention this,  
how your heart was seduced;  
the white boy gave you a jewel  
and you laid your thigh over him.'*

Freyia's necklace was known as Brisingamen (bright necklace). Taking the story from *Sorla-thattr* Guerber writes:

One day, while she was in Svartalfaheim, the underground kingdom, Freya saw four dwarfs fashioning the most wonderful necklace she had ever seen. Almost beside herself with longing to possess this treasure, which was called Brisingamen. Freya implored the dwarfs to give it to her; but they obstinately refused to do so unless she would promise to grant them her favor. Having secured the necklace at this price, Freya hastened to put it on, and its beauty so enhanced her charms that she wore it night and day, and only occasionally could be persuaded to lend it to the other divinities.

When Loki stole Brisingamen, Heimdall fought with him in order to recover it for her. To do this he travelled to Vagasker and Singastein, as Ulf Uggason says:

Heimdall, renowned defender of Bifrost, the powers' way, and kind of counsel, competes with Farbauri's terribly sly son Loki at Singastein. Son of eight mothers plus one, mighty of mood, is first to get hold of the beautiful jewel, Brisingamen. I announce it in verses of praise.

It is told more fully by Guerber:

Heimdall immediately started out in pursuit of the midnight thief, and quickly overtaking him, he drew his sword from its scabbard, with intent to cut off his head, when the god transformed himself into a flickering blue flame. Quick as thought, Heimdall changed himself into a cloud and sent down a deluge of rain to quench the fire; but Loki as promptly altered his form to that of a huge polar bear, and opened wide his jaws to swallow the water. Heimdall, nothing daunted, then likewise assumed the form of a bear, and attacked fiercely; but the combat threatening to end disastrously for Loki, the latter changed himself into a seal, and, Heimdall imitating him, a last struggle took place, which ended in Loki being forced to give up the necklace, which was duly restored to Freya.

Frigg too is shown to possess the same covetous nature of her Vanir counterpart. *Gesta Danorum* speaks of a golden statue brought to Odin in his image:

His wife, Frigg, desiring to walk abroad more bedizened, brought in smiths to strip the statue of its gold. Odin had them hanged and then, setting the image on a plinth, by a marvelous feat of workmanship made it respond with a voice to human touch. Subordinating her husband's divine honors to the splendor of her own apparel, Frigg submitted herself to the lust of one of her servants; by his cunning the effigy was demolished and the gold which had been devoted to public idolatry went to serve her personal pleasure. This woman, unworthy of a deified consort, felt no scruples about pursuing unchastity, provided she could more speedily enjoy what she coveted. Need I add anything but to say that such a god deserved such a wife? Men's intelligence was once made ridiculous by gullibility of this kind. Consequently Odin, wounded by both his wife's offences, grieved as heavily over the damage of his likeness as the harm of his bed. Stung by this double embarrassment he took to exile replete with an honest shame, thinking he would thereby obliterate the stain of this disgrace.

## UNDERWORLD

The final realm is that of the underworld, known as Hel. The serpent of the underworld is Nidhogg who dwells in the river Elivagar and is known as the 'corpse eater'.<sup>63</sup> It is also he who gnaws perpetually upon the principle root of the World Tree. There is no reason to believe that he has not been companion to the World Tree for a great long time; the eagle of heaven and serpent of the underworld have been associated with the tree connecting them since prehistoric times.<sup>64</sup>

*As when a golden eagle flapping skyward  
Bears a snake as prey—her feet entwined  
But holding fast with talons, while the victim,  
Wounded as it is, coils and uncoils  
And lifts cold grisly scales and towers up  
With hissing maw; but all the same the eagle  
Strikes the wrestler snake with crooked beak  
While beating with her wings the air of heaven.*

Here is how Hel is described in *Voluspa*:

*“She saw a captive lying under the grove of hot springs,  
That evil-loving form, Loki she recognized;  
There sits Sign, not at all happy*

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<sup>63</sup> Likely a representation of the powers of decay and corrosion that appears to eat things away, as anything is that is buried under the ground—that is, except for gold. His name 'terrible striker' suggests that he was thought to have a poisonous bite.

<sup>64</sup> The mythical eagle in the branches of the world tree and the serpent at its roots was widespread. The eagle was called Garuda or Garide, who pecked at the serpent.

*about her husband—  
do you understand yet, or what more?*

*From the east falls, from poison valleys,  
a river of knives and swords, Cutting it is called.  
To the north there stood on Dark-of-moon Plains,  
a hall of gold, of the lineage of Sindri,  
and another stood on Never-cooled Plain,  
the beer-hall of the giant who is called Brimir.*

*A hall she saw standing far from the sun,  
on Corpse-strand; its doors look north;  
drops of poison fall in through the roof-vents,  
the hall is woven of serpents' spines.*

*There she saw wading in turbid streams  
men who swore false oaths and murderers,  
and those who seduced the close confidantes of other men;  
there Nidhogg sucks the bodies of the dead—  
a wolf tears the corpses of men—  
do you understand yet, or what more?"*

The giant Loki, here described as residing under the hot springs, is the most formidable god from this realm. As it says of him in *Gylfaginning*:

That one is also reckoned among the Aesir whom some call the Aesir's calumniator and originator of deceits and the disgrace of all gods and men. His name is Loki or Lopt (airy one)<sup>65</sup>, son of the giant Farbauti (dangerous striker). Laufey (leaf-full) or Nal (needle) is his mother. Byleist (lightning storm) and Helblindi (blind one from Hel) are his brothers. Loki is pleasing and handsome in appearance, evil in character, very capricious in behavior. He possessed to a greater degree than others the kind of learning that is called cunning, and tricks for every purpose. He was always getting the Aesir into a complete fix and often got them out of it by trickery. Sigyn is the name of his wife, Nari or Narfi their son.

The name of Loki's other son is Ali or Vali. Loki was attributed the role of god of earthquakes, for it was said that he lay fettered in a cavern beneath the earth, and that when the poison from a snake fell into his face he would convulse, causing the entire earth to shake. As well as a god of the underworld, he is also a god of fire.<sup>66</sup>

The fire god Lodur, who gave man heat and hue, is also equivalent to Loki. His name is also similar to the word for fire 'logi' and the German word for fire 'lohi'. The Icelandic word for a sulphur fire is 'Loka daun'

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<sup>65</sup> This is the root of *lopteldr* (airy-flame, lightning).

<sup>66</sup> There is an association between the snake and the underworld, as noted earlier, there could also be a further relationship with poisonous snakes, whose victims can get a fever that could be interpreted as fire having been breathed into them (a fire-breathing serpent), and that fire would have also come from the underworld. The word fire 'eit' is the root of the word poison 'eiter'.

(Loki's vapor) and old firing chips were called 'Loki's chips'. In Sweden, when a child's tooth was thrown into the fire, they would say "Lokke, Lokke, here is a bone tooth, give me a gold tooth" and according to an old Norse saying the snapping of logs in a stove was Loki beating his children.<sup>67</sup> Loki's parentage too implies he was the son of lightning and plentiful leaves (spark and tinder).<sup>68</sup> Fire in Sweden is called either "red cock" or "red wind".

Thorstein's saga begins with Loki, called here Loge:

The beginning of this Saga is, that a king named Loge ruled that country which is north of Norway. Loge was larger and stronger than any other man in the country. His name was lengthened from Loge to Haloge, and after him the country was named Halogeland (Halogaland, Haloge's land). Loge was the fairest of men, and his strength and stature was like upon that of his kinsmen, the giants, from whom he descended. His wife was Glod (Glöd, glad), a daughter of Grim of Grimsgard, which is situation in Jotunheim in the north; and Jotunheim was at that time called Elivags (Elivagar in the north). Grim was a very great berserk, his wife was Alvor, a sister of Alf the Old. He ruled that kingdom which lies between two rivers, both of which were called Elfs (Elbs), taking their name from him (Alf). The river south of his kingdom, dividing it from Gautland, the country of King Gaut, was called Gaut's Elf (Gaut's River, the river Gotha in the southern part of the present Sweden); the one north of it was called Raum's Elf, named after King Raum, and the kingdom of the latter was called Raum's-ric.

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 save the giants. King Alf was married to Bryngerd, a daughter of king Raum of Raum's-ric; she was a large woman, but she was not beautiful, because her father, king Raum, was ugly-looking, and hence ugly-looking and large men are called great "raums". King Haloge and his wife, queen Glod, had two daughters, named Eisa (glowing embers) and Eimyria (embers). These maids were the fairest in the land, on account of their parentage, for their father and mother were both very fair. But as fire and light make dark things bright, so these things took their names from the above-named maids.

Loki was also the begetter of some of the primal monsters:

There was a giantess called Angrboda in Giantland, With her Loki had three children. One was Fenriswolf<sup>69</sup>, the second Iormungand, the third is Hel.

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<sup>67</sup> As god of the hearth-fire he was a useful helper, but when his flames grew he could cause the destruction of an entire homestead. The more wild and violent spirit of Loki might have also been associated with a volcanic eruption or lightning. His attribute of a shape-changer might relate to the quality of flames. The Indian fire god Agni was known as "lord of the house" and had the beneficial aspect of driving away evil spirits.

<sup>68</sup> The other name for his mother, Nal (needle), in relation to fire may refer to the fire stick used to ignite tinder or perhaps the pine needles used as the tinder itself. The Indian god of fire Agni had parents who were the fire sticks: father the upper stick, mother the lower.

<sup>69</sup> The gray wolf Fenrir, also known as Vanargand and Hrodndnr (mighty wolf).

Then All-father sent the gods to get the children and bring them to him. And when they came to him he threw the serpent into that deep sea which lies around all lands, and this serpent grew so that it lies in the midst of the ocean encircling all lands and bites on its own tail. Hel he threw into Niflheim and gave her authority over nine worlds, such that she has to administer board and lodging to those sent to her, and that is those who die of sickness or old age. She has great mansions there and her walls are exceptionally high and the gates great. Her hall is called Eliudnir, her dish Hunger, her knife Famine, the servant Ganglati, serving-maid Ganglot, her threshold where you enter Stumbling-block, her bed Sick-bed, her curtains Gleaming-bale. She is half black and half flesh-colored—thus she is easily recognizable—and rather downcast and fierce-looking.

In addition there is Mist-hel, where men go who die out of Hel.

## GODS AND GODDESSES

Here is what is said in *Gylfaginning* of the other gods (Aesir) and goddesses (Asynior):

Nanna is Baldr's wife and Nep's daughter.

Rind is the mother of Vali.

Saga (sayer) dwells at Sokkvabekk (treasure hill), and that is a big place.

Eir (helper) is an extremely good physician.

Gefion (giver) is a virgin, and is attended by all who die virgins.

Fulla or Fylla (plenteous) too is a virgin and goes around with hair flowing free and has a gold band around her head. She carries Frigg's casket and looks after her footwear and shares her secrets.

Siofn (love) is much concerned to direct people's minds to love, both women and men. It is from her name that affection is called *siafni*

Lofn (easygoing) is so kind and good to pray to that she gets leave from All-father or Frigg for people's union, between women and men, even if before it was forbidden or refused. Hence it is from her name that it is called *lof* (permission), as well as when something is praised (*lofat*) greatly by people.

Var (pledge) 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.

Vor (perceptive) is wise and enquiring, so that nothing can be concealed from her. There is a saying that a woman becomes aware (*vor*) of something when she finds it out.

Syn (refusal) guards the doors of the hall and shuts them against those who are not to enter, and she is appointed as a defense at assemblies against matters that she wishes to refute. Thus there a saying that a denial (*syn*) is made when one says no.

Hlin (protectress) is given the function of protecting people whom Frigg wishes to save from some danger. From this comes the saying that someone who escapes finds refuge (*hleinir*).

Snotra (clever) is wise and courteous. From her name a woman or man who is a wise person is called *snotr*.

Gna (lofty) is sent by Frigg into various worlds to carry out her business. She has a horse that gallops across sky and sea, called Hofvarpnir. It happened once as she was riding that some Vanir saw her travelling through the sky. Then said one:

“What is it flying there? What is it travelling there, passing through the sky?”

She said:

“I am not flying; though I travel and pass through the sky on Hofvarpnir whom Hamskerpir begot on Gardrofa.”

From Gna’s name a thing is said to tower (*gnaefa*) when it goes high up.

The sea, fire and wind are given as Aegir or Saer, Logi or Eldr, and Vindr or Kari. On occasion, giantesses are occasionally named as goddesses and the other way around. Also named in the sagas are the goddesses Ilm, Niorun, Nauma, Frid, and Grund. The other lesser gods are described by Snorri:

Bragi (poetry) is renowned for wisdom and especially for eloquence and command of language. Especially he is knowledgeable about poetry, and because of him poetry is called *brag*, and from his name a person is said to be a *brag* (chief) of men or women who has eloquence beyond others, whether it is a woman or a man. He is referred to as the long-bearded As and it is from his name that the expression ‘beard-bragi’ comes for someone who has a big beard.

Vidar (wide-ruler) is the name of one, the silent As. He has a thick shoe. He is almost equal in strength to Thor. He is a source of great support to the gods in all dangers.

Ali or Vali is the name of one, the son of Odin and Rind. He is bold in battles and a very good shot.<sup>70</sup>

Forseti (foremost-seated one, ruler) is the name of the son of Baldr and Nanna Nep’s daughter. He has a hall in heaven called Glitnir, and whoever comes to him with difficult legal disputes, they all leave with their differences settled. It is the best place of judgment among gods and men.

Adam of Bremen mentions an island called Fosetisland. Alcuin states that the island Fositesland was named after the god worshipped there, implying that Baldr’s and Nanna’s son Forseti was an independent god himself; and perhaps the island was a place where matters of law were settled.

Hermod, the son of Odin who rides to ransom his brother Baldr, is associated with Bragi, as one who greets the returning Einheriar into Valhall, as it says in *Skaldkaparmal*:

‘Hermod and Bragi,’ said Hropta-Tyr (Odin), ‘go to meet the prince, for a king is coming who is to be considered a hero, here to this hall.’

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<sup>70</sup> Guerber associates Vali with Valentine’s Day.

Hermod is a poetic term for warrior and Bragi as a poet, and so are sometimes considered to be deified personages who were later incorporated into the myths as gods.<sup>71</sup>

In *Skaldkaparmal* are given the names of the Aesir:

Odin's sons are Baldr and Meili, Vidar and Nep, Vali, Ali, Thor and Hildolf, Hermod, Sigi, Skiold, Yngvi-Freyr and Itreksiod, Heimdall, Saeming.

Yet shall be listed names of Aesir. There is Ygg and Thor and Yngvi-Freyr, Vidar and Baldr, Vali and Heimdall. Then there is Tyr and Niord, I list Bragi next, Hod, Forseti. Here is Loki last.

Now shall all the Asyniur be named. Frigg and Freyia, Fulla and Snotra, Gerd and Gefiun, Gna, Lofn, Skadi, Iord and Idunn, Ilm, Bil, Niorun.

Hlin and Nanna, Hnoss, Rind and Siofn, Sol and Saga, Sigyn and Vor. Then there is Var, and Syn must be named, but Thrud and Ran reckoned next to them.

Freyia also wept gold for Od. Her names are Horn, Thrungva, Syr, Skialf and Gefn, and likewise Mardoll. Her daughters are Hnoss and Gersemi.

There are yet others, Odin's maids, Hlid and Gondul, Hlokk, Mist, Skogul. Then are listed Hrund and Eir, Hrist, Skuld. They are called norms who shape necessity.

The god Phol (Fol) and the goddesses Volla, Sintgunt and Sunna are only named in a healing charm, although Phol clearly refers to Baldr and Volla to Fulla.<sup>72</sup>

*Phol and Woden rode into the wood,  
the foreleg of Baldr's horse was dislocated.  
then Sintgunt and Sunna, her sister, sang over it;  
then Friia and Volla, her sister, sang over it;  
then Wodan sang over it, for he could do that well:  
be it dislocation of bone,  
be it an ailment of the blood,  
be it dislocation of the limbs:  
bone to bone, blood to blood,  
limb to limb, as if they were glued!*

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<sup>71</sup> There is a King Heremod referred to in *Beowulf* and the Icelandic poet Bragi Boddason (c. 800 AD) was well known. But Heremod is hardly a hero to the *Beowulf* poet and Snorri clearly distinguishes the god Bragi from the poet.

<sup>72</sup> Baldr sends Fulla a finger-ring from Hel.

## RAGNAROK

Ragnarok (doom of the gods) is the end of the world when the Powers are torn asunder. It probably was understood to mean some undetermined time of the end, when all things that were as they were would no longer be. The cock Salgofnir was to announce its arrival by awakening Odin's army of Einheriar. Fenrir's bonds, that were to hold until the end of the world, would break, and Loki's bindings would be broken too.<sup>73</sup> In *Fafnismal* this is recounted, when Surt and the Aesir will do battle on the island of this name:

*'Mismade it's called, and there all the gods  
shall sport with their spears;  
Bilrost will break as they journey away,  
and their horses will flounder in the great river.'*

Muspell means 'fire at the world's end' and was the final conflagration. Fimbul-winter was the world ending with a great winter. As it says in *Gylfaginning*:

*First of all that a winter will come called fimbul-winter (mighty-winter). Then snow will drift from all directions. There will then be great frosts and keen winds. The sun will do no good. There will be three of these winters together and no summer between. But before that there will come three other winters during which there will be great battles throughout the world. Then brothers will kill each other out of greed and no one will show mercy to father or son in killing or breaking the taboos of kinship.*

*Then the wolf will swallow the sun, and people will think this a great disaster. Then the other wolf will catch the moon, and he also will cause much mischief. The stars will disappear from the sky. Then there will take place another event, the whole earth and mountains will shake so much that trees will become up-rooted from the earth and the mountains will fall, and all fetters and bonds will snap and break.*

*Then Fenriswolf will get free. Then the ocean will surge up on to the lands because the Midgard serpent will fly into a giant rage and make its way ashore. Then it will also happen that Naglfar will be loosed from its moorings, the ship of that name. It is made of dead people's nails, and it is worth taking care lest anyone die with untrimmed nails, since such a person contributes much material to the ship Naglfar which gods and men wish would take a long time to finish. And in this flood Naglfar will be carried*

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<sup>73</sup> Loki's release can be equated to the fire that consumes the world.

*along. There is a giant called Hrym (frost) who will captain Naglfar. But Fenriswolf will go with mouth agape and its upper jaw will be against the sky and its lower one against the earth. It would gape wider if there was room. Flames will burn from its eyes and nostrils.*

*The Midgard serpent will spit so much poison that it will bespatter all the sky and sea, and it will be very terrible, and it will be on one side of the wolf. Amid this turmoil the sky will open and from it will ride the sons of Muspell. Surt 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. And when they ride over Bifrost it will break. Muspell's lads will advance to the field called Vigrid. Then there will also arrive there Fenriswolf and the Midgard serpent. By then Loki will also have arrived there and Hrym and with him all the frost-giants, but with Loki will be all Hel's people. But Muspell's sons will have their own battle array; it will be very bright. The field Vigrid is a hundred leagues in each direction.*

*And when these events take place, Heimdall will stand up and blow mightily on Giallarhorn and awaken all the gods and they will hold a parliament together. Then Odin will ride to Mimir's well and consult. Mimir on his own and his people's behalf. Then the ash Yggdrasill will shake and nothing will then be unafraid in heaven or on earth. The Aesir will put on their war gear, and so will all the Einheriar, and advance on to the field. Odin will ride in front with golden helmet and fine coat of mail and his spear called Gungnir. He will make for Fenriswolf, and Thor will advance at his side and be unable to aid him because he will have his hands full fighting the Midgard serpent. Freyr will fight Surt and there will be a harsh conflict before Freyr falls. The cause of his death will be that he will be without the good sword that he gave Skirnir.*

*Then will also have gotten free the dog Garm, which is bound in front of Gniphellir. This is the most evil creature. He will have a battle with Tyr and they will each be the death of the other. Thor will be victorious over the Midgard serpent and will step away from it nine paces. Then he will fall to the ground dead from the poison which the serpent will spit at him. The wolf will swallow Odin. That will be the cause of his death. And immediately after Vidar will come forward and step with one foot on the lower jaw of the wolf. On this foot he will have a shoe for which the material has been being collected throughout all time: it is the waste pieces that people cut from their shoes at the toe and heel. Therefore anyone that is concerned to give assistance to the Aesir must throw their*

*pieces away. With one hand he will grasp the wolf's upper-jaw and tear apart its mouth and this will cause the wolf's death. Loki will have a battle with Heimdall and they will cause each other's death. After that Surt will fling fire over the earth and burn the whole world.*

Thus the end is fulfilled. The fire that retreated first to form the world will again flame up to bring about its end, and all the great adversaries will face each other one final time.

The Doom of the Gods, though, was not seen to be the end of the world, but instead heralded the new vision of a Christian heaven and hell.

*There will then be many mansions that are good, and many that are bad. The best place to be in heaven then will be Gimle (fire-proof), and there will be plenty of good drink for those that take pleasure in it in the hall called Brimir, that is also in heaven. There is also a good hall which is situated on Nidafioll, built of red gold. It is called Sindri. In these halls shall dwell good and virtuous people.*

*On Nastrands is a large and unpleasant hall, and its doors face north. It is also woven out of snakes' bodies like a wattled house, and the snakes' heads all face inside the house and spit poison so that rivers of poison flow along the hall, and wading those rivers are oath-breakers and murderers.*

*The earth will shoot up out of the sea and will then be green and fair. Crops will grow unsown. Vidar and Vali will be alive, the sea and Surt's fire not having harmed them, and they will dwell on Idavoll, where Asgard had been previously. And then Thor's sons Modi and Magni will arrive, bringing Miollnir. After that Baldr and Hod will arrive from Hel. Then they will all sit down together and talk and discuss their mysteries and speak of the things that had happened in former times, of the Midgard serpent and Fenriswolf. Then they will find in the grass the golden playing pieces that had belonged to the Aesir.*

*And in a place called Hoddmimir's holt two people will lie hid during Surt's fire called Lif (life) and Lifthrasir (vitality), and their food will be the dews of morning. And from these people there will be descended such a great progeny that all the world will be inhabited. And the sun will have begotten a daughter no less fair than she is, and she shall follow the paths of her mother.*

Here All-father, who was regarded as the supreme god, was matched to the god of the Christians. As it says in *Gylfaginning*:

He is called All-father in our language, but in Old Asgard he had twelve names. One is All-father, the second Herran or Herian, the third Nikar or Hnikar, the fourth Nikuz or Hnikud, the fifth Fiolnir, the sixth Oski, the seventh Omi, the eighth Biflidi or Biflindi, the ninth Svidar, the tenth Svidrir, the eleventh Vidrir, the twelfth Ialg or Ialk.

He lives throughout all ages and rules all his kingdom and governs all things great and small. He made heaven and earth and the skies and everything in them. But his greatest work is that he made man and gave him a soul that shall live and never perish though the body decay to dust or burn to ashes. And all men who are righteous shall live and dwell with him himself in the place called Gimle or Vingolf, but wicked men go to Hel and on to Niflhel; that is down in the ninth world.

They say there is another heaven south of and above this heaven of ours, and that heaven is called Andlang; and that there is a third heaven still further above that one, and that is called Vidblain, and it is in that heaven that we believe this place to be. But we believe it is only light-elves that inhabit these places for the time being.

These light-elves are viewed as the angels in Heaven. The return of Christ, associating the Doom of the Gods with the Day of Judgement is revealed in *Voluspa*:

*Then the powerful, mighty one, he who rules over everything,  
will come from above, to the judgement-place of the gods.*