

High Gods of the Northland  
**BOOK IV: DISCUSSIONS**

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“These divinities present themselves in a twofold aspect. Either as visible to human eyes, visiting the land at some holy tide, bringing welfare and blessing, accepting gifts and offerings of the people that stream to meet them. Or floating unseen through the air, perceptible in cloudy shapes, in the roar and howl of the winds, carrying on *war*, *hunting* or the game of *ninepins*”

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

This arises by equating those things that resemble or share characteristics in some sense with the thing that one is seeking to understand—the sun shines like gold and travels through the sky on a journey, or that love is caused by the influence of an unseen goddess. Only the conscious mind is recognized as inherent to man, while feelings or powers that overwhelm a person are believed to arise from an outside source: the way one feels a surge of strength during a battle or paralysis of fear would be the intrusion of the god of battle that was helping him or binding him. And humans, being only one of many empowered forces in the world, were vitally or fatally affected by these unseen forces. Cycles of human life are seen to match those cycles of the universe and the agricultural cycles they lived by; the fertility of the earth was associated with human fertility. The gods are also used to explain where things came from and how things would end, and this again arises from an association between observations of birth and death.

This then is embellished and combined with other ideas into a longer tale. For this reason, one can look for the root questions of any myth, which justifies its telling. More literary sophistication can create myths that are merely composed to tell a story, and other myths can have originated from legend, and either of these can be combined with an original etiological myth.

In considering the different religious traditions that combined to form the pagan gods and mythology recorded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, there are two basic rules that have been followed: first, that older gods in a region become the children of newer gods introduced into it; and second, that any tradition would only have one god for each phenomenon (that is, only one sun god or water god), thus once the god or goddess has been identified for one tradition, then another god of that same phenomenon is taken to have come from a different tradition. Another thing that must be kept in mind are those gods that are strongly associated within the myths, to thus suggest which gods emerged from the same tradition. This cannot be wholly relied upon,

given tendencies to transform the myths in later times, but strong associations between gods are significant. Also, that the further something is away from its source, the more divergent it becomes; thus implying that gods or myths evolve as they spread.

Each tradition seems to have started with only a few gods, but allowed for the addition of gods with no need for an exclusive single God. (If it were not for this insistence among the Christians, their gods would just be blended in as any others would—as was first the case among many adherents to the old religion.) As new gods were introduced into a region, they were simply added to the ones that were already revered. In this way, there is an accumulation of deities that permit people to both rely upon the traditional ones or hope for better luck with a new one. Beliefs and practices were adopted in different ways by different people and changed over time, making it very difficult to make any historical statements with exactness and specificity. Sometimes two gods remained distinct and would retain their individual existence, but if they were viewed as identical but with different names, sometimes one name won out over another or the god went by both names alternately.

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

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

The difficulty with the Roman accounts is that they have not given names of the Germanic gods themselves, but only their Roman equivalents. This requires comparing the characteristics of the Roman gods, whose names are provided, with descriptions of Germanic gods not recorded until over a millennium later. So before anything can be gained from the state of affairs of Germanic religion during the Roman Empire, the issue as to which Roman god equated with which German one must be answered first. However, the inferences drawn may not be conclusive. The obvious assignment may not be the correct one, and there might not even be an

obvious one. Further confusing the issue is that the gods given as the German gods by Tacitus in the first century AD: Mercury, Hercules, Mars and also Isis, bears more resemblance to the gods of the Gauls as given by Caesar in the first century BC: Mercury, Apollo, Mars, Jove, Minerva, and Dis Pater, than to the ones he provides as the gods of the Germans: Sol, Luna and Vulcan. In this case one then has to assume a mistake has occurred. However, it is too easy to try to fit the pieces together by assuming a mistake whenever there is a problem fitting them, and this quickly leads one away from the true form of the beliefs, which is the ultimate goal of the effort.

Thus, proceeding must be done upon both the assumption that no mistake has occurred and that a mistake may have occurred. In the first case that Caesar was relying upon accurate information and that between Caesar and Tacitus the Germans adopted to Gaulic gods themselves, or that Caesar's had faulty information, as his primary task and interest was to record martial exploits and not theology and ethnography.

Mercury is described as the greatest of the gods, and the Roman Mercury is an itinerant god of the underworld, and thus he can best be equated with Odin. As Caesar lists the gods in order of importance, Apollo is next, and is most well matched to Baldr, god of light and the sun. Mars is not Odin but Tyr, the god of war. Jove as the god of thunder and the god of supreme strength would be Thor. Minerva then most resembles Frigg, who is the goddess of spinning and weaving, just as the Roman Minerva is the goddess of spinning. However Minerva is also sometimes the goddess of war and in this resembles Frigg's counterpart Freyia, however Caesar only mentions her role as goddess of crafts, not war. Over a century on, Mercury again can be equated with Odin, Hercules with Thor and Mars with Tyr.

Confusions with later accounts arise from the fact that Odin later became the god of war. The wolf was an animal of Mars just as later it was associated with Odin. Odin also later became the god of healing, even though it was Thor was also prayed to during plague.

Dis Pater (Dis) was the Roman equivalent to the Greek Hades (underworld), who was brother of Zeus (thunder) and Poseidon (ocean). Isis was originally the Egyptian mother goddess, but having spread into Europe became a goddess of love and fertility, and the common depiction of her with her infant son Horus was later adopted in portrayals of the Virgin Mary. In Germanic tradition the Virgin Mary is often equated with Frigg, but Tacitus says that the German Isis' symbol is a warship, which could connect her again to Freyia being a goddess of war. However at this time there is no clear way of knowing exactly what characteristics were associated with Frigg, or whether this goddess had fully emerged by this time. Frigg is said to have a dwelling called 'fen hall', which at least

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

If the gods given by Tacitus are Odin, Thor, Tyr and Frigg, this corresponds well to Odin, Baldr, Tyr, Thor and Frigg as given by Caesar, with the notable absence of Baldr. The reason for this seems to be that the god Baldr was a uniquely Gaulic deity.<sup>2</sup> However, neither of these accounts mentions the gods Niord, Freyr, Freyia, Heimdall, and Loki. Tacitus does provide the actual name of the goddess Nerthus, who is in form equivalent to the male deity Niord, god of water. (Although in the absence of the name this connection could never have been made.)

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

The earliest mention of the Germanic gods comes from Caesar, who lists them as Sol (sun), Luna (moon) and Vulcan (fire).<sup>3</sup> The god Heimdall is a god of the Moon and Loki a god of fire and both are associated in the myths as enemies. Thus they could comprise two of the three gods mentioned.

Grimm states that the German gods Eru, Phol, Saxnot, Beowulf, Isis, Zisa and Sindgund were unknown to the North while there is no trace of Heimdall, Loki or Haenir in Germany.<sup>4</sup> This is more evidence that the gods described by Caesar as German were actually from a nearby area, and those given as Gaulic were actually the same Germanic gods mentioned by Tacitus.

Loki is a god of fire or the underworld, equivalent to Vulcan or Dis (Hades). Loki is the son of Farbauti and Logi (fire) is the son of Forniotr, along with Aegir (sea) and Kari (wind), who are considered giants rather than Aesir. Loki's name bears resemblance to Roman Lucifer ('light bringer', the morning star) and Finnish Louhi, the "old hag of the north". The connection to Lucifer appears only in that it contains the root 'luci' meaning light, that is related to 'loki'. Louhi may have originally been a goddess of the underworld, but is in no way connected to fire, however

<sup>1</sup> Other candidates put forward have been the Frisian goddess Nehalennia; the Germanic goddess Nerthus; or Sequana, goddess of the river Seine; all associated with water and thus ships.

<sup>2</sup> Might he have been adopted in by the western German tribes?

<sup>3</sup> According to Grimm the sun and fire are praised as supreme.

<sup>4</sup> Saxnot is sometimes equated with other gods, most notably Tyr.

Louhi takes the shape of an eagle just as Loki flies as a hawk. Grimm mentions that Louhiatar was the mother of nine sons: werewolf, snake, risi, lizard, nightmare, joint-ache, gout, spleen, and gripes; just as Loki is said to be the father to Hel, Iormundgand and Fenris.

The word Hell derives from the Hel of the north, and the Devil of tales and stories seems to gain some of his character from what was remembered of the god Loki. Satan was said to dwell in the north and to be chained in Hell and Saxo's *Utgardaloki* is practically indistinguishable from the Devil as he was commonly portrayed. When a fire broke out it was said "the Devil is loose" just as Loki breaking free was associated with the final conflagration.

Is it justifiable that Heimdall could be a god of water? Heimdall's name Vindhler means 'wind-sea'<sup>5</sup> and his nine mothers seem to be equivalent to the nine daughters of Aegir. The Moon was viewed to have descended under the waves just as the Sun was thought to bathe in the waters. Regarding the rivalry between Loki and Heimdall, fire was seen as 'wind's companion' because blowing on a fire causes it to stir, water was 'fire's enemy' because it puts it out.

There must have been a god of the Sun who corresponded to the god of the Moon Heimdall, regardless of whether they are the gods mentioned by Caesar.<sup>6</sup> The only god who is associated in the myths with both Loki and Heimdall is Thor, who is typically a god of thunder, but at one time must too have been god of the heavens. He confronts Loki in Utgard on two occasions. Also the name Iarnsaxa and the giantesses Greip and Gialp are listed among nine mothers, thought to be the mothers of Heimdall. The first is given as a name for Thor's wife and the giantesses are daughters of the giant Geirrod.

Another possibility is that Loki himself was god of the sun. In *Hattatal* the sun *rödull* is used as a poetic term for fire and fire is known as "sun of the houses". According to Grimm, Loki is also associated with lightning as Thor is with thunder, and lightning to the sun. The German phrase "Loki passes over the fields" meant fire and the Danish phrase for when the sun shines through the clouds was "Loki drinks water". When the air shimmered in the heat or vernal mists arose, the Danes said "Loki is driving out his goats." In *Skaldskaparmal*, Loki is said to have shoes with which he could cross both sky and sea. So there is reason to suppose that at some time fire was linked to the sun and lightning.<sup>7</sup> However, according to Caesar, the Germans viewed the fire and the Sun as distinct, and there is nothing in the myths that implies that Loki was ever a sun god.

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<sup>5</sup> The blue sky might have been thought to be water called the 'wind-sea'.

<sup>6</sup> Odin is not the Sun because both Thor and Heimdall are sons of Odin, and Odin was equated with Mercury by then. Also, in the Odin tradition, the Moon was Mim not Heimdall. In the myths Baldr is not directly associated with Heimdall and Loki.

<sup>7</sup> In mythology fire, lightning and the sun are often related.

The final defensible choice is Freyia, from whom Loki steals the necklace of the Brisings, which Heimdall then retrieves. This shows a closer mythic involvement than with Thor, as Loki was probably an ancient-enough god that he was widespread, and so his appearance cannot be uniquely determinant. In Germanic tradition, contrary to the Roman, the Moon was viewed as male and the Sun as female. In German they were *herr mond* and *frau sonne*. According to Grimm, the goddess *Froijenborg* in a Swedish folk song is called the beautiful sun. He also mentions that the Letts thought of the Sun and Moon as sister and brother.

Given that the gods of the Germans were not abstract, but were the objects they referred to, the name Heimdall itself meant Moon and Loki meant fire, but Thor meant thunder. So the deity should be one whose name meant Sun.

## LADY OF THE ELVES

The most prominent goddesses in Germany were Holda (propitious) and Berchta (bright, glorious). Holda also went by the name Holle, Hulla, Hulle, Huldre, Huldre, Helle<sup>8</sup> and Berchta by Berchte, Perchthe, Perchtha, Berhta, Bertha, Herke, Freke, Precht, Perchtel, Berchtolt, but they were sometimes combined into one goddess Hildaberta or Bildaberta. Likewise, the two share the same characteristics, as Grimm writes:

They drive about in *waggons*, like mother Earth, and promote agriculture and navigation among men; a *plough*, from which there fall chips of gold, is their sacred implement. This too is like the gods, that they appear *suddenly*, and Berhta especially hands her gifts *in at the window*. Both have spinning and weaving at heart, they insist on diligence and keeping of festivals holy, on the transgressor grim penalties are executed. The souls of *infant children* are found in their host, as they likewise rule over *elves* and *dwarfs*, but *night-hags* and *enchantresses* also follow in their train.

Holda was thought to haunt around lakes and fountains, and that she could be glimpsed at the noon hour, radiantly as a fair white lady bathing in the water and then quickly vanishing. Just such a goddess is described in *The Kalevala*:

*'Twas the fair maid of the North  
the land's famous, water's choice  
sat on the sky's collar-bow  
upon heaven's arch  
shimmered in clean clothes  
and in white garments;  
cloth of gold she was weaving  
of silver she was working  
from a gold shuttle*

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<sup>8</sup> Holle may be the origin of our word 'holy'. Compare Helgi meaning 'holy one'.

*with a silver reed.  
The shuttle whizzed in her grasp  
in her hand the spool swiveled  
the heddles of copper creaked  
the silver reed slammed  
as the maid wove cloth  
worked cloth of silver.*

Grimm writes: “The next step is, that Hulda, instead of her divine shape, assumes the appearance of an *ugly old woman*, long-nosed, big-toothed, with bristling and thick-matted hair.” She was also sometimes had a larger right foot that came from her continual spinning.

Every seventh year, *when may-lilies are in bloom*, a *white maiden* appears; her black hair is plaited in long tails, she wears a *golden girdle* round her *white gown*, a *bundle of keys* at her side or in one hand, and a bunch of *may-lilies* in the other.

Of still more weight perhaps are some Norwegian and Danish folk-tales about a wood or mountain wife *Hulla*, *Huldra*, *Huldre*, whom they set forth, not as young and lovely, then again as old and gloomy. In a blue garment and white veil she visits the pasture-grounds of herdsmen, and mingles in the dances of men; but her shape is disfigured by a tail, which she takes great pains to conceal. Some accounts make her beautiful in front and ugly behind. She loves music and song, her lay has a doleful melody and is called *huldreslaat*. In the forests you see *Huldra* as an old woman clothed in gray, marching at the head of her flock, milkpail in hand. She is said to carry off people’s unchristened infants from them. Often she appears, not alone, but as mistress or queen of the mountain-sprites, who are called *huldrefolk*.

In Germany, they were known as *holden*, after Holda, and elves too were thought to congregate near springs and lakes. They were also known to dance and feast under stones raised upon pillars on Christmas night. The Elf Queen appears in the Swedish fairy tale “The Elves’ Dance”:

Exhausted at last by constant walking, he sat down at the foot of an oak to rest himself. Presently strains of lovely music reached his ears, and he saw, quite near, a multitude of little people engaged in a lively ring dance upon the sward. So light were their footsteps that the tops of the grass blades were scarcely moved.

In the middle of the ring stood the Elf Queen herself, taller and more beautiful than the others, with a golden crown upon her head and her clothes sparkling in the moonlight with gold and precious stones.

Huldra is also given as the mother of the goddesses Thorgerd and Irpa and beloved of Odin. The Norse Hulle was goddess of cattle-grazing and milking, where agriculture may have been more scarce.

Berchta, known as the white lady, too had the role of fairy queen, attended by many elves or dwarfs. In the Icelandic fairy tale “Hildur, the

Queen of the Elves”, Hildur travels on a herdsman to Elf-land on the night of Christmas eve.

Then mounting on his back, she made him rise from the ground as if on wings, and rode him through the air, till they arrived at a huge and awful precipice, which yawned, like a great well, down into the earth...So he managed, after a short struggle, to get the bridle off his head, and having done so, leapt into the precipice, down which he had seen Hildur disappear. After sinking for a long, long time, he caught a glimpse of Hildur beneath him, and at last they came to some beautiful green meadows...When they had gone some way along the meadows, a splendid palace rose before them, with the way to which Hildur seemed perfectly well acquainted.

This passage takes one down into the underworld, also arrived at by sinking down through a swamp to “a vast and charming green plain”. Elves were also known to sink into the ground, passing back into the elf-world.

In addition, she led the Wild Hunt at the time of the winter solstice accompanied by her wild hounds.<sup>9</sup> Holda too was associated with the witches’ ride, referred to as ‘Holle-riding’ or ‘riding with Holle’. Bede mentions that Christmas Eve night was referred to as “Mother’s night”, which could be an adaptation of Berchta’s Eve. She was associated with the ‘twelfths’ between Yule and New Year’s and was seen on New Year’s eve (Twelfth-day eve) riding her wagon and destroying unfinished spinning. In this, according to Grimm, and the practice of setting out food and drink for her, Berchta and Holda resemble the Greek Hecate, goddess of the underworld. On the last day of the year a dish of herring and oats was left out for Berchta. She was also associated with the ship and represented one of the deities who had a ceremonial ship carried about in her honor.

When there was fog on the mountain it was said that Dame Holle had lit a fire in the hill, and when it was snowing that she was making her bed and her feathers were falling down.

“Stay with me; if you will do all the work in the house properly, you shall be the better for it. Only you must take care to make my bed well, and to shake it thoroughly till the feathers fly—for then there is snow on the earth. I am Mother Holle.”

Frau Holle was known as the goddess of the skies, like the Greek Hera. In Germany around Lucerne, thunder was said to be Perht reeling her flax, and the Milky Way was known as *Vroneldenstraet* (frauen Hilde street).

So Holda and Berchta were not merely goddesses of the earth and underworld, but of the sky, the wind and weather. This means they too may have been goddesses of the Sun. Berchta means “bright” and this could be a name for the Sun, so Berchta could originally have been a Sun goddess,

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<sup>9</sup> In Tyrol, according to Grimm, a frau Selga rides at the head of the nightly host.

with Heimdall as the Moon.<sup>10</sup> There is verification for this prior relationship in Saxo:

Tradition has it, however, that it was from Dan that our royal pedigree flowed in glorious lines of succession, like channels drawn from a spring. His sons were Humbli and Lothar, their mother Grytha, a lady whom the Teutons accorded the highest honor.

Here the revered goddess Grytha would be Bertha with her sons Humbli and Lothar corresponding to Heimdall and Loki. Humbli is also said to be the father of Dan and Angul, progenitor gods of the Danes and Angles. *Rigthula* names Dan and Danp with Heimdall as the father of mankind. The exact details are not so important as the clear parallels.

The notion of the mother goddess as being both divine maiden and ugly hag came from the dichotomies of the world: youth and age, summer and winter, birth and death, light and darkness, growth and decay. These were two aspects of the same thing. And often the goddess was given as sisters (as with Freyia and Hyndla) or depicted as having one attractive and one repulsive side, as Grimm says: “Poets of the 13<sup>th</sup> century paint the World as a beautifully formed woman in front, whose back is covered with snakes and adders”. Just as the goddess Hel is described as being a woman above but dark beneath, known as both gloomy and fierce. This dichotomy might first have been a representation of the earth, that was beautiful above ground with its plants and verdure, but below the surface was all dark and gloomy.

Both Holda and Berchta were known to travel around on wagons and often carried with them a plow. The earth was called “mother of men”, brought the fruits of agriculture, and was thought also to be take back the dead. In addition Grimm says newborns were said to come from dame Holle’s pond. Unchristened children (*heimchen*) went to Holda, because they were considered to be still under heathen powers, and were seen weeping as they accompanied her on her travels. Those children who fell into a well would find their way to her house through her green meadows. As Grimm writes: “motherly earth hides the dead in her bosom, and the world of souls is an underground world.”

*Yet Ancient Earth, child-bearer of all things  
Was not subdued, surrounded as she was  
By deep and shrinking seas and by her rivers  
That sank to darkest wells down to her womb*

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<sup>10</sup> In Ireland even to this day reeds in the shape of a sunwheel are taken around in honor of Bridget. Bridget or Brid might be the same as the Baltic Saule (Sol), said to sit on top of a tree. She was goddess of flax, the hearth fire, and the house-snake and is represented by the wheel, egg and golden apples.

In this Holda resembles Hel, who received the dead into the underworld. According to Grimm, in Danish belief Hel travelled on her wagon pulled by a white three-legged horse, a portent of plague and pestilence or out to collect the dead with large rake or broom. In the Middle Ages she was thought to have large gaping jaws with which to consume. Hel's name not only resembles that of Holle, but *holle* was another name for Hel. Grimm writes:

Orion's relation to Artemis is not like that of Wuotan to Holda, for these two are never seen together in the host; but Holda by herself bears a strong resemblance to *Artemis* or *Diana*, still more to the nightly huntress *Hecate*, at whose approach *dogs whimper* (as with frau Gaude), who, like Hel, is scented by dogs, and for whom a paltry pittance was placed (as for Berhta and the wild woman).

Then there is the figure Baba Yaga<sup>11</sup> (granny Yaga) from Russian folk tales, as it says in *Roles of the Northern Goddess*:

She is depicted as a powerful old woman who devours living victims, including children, and her description recalls some of the earliest goddess figures, since she has huge breasts, posterior and thighs; she is also said to have a leg of bone, a long pointed nose and teeth of iron. She lies in a hut without doors or windows, which blocks the road by which the hero has to pass; it is supported on hen's or animal legs, and can be entered only by reciting a special formula to make it revolve. Inside the Baba Yaga squats or lies beside a fire, spinning or weaving. The hut, which sometimes seems to fit her tightly and may be fenced with human bones, has been compared to a coffin.

The Baba Yaga also flies through the air in a mortar driven by a pestle, and this, together with her poker and broom point to a being connected with the hearth. However she is also represented as the mistress of the forest, and can call on animals to help the hero if he wins her favor.

Goddesses of spinning and weaving appear often throughout Germanic myth and legend, and often appear in groups of three. This seems to associate them with the Norns, but also the Valkyries, who were also sometimes seen as weavers and appeared in groups of three, seven or nine. The Valkyries would weave together and then would each tear off a piece for themselves and ride away.<sup>12</sup> It was said that upon this cloth were the fates of the men to be slain in battle. In *Njal's Saga* it states:

On the morning of Good Friday, in Caithness, this happened: a man named Dorrud walked outside and saw twelve people riding together to a woman's room, and then they disappeared inside. He went up to the room and looked in through a window that was there and saw that there were women inside and that they had set up a loom. Men's heads were used for weights, men's

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<sup>11</sup> Possible linguistic derivation: Yaga < Vag > Frigg. Might also be related to the Norse goddess Saga.

<sup>12</sup> This could be a representation of the Northern Lights.

intestines for the weft and warp, a sword for the sword beater, and an arrow for the pin beater.

This indicates that the Valkyries and the Norns might first have been equated with three goddesses of fate, that may have corresponded to birth, life and death. They may first have viewed these as aspects of the same goddess, but then later they became split into different aspects. The notion of the Valkyries taking heroes up to Valhall is not much different from the notion of the Wild Hunt, where spirits would ride to the underworld with the goddess of death.

As the goddesses were also the “lady of the elves” or “queen of the fairies”, this role again seems to represent a guardian of departed souls. According to Grimm, just as men only came up as high as a giant’s knee, dwarfs only came up as high as a man’s knee, but some were the only the size of a thumb. Indian stories speak of the soul as leaving the body as a man as big as a thumb. The Indian Yama is said to draw the soul out of the dying man in the shape of a tiny mannikin, at which time the man turns pale and sinks into the ground; but when the mannikin returns to him he rises back, thinking he had but been asleep for that time. Or it is said that the soul slips out of the mouth as a little child. The Roman *lares* were thought to be departed ancestors and in Germany souls were thought to become *kobolds* (homesprites). According to Grimm, the names of the dwarfs Dainn and Nainn mean death, implying they are embodied souls.<sup>13</sup> A burial mound at Geirstad was known as Geirstadar-álf. Both dwarfs and giants are mentioned to serve the wild women, who conduct people to their dwelling along a narrow path, which recalls the narrow bridge to the underworld, as wide only as a thread.

As people sacrificed to forest-women, so they did to subterraneans. On feast-days the Ossetes place a portion of the viands in a separate room for the homesprite to eat; they are miserable if he does not, and are delighted to find a part of them gone.

Gruel and fish are offered to Percht on her day; meat and drink to Souls; the milk of a cow set on the Brownies’ stone every Sunday.

The primary goddesses of the north are Frigg and Freyia, both of whom seem to have arisen from the goddess Berchta.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps they derive from Freke and are equivalent to Frick, who was also a goddess of wind. They are also related to the German Frea, who is also known as Priye and Prithvi.

Frigg and Freyia themselves seem to have a recent common origin implying that they were the same goddess at some point in early Germanic

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<sup>13</sup> The name of the Swedish *tomten* might be compared to the German word *toten* (dead).

<sup>14</sup> One name for Freyia is Moerthöll (Mardöll), that may mean ‘shining over the sea’. Guerber says that Frigg represented the atmosphere, weaving the clouds from thread made on her bejewelled spinning wheel.

history. However, Frigg arose among the Aesir gods and Freyia among the Vanir. The name of each means ‘woman’, which makes them both claimants to the distinction of supreme female deity. Each is associated with their abilities as a seeress, and each possesses a magic falcon garment that allows them to transform themselves into the form of a bird for their flight into the spirit world. In both incarnations, this deity was called upon for protection at times of marriage and, according to the poem *Oddrúnargrátr*, with childbirth.

Freyia’s travelling over the earth and weeping was meant to explain the morning dew, which in Frigg’s case was applied to the entire earth upon the death of her son Baldr. Originally, however, Frigg was likely to weep due to Odin’s absence (before the story of Baldr and Hod was incorporated in the mythical story). In this myth the goddess of the underworld is Hel, just as in *Hunduljod* Hyndla is the underworld sister of Freyja, implying that they represent equivalents to the two aspects of the goddess, the bright and the gloomy.<sup>15</sup> The earth itself was Fiorgyn, equivalent to Iord, while the archaic Frigg, like Berchta, must have been the Sun.

Because Frigg’s spinning was done on Thursday, women were not permitted to spin at that time. In Latvia it was for the goddess Laima that spinning, weaving, agriculture and childbirth were forbidden on Thursday evenings. The reason for it being Thursday rather than Friday is because the night proceeded the day, so that Friday night came before Friday day, and it was Friday that was sacred to the goddess Frigg.

Frigg’s dwelling was called *Fensalir* (fen-hall). This resembles the bog in *Beowulf* where Grendel’s mother resides. Although his mother is unnamed, Grendel might be equivalent to Orendel (Erentel)<sup>16</sup>, who is the Morning Star.<sup>17</sup> This would suggest that the Morning Star was taken to be the son or husband of the Sun, where Berchta was the Sun. This might be confirmed by the name Gerutha given by Saxo for the wife of Orvendil. Just as Grytha is Brytha or Bertha, so Gerutha would be Berutha or Bertha.<sup>18</sup> This also matches the wife of Erentel, whose name was Breide. Thus Grendel’s mother was the goddess of death who lived beneath the fens. The light that sometimes appears over marshes at night (*ignis fatuus*) could have been seen as reflecting from the Sun’s subterranean dwelling. This is certainly referred to when the *Beowulf* poet says: “At night there, something uncanny happens: the water burns.”

*Within the weed-grown swamps left by the flood  
The animal kingdoms of the earth appeared.*

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<sup>15</sup> Two hills near Leira in Sjaellend are named Hyldehög and Frijszhög.

<sup>16</sup> Orendel was the first hero. Grimm summarizes his exploits: “He suffers shipwreck on a voyage, takes shelter with a master fisherman, *Eisen*, earns the seamless coat of his master, and afterwards wins frau *Breide*, the fairest of women: king *Eigel* of Trier was his father’s name.”

<sup>17</sup> Grendel’s arm suspended from the rafters in Heorot appears to reflect the shape of the Morning Star, and its place in the sky.

<sup>18</sup> The German Bertha seems to have gone into the north as Gertha, so that the giantesses Gerd (Gerth) and Grid (Gryth) might also originally have been Berth and Brid.

Clearly it was not merely the infiltration of male sky gods that displaced the female gods. This would not explain the god and goddess pairings that recur. Could it be that the singular earth goddess acquired a male companion who is almost always both brother and consort? Thus Berchta and Bercht (Berchtolt), Frigg and Friggo, Freyia and Freyr, Niorun and Niord, Juno and Jove. This implies that at some point the mother goddess became an earth goddess, and the sky became the domain of a male sun god.<sup>19</sup>

This did not apply to Thor, Tyr, Ullr, and Zeus, where the Sun was the son of earth: Iord, Gefion (?), Sif and Rhea. (Odin is distinct from these for having arisen from a distinctly male lineage.)

Niord is often taken to be a male version of the Danish earth deity Nerthus, who is considered female, but his name suggests he might also have been one-time consort of the female earth deity Iord or the enigmatic Niorun. Apart from being named as a goddess, Niorun is only referred to one other time. In this other case she is used in a name for night “dream-Niorun”. Taking Niorun as a substitute for ‘goddess’, this would produce ‘dream-goddess’. Although this would fit the giantess Nott well, it is a strict definition of night and quite out of keeping with the rest of the myth. It is more likely that Niorun is identical to Iord (land) and ‘dream-land’ is meant.

Freyia’s chief symbol is her necklace *Brisingamen* (bright necklace) or ‘necklace of the Brisings’.<sup>20</sup> A similar necklace is the property of Gefion. Amber pendants existed in the north from prehistoric times and might even have descended into the ‘stone chain’ said in *Skaldskaparmal* to have been a necklace worn by women in antiquity. Thus it was viewed as a feminine symbol.

*Amused they were by their prisoners’ strange clothes and outlandish necklaces, and happy, bantering over the water from one boat to the next how their wives would all be pleased to welcome their husbands home and be freed from their boring chores by these women, the prizes of war.*

The necklace might then have been viewed as a symbol that gained the favor of a woman, just as a man worked to gain the favor of the earth in agriculture. Therefore the necklace was a symbol of fertility.

Out of mythology comes the references from the *Iliad*, where the necklace or girdle of Aphrodite could drive men to passion. Aphrodite passed her girdle on to Hera for her use:

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<sup>19</sup> Grimm lists pairs of deities, either brother and sister or mother and father: Niordr and Nerthus, Freyr and Freyja, Berhtolt and Berhta, Fairguneis and Fiorgyn, Geban and Gefjon, Hruodo and Hreda.

<sup>20</sup> Bonfires in Norway are called *brisingr*.

*With that she loosed from her breasts the breastband,  
pierced and alluring, with every kind of enchantment  
woven through it... There is the heat of Love,  
the pulsing rush of Longing, the lover's whisper,  
irresistible—magic to make the sanest man go mad.  
And thrusting it into Hera's outstretched hands  
she breathed her name in a throbbing, rising voice:  
"Here now, take this band, put it between your breasts—  
ravishing openwork, and the world lies in its weaving!  
You won't return, I know, your mission unfulfilled,  
whatever your eager heart desires to do."*

And this too is recorded in Flaccus's *Argonautica*:

*Venus is not at all fooled, but she, too, has tried to destroy  
the Colcian land and Apollo's detestable race and can see  
exactly what Juno is trying to do. At once, she agrees  
and gives the other without any further pleading that awesome  
aphrodisiac charm, the girdle that radiates lust  
at a fever-heat to incinerate all caution and faith and shred  
of honor in males, and prompts, at whatever peril, to sin.*

*This is the way it was with Medea in those first moments  
that led her on to her fits of madness. She fingers the necklace  
that flashes around her helpless neck, and its lustrous gold  
seems to melt the strength of her limbs. She gives it back  
to the goddess, not displeased by the gemstones or crafted metal  
but afraid of the feelings of passionate wildness that rouse in her shreds  
of maidenly shame while they rouge her cheeks with delicate blushes.*

The piece of turf raised underwhich people would take oaths was called *iardarmen* (Erda's necklace), equating vegetation to women's finery. Sometimes the goddess is referred to by her ornamentation, such as *Menglod* (necklace-glad). There is also the Himalayan goddess of nature *Mushiringmen* (whose animal was an ibex with a single golden horn). Her name might be related to *Brisingamen*.<sup>21</sup>

There is one reference in *Beowulf* that speaks of Hama taking the necklace *Brosinga mene*:

*There was no hoard like it since Hama snatched  
the Brosings' neck-chain and bore it away  
with its gems and settings to his shining fort,  
away from Eormenric's wiles and hatred,  
and thereby ensured his eternal reward.*

If Hama is a form of the name *Heimdall* then the necklace would appear to be the rainbow. This is by no means suggested and does not match any

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<sup>21</sup> Possible linguistic derivation: *Mu-shiring-men* < *Bru-siring-men* > *Bri-singa-men*

details found in the story of the theft of Freyia's necklace, but in Lithuania the rainbow was known as Lauma's or Laima's girdle.

It is possible that the original myth of the theft was the battle between water (rain) and fire (lightning) during a thunderstorm. Afterwards, when the Sun shone, the necklace returned to her as the rainbow.<sup>22</sup>

## LORD OF THE HEAVENS

*The great round shield of Phoebus blazes red  
From under Earth and glows in scarlet fires  
When it declines beneath the Earth again,  
Yet when his shield has climbed the highest Heaven  
It is all whiteness, for the air around it  
Is farthest from the taint of blood-red Earth.*

In its descriptions, the Sun is variously seen as a wheel, a circular shield or an eye.<sup>23</sup> As it says in *Grimnismal*:

*'Svalin is the name of a shield which stands before the sun,  
before the shining god;  
mountains and sea I know would burn up  
if it fell away from in front.'*

It was either seen to set into a forest or down into the sea.

*Courage, my friends! You see the clear sky overhead,  
and Cynthia's moon with its delicate horns has appeared—no tinge  
of menacing red to imply foul weather. The sun went down  
cleanly into the water, and that, too, was auspicious.*

This was apparently the origin of the bathing of the goddess at annual feasts. At some point, however, the sun became associated with a male god.

The gods Baldr and Hod are sons of Odin and Herebeald and Haethcyn in *Beowulf* are brothers. Their story is present in three complete forms: that of the Eddas, that of *Beowulf*, and that of Saxo. Each is quite different but shares the same basic features. In only the Eddas is Loki made responsible for the deed, but even so it is still Hod who is put to death. This implies that Loki played no role in the earlier version of the story. Then there is Nanna, alternately Baldr's wife in the Eddas, or as Hod's wife, who provokes the contest between them, in Saxo.

Snorri mentions the sword Mistletoe and Misteltein (mistletoe sword) comes from *Hromundar-saga Greipssonar*. Hromund took the sword out of a hill from a berserker's ghost. In the story Hromund (Hod) loved Svanhit,

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<sup>22</sup> Guerber interprets this myths as the fire Loki robbing the earth Freyia of her necklace (verdure), only to be restored by the rain Heimdall.

<sup>23</sup> A poetic term for sun or moon is 'shield', and vice versa.

but the magicians Bildr (Baldr) and Voli (Vali) opposed his marriage to her. In the contest Bildr is killed, and Voli, after knocking Misteltein out of Hromund's hand and delivering a wound, is himself killed.

These gods might be attested by Tacitus, who says that Castor and Pollux were worshipped as the Alcis, which could mean elk (*alsces*). Another definition for *alcis* is 'gods', which could merely attest that the gods and elks were deeply wound together. The only other immediate reference comes from Saxo, who says that Hother rode a chariot pulled by reindeer.

The gods' names are common throughout Europe and western Asia and down in the Middle East. There are the Irish Beal or Beil, the Gaelic Beal, and the Welsh Beli<sup>24</sup>; the Celtic sun, healing, and horse god Belinus or Belenus (bright) or Apollo Belenus and fertility god Cernunnos; the Celtic war god Belatucadrus (fair-shining one); the German pastoral god Beel<sup>25</sup>; the Austrian pastoral god Belenos; the Russian god of light Bielbog (Byelobog)<sup>26</sup> and of darkness Tschernobog (Chernobog); the Frank war god Hadu; the Etruscan conveyer of the dead Charun; the Greek Apollo or Phoebus (bright) and ferryman Charon; the Greek Pollux and Castor; Ba'al or Bel or Belus, the Syrian sun and sky god, and Sin the moon god; the Saxon god Baeldaeg<sup>27</sup> or Beldegg (bright day) and Siggi (victor); and Beal and Sighe. They are also equivalent to the Canaan brother gods Abel and Cain.

The god Cernunnos (horned one) was a Celtic god of fertility, abundance, regeneration and wild animals. He was depicted as having ears of a stag and wearing antlers. He was associated with the shedding of antlers and thus growth and regeneration.<sup>28</sup> They at least would have been representative of seasonal changes and thus rebirth. The crescent Moon is also likened to horns and antlers.<sup>29</sup> (Ground-up antler has also been used as a traditional medicine to treat impotence and infertility.)

Cain himself is said to be a man of agriculture:

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you

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<sup>24</sup> The Welsh kings claimed their descent from Beli and Anna, the same as Baldr and Nanna.

<sup>25</sup> Depicted in a church at Belsen with an ox or sheep head.

<sup>26</sup> Possibly the same as Beelzebub.

<sup>27</sup> In Old English the word *bealdor* is a name for 'lord' and might have arisen from the name of this god into an honorific title. It also recalls the Syrian Bel, also meaning 'lord'.

<sup>28</sup> This could also be associated to an antler adze used for breaking the ground before iron plows were used, or that when the elks hit their antlers together it sounded like thunder.

<sup>29</sup> Cernunnos might be associated with the Moon. Sin is also a god of the Moon and skin disease. Cain was said to have a mark upon him and is sometimes depicted with horns.

do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

Cain said to Abel his brother, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?”

He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”

And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me.”

Then the Lord said to him, “Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.”

And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.<sup>30</sup>

In its original form, the story may have been a myth about the creation of the world. Cain made the earth out of his brother’s body, the blood of Abel having caused the red earth. This is similar to the story of Belus, who divided the heaven from the earth and then had himself beheaded, and the blood mixed with the earth produced mankind.

The association of Baldr with reindeer, and possibly elks, links the antler as symbolic of the seasonal cycle with the god of the summer. The relation of Baldr to mistletoe also reinforces this relationship. So the general conception of light is more accurate than either sun or summer. However as gods of light and darkness, Baldr and Hod would also be associated with both the sun cycle and the annual solar cycle.

The gods themselves were probably originally related to agriculture and so spread out of Syria as the knowledge of agriculture spread out from the Middle East.<sup>31</sup> In Fridthiof’s saga Baldr is referred to as a bond farmer, just as Apollo was known as a herdsman of cattle.

It was said that the summer clothed the earth, but that the winter stripped her bare.<sup>32</sup> Frost and snow were seen as giants of winter who were fought back by the summer. This can be compared to the fight between Apollo and the dragon. Although Venus reconciles the brothers, in the end winter is

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<sup>30</sup> The Cain and Abel story is quite distinct from that of Adam and Eve and Noah. Both stories explain the labor required for agriculture: God says to Adam “cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.” Just as God says to Cain “And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength”. Thereafter it says “Noah was the first tiller of the soil.”

<sup>31</sup> Adoption of agriculture in northern Europe occurred around 4200 BC.

<sup>32</sup> In *Skaldskaparmal*, a giant is “Frid’s first defiler”.

slain by summer.<sup>33</sup> Belenus may be connected to Celtic solar festival Beltene or Beltane (bealtain); *bealtine* or *beiltine* means beal fire.<sup>34</sup>

Atargatis is a Syrian earth goddess and consort of Ba'al Shamin ('lord of heaven'), the Syrian thunder god and patron of farmers and shepherds. Her throne was flanked by lions, while his was flanked by bulls. The Syrian sky god Ba'al or Bel ('lord') is associated with Astarte. Like Hod defeating Baldr, the Syrian Vahagn defeated Ba'al and the Babylonian Hayk shot Bel with an arrow.

Nanna is related to the Syrian goddess Inanna, Innini, Nannar, or Nana (also known as Ishtar). In the north she is the daughter of Nep. Nep is related to Nek or Neck (nix, nyk) a sea sprite or sea god, as with Neptune. Inanna's sister Erishkigal ruled over the underworld. As with the dual goddess already mentioned, she might represent Inanna's shadow side.

Inanna's descent into the underworld has many comparable points to the death of Baldr. Inanna is the Morning Star and her brother Utu is the Sun, children of the Moon god and goddess. In the series of tablets that record her myths Utu tells his sister Inanna, the Queen of Heaven, that she will marry the shepherd Dumuzi. Inanna rather wishes to wed the farmer, but does ultimately accept Dumuzi as her husband. Inanna descends into the underworld for the funeral of Guglananna, husband of her older sister Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld. There Ereshkigal turns her into a corpse but she is retrieved and revived by Enki's servants. In order that she may return to the world of the living the demons of the underworld claim her husband Dumuzi in her place. Dumuzi dreams a terrible vision of his fate. When the demons come for him his sister Geshtinanna protects him, but his friend betrays his location to them. Dumuzi is slain and his wife Inanna and mother Sirtur mourn him. Geshtinanna and Inanna are informed where Dumuzi is and they find him sitting and weeping. Inanna proclaims Geshtinanna will spend half the year in the underworld in Dumuzi's place.

The myth reveals the seasonal cycle when Dumuzi is permitted to be united with his wife for only half the year, at which time there is fertility in the land. Dumuzi here is the Baldr character: dreaming of his own death, being betrayed by his friend, and finally returning to the world. That Inanna

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<sup>33</sup> Would there be any connection between the killing of Baldr by Hod with a mistletoe dart and the killing of Beli by Freyr with a stag's antler? The antler is associated with Cernunnos who is equivalent to Hod. However, the only way this seems possible is if a substitution was made and Freyr took the place of Hod. Regarding the Gods Beal and Sighe, it is Sighe who is associated with the elves, just as it is said that Freyr received Alfheim as a tooth-payment. (Veggdegg, Beldegg and Siggi are Odin's three sons in the prologue to Snorri's *Edda*.) There is at least some equivalence between the trio Baldr, Hod, Nanna and Beli, Freyr, Gerd. Idunna also holds a place, who like Gerd is to have embraced her brother's killer.

<sup>34</sup> Grimm writes: "Leo has ingeniously put forward an antithesis between a god of war *Beal* or *Bael*, and a god of peace *Sighe* or *Sithich*; nay, by this distinction he explains the brothers Bellovesus and Sigovesus in Livy as servants of Beal and Sighe, connecting Sighe with that silent peaceful folk the elves, who are called sighe: to Beal were offered the May fires, *bealtine*, to Sighe the November fires, *samtheine* (peace-fire)."

must choose between a shepherd and a farmer parallels the story of Cain and Abel, when it is God who is choosing.<sup>35</sup>

Atargatis, Astraea, Astar, Astarte and Ishtar (also Ostara and Eastre), whose name means 'the veiled bride', are the same goddess of the Morning Star and are also equivalent to Nanna. So then the consort of the goddesses, Ba'al Shamin and Bel would also be equivalent to Baldr through this relation. The lack of any other equivalences between Syrian and Scandinavian mythologies would indicate that these gods would have to be ancient ones and found their way to the north at an early time, remaining there without as much change or influence as they would have received further south.

Even in Neolithic times, the axe was a religious symbol and was also emblematic of the power of the sky god, the thunderbolt. Miniature axes were made either as amulets or offerings, even found buried under drawings of five lightning bolts were five hand axes.

Thor was thought to be fighting the trolls when there was lightning. In Estonia the rainbow was known as the thundergod's sickle. The Finnish god of war Turisas had a drum, and "when a war was imminent, his drum beaten high up in the clouds."

There is reason to believe that the world that men inhabited was thought of as Thor's realm:

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.

The world is described as Thor's boundless new cabin and fields in *Kalevala*:

*'Bee, my little bird  
fly that other way  
right over nine seas  
to an island on the main  
a honeyed mainland  
to Thor's new cabin  
the Worshipful's boundless one!  
There is pleasant honey there  
and good ointment there  
which will suit sinews  
and be good for limbs  
so bring some of those ointments  
bear some of those remedies  
for me to put on the hurt  
to pour on the injuries!'*

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<sup>35</sup> In Sumer a king would take the place of Dumuzi, offering gifts to the goddess. If he were accepted the ritual marriage would take place.

*The spark of fire flared  
the red ball fell from the halls  
the Creator created  
And the sky's Old Man beat out–  
fell through level heaven  
cleaving that clear sky  
Piercing the mucky smoke-hole  
past the dry roof beam  
to Thor's new cabin  
The Worshipful's boundless one.  
Then, when it got there  
to Thor's new cabin  
it set about evil work  
it started on dirty work*

*Steady old Väinämöinen  
has hastened to ask:  
'Where did the fires go from there  
where did the sparks dash  
after Thor's field edge–  
to the forest or to sea?*

This could indicate that the world was believed to be a cabin and beyond this was Thor's field. This is a scarce idea and the reference is enigmatic. In *Alvissmal* the elves are known to call the sky "splendid roof". However, because the dwarf's word for sky "dripping hall" is clearly a cave ceiling, the elves' roof may not apply to the sky vault, but possibly to the height of a mountain top.

Why the world is "Thor's new cabin" could arise because after a cabin was first built a certain amount of sap would seep out of the logs, and the fire would thus cause the wood to twinkle like stars. After a time soot and dirt would mask this effect.

Odin may have first been a god of the sun and underworld. Like Hel, Grimm writes, "Wode also and the wild hunter ride on a *three-legged horse*; Wode catches the subterraneans, ties them together by their hairs, and lets them hang on each side of his horse." Sometimes the Devil is described as a hunter in green or goes by the name Greencoat, just as Odin was to have worn a green hat.<sup>36</sup> In Ostgotland the name Oden was used to mean Devil.<sup>37</sup> Huntsmen in Germany dressed in green, so Odin's green hat is a hunting hat: green to blend into the greenery and wide-brimmed to disguise the face from prey.

Some of the gods of the underworld have often also been gods of war. The Valkyries seem little different from the wild women, and were thought to capture the spirits of men and carry them below. Among the Ossetes

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<sup>36</sup> In Swedish legend it is a pointed hat.

<sup>37</sup> In German fairy tale arises the expressions "ran as if the Wild Huntsman were behind them" which can be compared to "as though the Evil One were at his heels".

they have a hunting god named Aefsati, who according to Davidson is “old and bearded and sometimes blind or one-eyed, with beautiful daughters who were sometimes allowed to marry poor huntsmen.” Later, Odin’s realm passed into the heavens and there was imagined Valhall, where they were served by Odin’s maidens, the Valkyries, and beyond which the fallen heroes would fight daily.<sup>38</sup>

On the arrival of the male god of sun and underworld, who were also gods of the horse and of war, the earth was no longer a goddess but the body of a dismembered giant. Rather than rocks being ‘Hlodyn’s bones’ they became ‘Ymir’s bones’.

This final tradition replaced the previous notions with new explanations for the Sun and the Moon, suggesting that they no longer remembered that Odin had been the god of the sun and moon and he became a god that existed beyond the realm of sight, in the spirit world only. Frigg no longer wept at her son’s passing, but caused all thing upon the earth to weep for him. And except for their retention in the characteristics of the gods and myths about the gods, the earlier beliefs were entirely forgotten.

## COMPARISONS

There are several northern traditions that match with that of those to the south. The Romans too had sacred groves and statues of gods for the sacrifices and seeresses of every kind. They have the divine brother/sister pair of Jupiter and Juno. Jupiter, like Odin, was known as the “father of all gods” or “father of all” and looked down upon all of earth from his high seat, and was called “Grandfather Jove” as was Thor. Juno was called “great mother of all the gods” and “great mother of all life” and she rode her leonine chariot through the air. Her trees were the pines and oaks that grew on the mountain of Ida (a name similar to Idavoll). The mother goddess Cybele too was to have had a chariot yoked with lions just as Freyia’s was yoked with cats, and both goddesses were called upon as patroness in combat. Mercury and Odin both wore broad-brimmed hats and carried a staff: Odin a golden spear, Mercury a silver wand. Apollo (Phoebus) resembles closely Baldr (Phol) as god of the sun. The Harpies are described as having young girl’s faces, but are of foul form below just as Hela is described by Snorri. The Hesperides are maidens in the west who guard the tree of golden apples with its protective dragon, recalling the World Tree and Nidhogg, the *Parcae* are the three Fates, and the Furies at Hell’s gate too are like some gruesome Valkyries. The Styx fountainhead has its river Hvergelmir. Even the significance of the number nine and swearing upon one’s spear as an oath.

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<sup>38</sup> According to Grimm the Lettons used to say when the northern lights shone, “the souls of the fallen warriors are fighting”.

Hercules and Hylas appear to be equivalent to Thor and Thialfi.<sup>39</sup> After he had finished his labors on earth, Hercules arrived at heaven's hall where he was offered a cup of mead by Hebe, his wife and Juno's daughter, just as heroes are greeted in Valhall. Hercules like Thor was also guardian of both gods and man. The *aegis* that was associated with the Greek Zeus and Athena and the Roman Jupiter and Minerva, was used to create thunderstorms (in addition to helping friends and disrupting enemies as the gods saw fit). Goats were also sacrificed to Juno <Thuno> "queen of the sky" as they were to Thor. Likewise, the oak is Jove-Dodona's tree as it is Thor's. To Minerva was sacrificed a cow, to Mercury a steer and to Jove a bull.

Storms were thought to emerge from the Earth's deepest caves, and the stones were referred to as the bones of the Earth. Davidson writes of Hekate, queen of the underworld:

"She was held to roam the earth on moonlit nights accompanied by barking dogs and restless spirits who could not lie quiet in their graves; her influence may be seen in the widespread tradition of the Wild Hunt in north-western Europe, which might sometimes be led by a female huntress."

Just like a goddess of the underworld she was sister to the goddess Latona or Leto, mother of Apollo. Saturn seems also once to have been a god of the underworld and equivalent to Loki. Saturn too may have been associated with fire, as it says in Ovid "So Saturn shines with less light than Jove" (so fire shines with less light than lightning?). Both Saturn and the Indian fire-god Agni are said to be the son of Earth and Sky. They also figured that the world would end in fire.

*He then remembered that the Fates had scored  
A certain distant hour when sea and land,  
Earth and the vault of heaven would be consumed  
In universal fire.*

How much of the classic traditions found their way into the northern tradition through its literature and not through its common beliefs is difficult to measure, although it does not seem to have been infused by those who wrote the Eddas, except where it is immaterial and obvious. Also there were many opportunities for beliefs to be carried from one peoples to another, from the time of the Roman legions right through to the Viking voyages. However, the actual instances of direct borrowing seems to have been at most minimal and unintentional among those who composed the final poems.

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<sup>39</sup> Possible linguistic derivation: Hercules and Hylas < Ther and Thyl > Thor and Thialfi. The hero's name given by Saxo is Thorkil that is of the same form as Hercules: Thorkil < Thurkul > Hercules. (However, Saxo might have chosen the name just to make such a connection.)

Some of the mythology of the north is associated not only with Cain and Abel, but perhaps with Noah and even Adam and Eve. The myth about Noah originated in Anatolia, given that the ark rested upon Mount Ararat. The name of Noah could be related to the word Noatun (ship-town), the dwelling of Niord. The story of Adam and Eve (Ask and Embla) both relates the isolation of man from the fruit of the Tree of Life (World Tree), includes the serpent from the underworld (Nidhogg) as well as mention of the pain at childbirth, explained in the north as being cured only by the fruit from the World Tree. The Syrian storm god Adad is the son of the sky god Anu. Of his temple it is said:

*In the shade of that throne-dias a poplar sprouted **and grew**.  
On its crown an eagle crouched, and a serpent lay at its base.*

The dying and resurrected god represented in the north by Odin, hanging on the World Tree to attain the runes, may also have been part of a larger European tradition that was even borrowed into the Roman Christ myth.

A goddess with at least a similar name to Idunn is Arduinna, the Celtic goddess of the Ardennes forest. She appeared, however, more like Freyia, riding a boar and holding a dagger in her right hand. Idunn herself seems to arise from the same source as Nanna; that is, the Syrian goddess Inanna (Ishtar). Ishtar is called “Mistress of the Gods” and “Mistress of birth” and is goddess of love and war. She is the sister of Ereshkigal and the daughter of the sky god An (Anu) and Antu or of the god Sin.

Baldr and Nanna might have been brought west by the Celts into Europe from the east, where they had spread from Syria. Condensing it into a simple naturalistic explanation: the two brothers Summer/Sun (Baldr) and Winter/Moon (Hod) fought over the Earth (Nanna) and Winter was always vanquished upon Summer’s return, when the sun rose back in the sky. This seems primarily to be an agricultural myth that arose during the Neolithic in Syria. Other Syrian gods Eilli and Ea are the same as Vili and Ve, with Odin merely substituted for Anu. Like Odin, Anu is known as the father of mankind. Even the order of the gods is preserved: Odin, Vili and Ve compared to Anu, Eilli and Ea.

*Anu went up to the sky,  
And Ellil took the earth for his people.  
The bolt which bars the sea  
Was assigned to far-sighted Enki (Ea).*

The trio Odin, Loki (Lodur), and Haenir or Odin, Vili, and Ve are the gods responsible for the creation of mankind. They are equivalent to the gods of sky (air), underworld (fire), and sea (water) that appear in Greek myth as Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon; Indian myth as Indra, Agni and

Varuna<sup>40</sup>; Syrian myth as Anu, Eilli and Ea; in addition to Forniot's sons Kari (Vindr), Logi (Eldr), and Aegir. The gods are not merely equivalent but even derived from each other: Odin, Loki and Haenir are alternate manifestations of Vindr, Logi and Aegir.

Snorri includes the additional information that Vili and Ve were Odin's brothers. In *Lokasenna*, Odin and Loki are said to be blood-brothers and one of the names of Odin is Helblindi, which is also the name of one of Loki's brothers.<sup>41</sup> Loki is referred to as 'Haenir's friend' and 'Odin's friend', and Haenir is "Odin's table-companion or comrade or confidant" while Loki is "comrade and table-companion of Odin". In a myth from the Faroe Islands the three gods are given as Ouvin, Höner and Lokkji, who hide a boy from a giant, Skruimsli, by putting him in an ear of barley, a swan's feather, and a fish's egg.

There are three figures who appear in the *Rig Veda* who might represent these three gods:

This beloved gray priest has a middle brother who is hungry and a third brother with butter on his back. In him I saw the Lord of All Tribes with his seven sons.

The three long-haired ones reveal themselves at the right moment. During the year, one of them shaves, one looks upon everything with his powers; of one the onrush is visible, but the form is not.

In the first passage the one who is hungry would be fire, the other two are unclear.<sup>42</sup> In the second passage the one who shaves is fire, the one who looks upon everything is the Sun, and the onrush is the wind.

There is also a similarity between Indra and Vindr, as well as Agni and Logi. Indra is god of the sky and thunder and Agni is god of domestic fire, lightning and the hearth. Both are at times equated with the sun and Indra thus as a bull. Agni is the child of sky and earth or the two fire-sticks, and is said to have two mothers.<sup>43</sup> As fire, Agni is said to have golden teeth, and like Loki is able to change gender.<sup>44</sup>

After his birth, Indra went to his father Tvastr's house and there drank the *soma* (worth a hundred cows) that was an intoxicating drink pressed in twin bowls, then he killed his father. Indra then has a primeval contest with the

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<sup>40</sup> Like Loki, Agni was pursued by the gods and hid in a lake where they eventually found him.

<sup>41</sup> Loki's other brother is Byleist, who does not answer well to Haenir.

<sup>42</sup> These could be Indra, Agni, and Soma. Could there be significance to one having "butter on his back" and Heimdall who has a "muddy back"? Might there also be a similarity between Heimdall and Haenir the "mud king", as there might be between Haenir and Soma the "river king", and Heimdall and Soma who both relate to the Moon and water? Heimdall is strengthened through sacrificial blood and the month of sacrifice was known as 'mud month' among the Anglo-Saxons. These wisps yet fail to weave.

<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere it is said Indra created fire with two stones.

<sup>44</sup> In *Ynglinga Saga* there is a Danish King Agni who defeats King Frosti (frost) of Finland, capturing his daughter Skialv and son Loga (flame).

dragon Vrtra, whom he killed and by piercing its trunk he caused the seven rivers to spring forth, that flowed down into the sea.

“I killed Vrtra, O Maruts, by my Indra-power, having grown strong through my own glorious rage. With the thunderbolt on my arm I made these all-luminous waters move well for man.”

After this Indra splits open the mountain to release the cows and bulls, kept pent up by Vala, to provide the priests with animals for sacrifice.

The body of Vrtra must then be considered to be the land, thus is a creation of the world similar to that of the slaying of Ymir. However, Ymir appears more similar to Yama, the first man and god of the underworld

“Beneath the tree with beautiful leaves where Yama drinks with the gods, there our father, the head of the family, turns with longing to the ancient ones.”<sup>45</sup>

He is also like Purusa the cosmic giant, sacrificed to create the things of the world and heaven. The birth out of Ymir’s legs and from under his arm parallels the generation of the four classes of mankind from Purusa:

*When they divided the Man,  
Into how many parts did they apportion him?  
What do they call his mouth,  
His two arms and thighs and feet?  
His mouth became Brahmin;  
His arms were made into the Warrior,  
His thighs the People,  
And from his feet the Servants were born?  
The moon was born from his mind;  
From his eye the sun was born.  
Indra and Agni came from his mouth,  
And from his vital breath the Wind was born.  
From his navel the middle realm of space arose;  
From his head the sky evolved.  
From his two feet came the earth,  
And the quarters of the sky from his hear.  
Thus they set the worlds in order.*

Yama’s father was the Sun (named Vivasvan or Martanda) and the first mortal man who was also thus the first one to make the journey into the otherworld, where he became king.

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<sup>45</sup> This idea of a primal giant sitting under a tree and drinking is also found with the giant Mimir. The tree would lie in the north, at the axis of the stars, where the world of the dead was thought to be. Brimir also was to live in the underworld drinking in his beer-hall in Okolnir (uncold place), perhaps a warm place in the cold north.

Even in Greek mythology the axis of the sky, held up by Atlas, was in Hyperborea. There Hercules went to seek the golden apples and took them after slaying the tree’s guardian snake.

Yama, give him over to your two guardian dogs, the four-eyed keepers of the path, who watch over men. O king, grant him happiness and health. The two dark messengers of Yama with flaring nostrils wander among men, thirsting for the breath of life. Let them give back to us a life of happiness here and today, so that we may see the sun.

His wife was Yami and his brother was Manu, the father of mankind, whom Indra led to safety on the flood waters. This seems to set up an alternative to Purusa as the progenitor. In the Eddas everything is created from Ymir.<sup>46</sup> Certainly the roles of the different players were confounded, but clearly Ymir and Yama must have once been the same. There is no remnant left of Odin having slain a dragon; rather this is performed by Thor.<sup>47</sup>

The Iranian Yima, like Yama, was the first mortal, who built the *vara* (enclosure) that would protect those who would repopulate the earth after the great winter came. This resembles both Fimbulwinter and the hiding of Líf and Lífthrasir in Hódmimir's holt.

Manu is said to be the son of the Self-born One, and himself seems identical to the German Mannus, son of Tuisto the son of Earth as mentioned by Tacitus, from whom the three Germanic tribes are descended. It could be too that Dis Pater, the primal ancestor of the Gauls could have been Yama, as he and Dis are both gods of the underworld.

Indra was also said to be the lord of bay horses, two of them were thought to carry to him the Soma sacrifice. A certain horse called Swift-Runner, who was to represent the sun, is similar to Odin's horse Sleipnir.

When you whinnied for the first time, as you were born coming forth from the ocean or from the celestial source, with the wings of an eagle and the forelegs of an antelope—that, Swift Runner, was your great and awesome birth. Yama gave him and Trita harnessed him; Indra was the first to mount him, and the Gandharva grasped his reins. You gods fashioned the horse out of the sun.

Here I saw your highest form eager for nourishment in the place of the cow. As soon as a mortal gets the food that you enjoy, the great devourer of plants awakens him.

Here the horse (Sun) goes to the place of the cow (Moon) from where he attains what brings man great wisdom. This “devourer of plants” seems to be the cow, who is the Moon, and might refer to a drink of inspiration found there. The Moon is sometimes called Soma, and the waxing and waning is

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<sup>46</sup> By removing the “ir” ending from Ymir one produces Ym (Im), making it not too far from Mim. Mimir may also have been the giant out of whom the world was formed. From his head was made the moon and his body became the earth.

<sup>47</sup> The contest does recall figures placed at the tops of Jupiter columns where the Celtic Zeus was shown on his horse trampling a tentacled monster.

likened to the soma bowl filling and draining. The Moon is also referred to as a bull with a thousand horns and said to rise from the sea.

The Sun is called Surya, “great face of the great gods”, or the eye, but is also represented by other gods such as Indra and Agni. The Sun was said to have been drawn from the ocean by the gods. The *Rig Veda* says of the Sun and Moon:

These two change places through their power of illusion, now forward, now backward. Like two children at play they circle the sacrificial ground. The one gazes upon all creatures, and the other is born again and again marking the order of the seasons.

The “cow of dawn” may have been the Morning Star. The rain cloud was the cow, bull or chestnut stallion, bringer of fertility.

The sky gods according to the oldest tradition are named Asuras, similar to Aesir. There is another group of gods associated with the sun called Vasus, similar to the Vanir, and twin male horsemen called the Asvins, similar to the Alcis. The waters are sometimes called “the young women” recalling the nine daughters of Aegir. There is a certain river that divides the world of men from the demons known as Rosa, like the river Vimur. There is also a wall dividing the world of the living from the world of the dead. The one known for the creation of the earth and sky is called “All-Maker”, “Father of the Eye”, or “One God”, also lord of sacred speech, quite like All-Father. The sky god Dyaus is a direct representative of the Norse Tyr and the Greek Zeus. Dyaus (father sky) was associated with the goddess Prthivi (mother earth), who were together known as Dyavaparthivi. Dyaus too was associated with lightning and thunder, that was supposed to be a bull bellowing, and also with the night sky as a “black steed decked with pearls”.

The sky god Tyr was associated with the cult of the bull that had spread throughout much of Europe, which seems to have been predominantly one of fertility. Tyr is related to *taur* (bull) and thus Taurus. In the mythology, his father is Hymir.<sup>48</sup> The sons of Gefion were said to be bulls by a giant and Hymir is said to keep bulls, so this could mean that Gefion is Tyr’s mother. That his mother is described as being “decked in gold” and “with shining brows” indicates that she is a goddess.

In addition, the sky god Tyr (Ziu) is the same as the thunder god Zeus (Diwija), both derived from the same god of sky, rain and thunder. Jupiter is also the same god as that of Tyr, and to him too bulls were sacrificed.

It seems at some point very far back that Tyr and Thor were the same god of sky and war. Like Thor, Zeus is a god of hills and oak trees. In the Sami tradition, Torden (Thor) and Tiermes (Tyr?) were viewed as different

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<sup>48</sup> Hymir could be the primal giant Ymir, who was known for his wisdom and age. Several prominent giants Ymir, Hymir, Gymir, Brimir and Mimir share similar names, and might simply be versions of the proto-giant in the continuing affairs of the gods, and as one who understood the divine creation.

names for the same god. As time went on and the gods met again: Thor kept his unique position of god of thunder while Tyr was slowly replaced by the upsurgent Odin.

Then there came the gods that figured more prominently in later myth, the three gods Freyia/Frigg, Freyr/Friggo, and Oedi/Odin. In the Scandinavian area Freyia became the prominent mother goddess along with her brother Freyr while Oedi (Od) lost significance, while those on the continent clearly raised Odin to prominence, while Frigg and her brother Friggo lost prominence. Odin, moreover, was a god of the Sun and the Moon, while it is not certain what the Vanir Sun and Moon were. Odin might well have become a dominant god over Friggo because he was seen as a horse god. This might mean that this group was at least at some time a horse culture, while in a settled area the fertility god Freyr was more significant.

It seems that it was the introduction of the sky being a male divinity that caused the sky goddess to become an earth goddess. Freyia/Frigg may have come to represent the growth that returned each spring, whereas Freyr/Friggo himself may have been a god specifically of the summer rather than the sun. As the Earth (Freyia) and the Sun (Od) were present in both summer and winter, the summer god in particular was only present during a certain season. Thus Freyr became a god of fertility and plenty. Perhaps Skirnir (shining one) as the Sun is a mere aspect of Freyr. That the Sun returns and warms the earth (Gerd) over, so that she blossoms forth and accepts the rains of the returning god of summer, Freyr.<sup>49</sup> Frigg's handmaidens Hlin (maple) and Gna are both names for trees.

Frigg as the earth was believed to be crying (dew) for her husband (Sun) when he went into the underworld, only to have him return in the morning. There was also a story of Baldr and Hod. When they became Odin's sons, now Frigg wept for her lost son Baldr. Baldr as god of the Sun, equated with the ring on Baldr's boat that travelled through the ocean-sky and would burn each night at sunset.

Odin is specifically said to arise from a male lineage, which sets him apart from the gods that came before him. He is clearly the dominant god of the Gauls by the time of the Roman Empire, equated with Mercury. By then he had already replaced the supremacy of the prior sky god Tyr. This gradual replacement also seems to have led to some confusion. Whereas it is Tyr who is known for his rivalry with the wolf Fenrir, it is Odin who fights him at the end of the world; Tyr is left to confront the dog Garm. There is some similarity between the god Odin (Wotan) and the Etruscans' chief god Veltune (Vertumnus) or Voltumna (Vortumnus), the Celtic god Vellaunus, who was also identified with the Roman Mercury, and the god Voltumnus,

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<sup>49</sup> The tale *Svipdagsmal* with Menglod (necklace-glad) and Svipdag (quick-rising day) might originally have been a myth of Freyia and Freyr.

who may have been a wind god. As god of the underworld Wotan might be equivalent to Vulcan.<sup>50</sup>

Odin's emergence is difficult to explain; he is clearly associated with the Indian Indra, but whether he is the same god or an indigenous god who took the other's place is unclear. He did emerge after Tyr and Thor and usurped Tyr's position as the chief god, and later as god of battle. That Odin was prominent over Tyr in the north and Indra over Dyaus in India, speaks to Odin having already been adopted before the two branches diverged. As Oedi he never gained as much significance as he would as Odin.

Then there is the god Niord, principle god of the Vanir but mentioned first as the goddess Nerthus. There may be equivalence between Nerthus and the Etruscans' chief goddess Nortia who, like Niord, is a god of fortune. According to Varro, both Veltune and Nortia had shrines near Volsinii. At Veltune's temple the League of Twelve would meet for their law court, as well as ceremonies and games, and the official of highest rank would hammer one nail at each annual festival, recording the passage of time to the end of their civilization.<sup>51</sup>

Among the deities of the north, the male and female Niorun/Niord, Fiorgyn/Fiorgynn, Frigg/Friggo, and Freyia/Freyr, are paired deities of the earth and fertility. There also appears to be a close linguistic relationships between Niord, Niorun, Iord, Fiorgyn, and Hlodyn. There is no specific connection in the myths between Niord and Iord, despite their similar names, nor of Niord and Niorun. However, it could be both Iord and Niorun are equivalent to Nerthus.

Fiorgyn and Hlodyn are names given for Thor's mother, and the male form Fiorgynn is also given as the name for Frigg's father. Iord is equivalent to Fiorgyn and Sif might be to Gefion. However, even as Iord and Fiorgyn are designations for the earth, none of them is personified in the mythology, unlike Sif and Gefion, Frigg and Freyia.

Gefion is specifically related to the plow and oxen.<sup>52</sup> The Greek Athena was known as "yolker of oxen" because she was thought to have taught farmers how to plough. In Anatolia the goddess Magna Mater is shown with leopards and a stag or bull. She also known as Agdistis, Cybele, or Kybebe and is the mother of all living things.

Mother of wild beasts, untilled by a plough but full of food, sweet-smelling of perfume and balm—to her, the spirit of the forest, I offer my praise.

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<sup>50</sup> Possible linguistic derivation: Vulcan < Voltan > Wotan.

<sup>51</sup> Other gods in this tradition are the goddess of fate Vanth, the god of death Mantus and the god of the underworld Aita. The dead would be met in the underworld by Charun, a winged and beaked monster holding a mallet, along with his lesser demonic fellows. None of these appear to have direct equivalents in the northern tradition.

<sup>52</sup> According to Snorri the name of Hlodyn's husband Vingnir is given as the name of an ox. Freyr is also given as the name of an ox.

Her cult included prophesy and ecstatic states along with bull sacrifice. She is sometimes shown with the skull of a bull emerging from her thighs, so like Gefion was to have given birth to bulls.

## OVERVIEW

The Aesir and the Vanir gods appear to be the gods of two distinct peoples. The Vanir were established in Sweden specifically and the Aesir may have come in from Denmark. The exchange of hostages between the Aesir and Vanir implies that there was a fairly recent combination of the two during a migration of one into the lands of the other, but both having at some point grown out of the same initial ancient beliefs. But this fusion was well before the settlement of Iceland, where their poets already accepted both traditions, even when they differed.

Thor was the most prominent of the gods in Norway, Freyr in Sweden and Odin in Denmark. Thor was known as ‘chief of all gods’ and was most prominent in Norway and Iceland. A law oath was concluded with “so help me Frey and Niord and the almighty god”, this latter being Thor. Odin was sometimes known as Gaut, Gauttyr (god of the Gaut), ‘friend of the Gauts’ and Saxagod (god of the Saxons). The Lombards had a story that Odin had given them their tribal name:

At that time Gambara with her two sons, that is, Ybor and Agio, who were chiefs over the Winniles, besought Frea, the wife of Godan, to be propitious to the Winniles. Then Frea gave counsel that at sunrise the Winniles should come, and that their women, with their hair let down around the face in the likeness of a beard should also come with their husbands. Then when it became bright, while the sun was rising, Frea, the wife of Godan, turned around the bed where her husband was lying and put his face toward the east and awakened him. And he looked at them, saw the Winniles and their women having their hair let down around the face. And he says, “Who are those Long-beards?” And Frea said to Godan, “As you have given them a name, give them also the victory.” And he gave them the victory, so that they should defend themselves according to his counsel and obtain the victory. From that time the Winniles were called Lombards.<sup>53</sup>

Germanic tribes claimed descent from sons of Odin: East Saxony from Weldegg, West Saxony from Beldegg, Franconia from Sigi, Denmark from Skiold, Norway from Saeming, and Sweden from Yngvi. Freyr was known in *Skirmismal* as *folkvaldi goda* (chief of the gods), and elsewhere as *Blotgud Svía* (sacrificial god of Sweden) or *Sviagod* (the Swedish god) and Swedish kings believed themselves descendants of him.

These are matched by the location of place-names associated with the god’s holy places. There are prevalent indications of Odin and of Niord, Freyr and Freyia throughout Norway, Sweden and even Denmark. Thor is over all these areas too, especially in Norway but also in Iceland. Ullr

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<sup>53</sup> The name Lombards derives from the men’s long unshaven beards.

exists in Norway and Sweden but not in Denmark, while Tyr is largely restricted to the continent in Denmark.

Baldr, Heimdall and Loki are not common place-names. It seems that Heimdall's supreme role as father of mankind reveals that he is very ancient. Loki too, as god of fire and the underworld, seems a god that had a very early origin in Europe. The absence of plentiful place names suggests that the gods themselves had not become abstract concepts that were symbolized through idols or temples, but that they were still viewed as the objects themselves, explaining what Caesar says of the gods of the Germans.

According purely to the interpretation of the mythology, several traditions are represented. The earliest gods among the Germans appear to have been the gods Bertha, Heimdall and Lodur, the gods of the Sun, Moon and fire. Bertha certainly spread widely, from Hekate in the south to Freyia in the north.<sup>54</sup> Loki too, as a god of fire, would at least have extended back into the Neolithic.

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

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

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

Then the trinity gods from Scandinavia came into the continent, adapting though time in the former into the Vanir Freyia, Freyr and Oedi and in the latter as the Aesir Frigg, Friggo and Odin (and in Germany as Frea, Fro and Wodan). Thus Tyr, Thor, Heimdall and Baldr all become Odin's sons, with Lodur equated with Loki.

Meanwhile in the north, the god Niord was introduced from Denmark and became the father of Freyr and Freyia. Then there was a final combination of the Aesir with the Vanir.<sup>55</sup>

During the next few hundred years the myths were adapted to associate these gods with one another in the myths, and to better distinguish them. Into it too was adopted the idea of the end of the world. Then after the adoption of Christianity, when heathen traditions were fading, many of them were still told as children's tales with some further embellishments

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<sup>54</sup> It is possible that she is represented in the "Venus figures" found throughout Europe.

<sup>55</sup> Two gods that were apparently considered so close as to be identical were Freyr and Friggo (although it seems that the latter name was still in use at least to the 11<sup>th</sup> century in some parts of Germany when used by Adam of Bremen).

and clean-ups. Snorri recorded most of these in his *Edda*, who worked to understand and interpret the sources at his disposal. The poet of the *Poetic Edda* recorded many from a different collection. Both, however, were associating them to a limited extent with Biblical or Classical ideas.

That the myths were ultimately written down in Iceland does not appear to have influenced their composition. Even after adopting Christianity, the illiterate people still retained their conceptions of the universe that were so prevalent in their way of understanding the world. So remnants of this view creep in relentlessly for hundreds of years to follow, until general scientific education started to replace them.

This concludes the treatise of these ancient beliefs.

*Hail to the day! Hail to the sons of day!  
Hail to night and her kin!  
With gracious eyes may you look upon us,  
and give victory to those sitting here!*

*Hail to the gods! Hail to the goddesses!  
Hail to the mighty, fruitful earth!  
Eloquence and native wit may you give us,  
and healing hands while we live!*