

Urð, Skuld and Verðandi: Blood magic in the North of Europe

A look at the mythology of the Norse and how it relates to the Female Kin Coalition theory

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Lecture presented to the Radical Anthropology Group, June 2008

ABOUT THE NORSE

A potted history

8500ya: Indo-European culture begins.

5500ya: the Norse enter Scandinavia.

2600-2300ya: Mini-ice age.

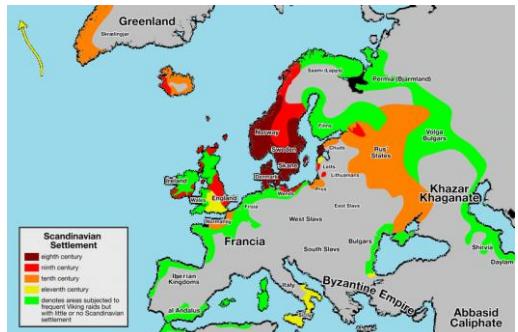
1600ya: Goths destroy Western Roman Empire.

1400ya: Scandinavian Norse begin expansion.

1200ya: Norse begin to adopt Christianity.

900ya: end of Norse age.

800ya: Norse myths written down; Norse myths were skaldic – spoken, not written.



Economic culture

Pastoralists before they entered Scandinavia.

Specialist economy (a non-hereditary aristocracy, priests, warriors, artisans and traders).

Females held and inherited land and chattels, but most inheritance was by the male line.

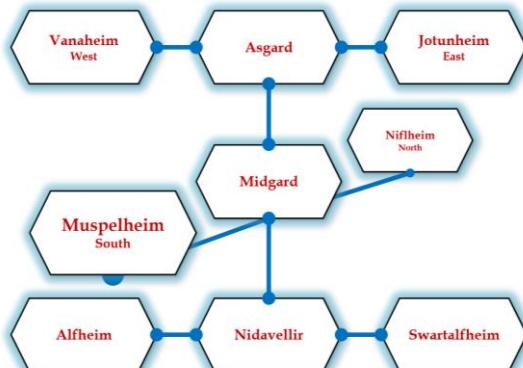
Viking – trading and raiding

Trading: the Norse had a long tradition of trading and, by 2,000ya, had a trade network along the rivers of modern-day West Russia, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, as well as throughout the Roman Empire.

Raiding: the Norse had a pastoralist raiding tradition, which was carried out mostly by sea. They were not, initially, settlers, but they built trading and supply depots along their routes.

COSMOLOGY

Creation – The World was created by a primal killing. In this case, the Giant Ymir.



The nine worlds

Above the earth:

- Asgard
- Vanaheim (to west)
- Jotunheim (to east)

With the earth:

- Midgard
- Muspelheim (to south)
- Niflheim (to north)

Below the earth:

- Nidavellir
- Alfheim
- Swartalfheim

The Asgardir, Vanir and Jotuns

Asgardir and Vanir: dry vs wet, hot vs cold, mundane vs magic.

Asgardir and Jotuns: human vs monsters, cooked vs uncooked, fixed gender vs gender-ambivalent.

Ragnarok

The twilight of the gods.

Almost all the gods, giants and monsters kill each other.

The role of the Norns at Ragnarok is to protect the last humans.

Vafþrûðnismal text (“Ballad of Vafþrûðnir”)

Odin spake:

48. "Much have I fared, much have I found,

Much have I got of the gods:

What maidens are they, so wise of mind.

That forth o'er the sea shall fare?"

Vafþrûðnir spake:

49. "O'er Mogþrasir's hill shall the maidens pass,

And three are their throngs that come;

They all shall protect the dwellers on earth,

Though they come of the giants' kin."

Is Ragnarok dark moon or full moon?

Ragnarok is a time of war, noise and blood and would therefore seem to be a dark moon event; but the time of blood is not over until the blood of the hunt is rendered safe by cooking. Blood is a part of the full moon hunt as well as the dark moon sex strike.

Ragnarok represents the death of magic, the ending of separation, the ending of the monsters and the male hunters, and a passing into a quieter time. The old world is consumed in fire and a new world is founded.

THE NORMS

Three women – Urð, Skuld and Verðandi – giantesses – their coming ended the golden age of the gods and introduced measured time (just as the Wawilak Sisters ended the Dreamtime).

Voluspa text (“the Seer’s Story”)

19. An ash stands, I know, by name Yggdrasil;

That tall tree is watered by white icicles daily;

Thence comes the dew that drops in the dells;

It stands ever green above Urd's well.

20. Thence come maidens who know much,

Three from that hall beneath the tree:

One was named Origin, the second Becoming,

These two fashioned the third, named Debt.

21. They established law,

They selected lives

For the children of ages,



And the fates of men.

The Norns care for the World-tree, Yggdrasil.

The Norns are all about the future.

- Urð – “Fate”, or Future-that-has-been-made, the unavoidable future – “the old one”, “the crone”.
- Verðandi – “becoming”, or Future-that-is-being-made – “the mother”.
- Skuld – “allowed”, or Future-that-will-be-made – “the young one”, “the maid”.

The Norns are also associated with the Valkyrie – Skuld, the youngest Norn, is also a Valkyr.

Völuspá text

31. On all sides saw I Valkyries assemble,
Ready to ride to the ranks of the gods;
Skuld bore the shield, and Skogul rode next,
Guth, Hild, Gondul, and Geirskogul.
Of Herjan's maidens the list have ye heard,
Valkyries ready to ride o'er the earth.

The Personal Norns

Every person has a Norn, who arrives three days after the birth to tell the child's future.

These Norns can be any person of power, including a human seer, or Volva.

Fafnismál text (“the story of Fafnir”, a dragon)

Sigurd spake:
12. "Tell me then, Fafnir, for wise thou art famed,
And much thou knowest now:
Who are the Norns who are helpful in need,
And the babe from the mother bring?"
Fafnir spake:
13. "Of many births the Norns must be,
Nor one in race they were;
Some to gods, others to elves are kin,
And Dvalin's daughters some."

Gylfaginning text (“Gylfi is deceived”, Prose Edda)

Norns; but there are many norns: those who come to each child that is born, to appoint his life; these are of the race of the gods, but the second are of the Elf-people, and the third are of the kindred of the dwarves, as it is said here:

Most sundered in birth I say the Norns are;

They claim no common kin;
Some are of Æsir-kin, some are of Elf-kind,
Some are Dvalinn's daughters."

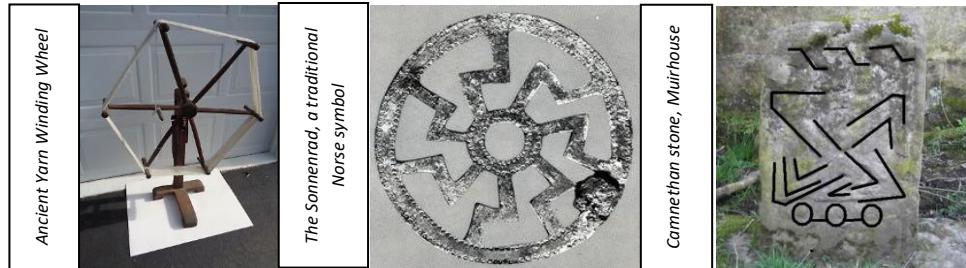
Then said Gangleri: "If the Norns determine the weirds of men, then they apportion exceedingly unevenly, seeing that some have a pleasant and luxurious life, but others have little worldly goods or fame; some have long life, others short."

Hárr said: "Good norns and of honorable race appoint good life; but those men that suffer evil fortunes are governed by evil norns."

Equivalents of the Norns in Indo-European cultures

- The Greek Moirae (Roman Parcae): Clotho (Spinner – goddess of childbirth, also called Nona, The Ninth) – links to Skuld; Lachesis (Measurer – also called Decima, The Tenth) – links to Verðandi; Atropos (Inevitability – also called Morta, Death) – links to Urð.
- The Celtic Morrigan – both a single goddess and a trio: Badb (wise crow); Macha (battle crow); Nemain (frenzy).
- Macbeth's Wyrd Sisters.

The Norns and the wheel



Norn comes from the Indo-European root word *ner*, meaning to twist or twine – as in spinning. Norns twist the threads of fate (like the Moirae).

The wheel is still used as a symbol of fate today, e.g. the four-pointed wheel or swastika – or, indeed, the roulette wheel.

THE MOON AND MAGIC

The Female Kin Coalition model

- Sex strike at dark moon.
- Separation of sexes and preparation for hunting during waxing moon.
- Hunt at full moon.
- Fertility and feasting during waning moon.

There are four seasons of the moon – Dark, Waxing, Full, Waning – but only three Norns – why?

The seasons of the moon as events

- Dark moon – the time of female monsters – the future that was already created in the past – “no” – the crone – Urð.
- Waxing moon – the time of seclusion and sexual separation – the future that will be created in the future – “soon” – the maid – Skuld.
- Waning moon – the time of rejoining – the future that is being created now – “fertility” – the mother – Verðandi.

Which leaves full moon. Who is the goddess of full moon and what does she represent?

Who is the Goddess of Full Moon?

One obvious candidate is the goddess Freya. Classical equivalents are Artemis & Diana, the goddesses of hunting, and both associated with the full moon.

There is another candidate: Odin, lord of the hunt. There is no direct evidence for Odin as the fourth Norn, but his Greek equivalent, Zeus, was known as Moiragetes (leader of the Moirae). Odin was also known as Ygg, and the world tree, Yggdrasil, translates as Ygg's horse.

A final candidate may be Urð, as goddess of transitions – the future that was already created in the past. She could represent both the transition from waning to waxing and from waxing to waning.

This view of a four-part lunar cycle is speculative!

CONCLUSION

Like all other mythic forms, Norse myths add new layers to the story of what it means to be human. But they also contain features that indicate they are part of the two global mythic traditions: the story of the female-oriented lunar calendar; and the story of the male-oriented solar calendar. These two myths form the backbone of the Female Kin Coalition model, and give us an important window into our cultural past.

NORSE CREATION MYTH (PERSONAL VERSION)

At first there was Ginnungagap, the great void. But in the north of the void was cold ice, which was Niflheim; and in the South were sparks and fire, which were Muspelheim. Then in the void a giant was formed, made of ice and given life by the sparks of Muspelheim. This giant was Ymir, and he was nourished by milk from the great cow, Auðhumla; and Auðhumla was nourished by the salt she licked out of the ice. Ymir slept, and while he slept the race of ice giants came from his sweat.

As she licked, Auðhumla uncovered the body of the Buri, the first. And from Buri came Borr, and from Borr and his wife Bestla came Odin, Vili and Ve. The sons of Borr killed Ymir, and from his body they made the Middle land, Midgard. His flesh became the land and his blood was the rivers and seas. His skull became the dome of the sky, his brain became the clouds; his hair became the green growing things, and from his eyelashes the sons of Borr made a fence to keep out the giants. Humans they made out of driftwood they found: man from a piece of ash, woman from a piece of rowan (or sometimes, elm).

RAGNAROK AND AFTER IN THE VOLUSPA (Henry A Bellows' translation)

42. On a hill there sat, and smote on his harp,
Eggþer the joyous, the giants' warden;
Above him the cock in the bird-wood crowed,
Fair and red did Fjalar stand.

43. Then to the gods crowed Gollinkambi,
He wakes the heroes in Ódin's hall;
And beneath the earth does another crow,
The rust-red bird at the bars of Hel.

44. Now Garm howls loud before Gnipahellir,

The fetters will burst, and the wolf run free;
Much do I know, and more can see
Of the fate of the gods, the mighty in fight.

45. Brothers shall fight and fell each other,
And sisters' sons shall kinship stain;
Hard is it on earth, with mighty whoredom;
Axe-time, sword-time, shields are sundered,
Wind-time, wolf-time, ere the world falls;
Nor ever shall men each other spare.

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

47. Yggdrasil shakes, and shiver on high
The ancient limbs, and the giant is loose;
To the head of Mim does Odin give heed,
But the kinsman of Surt shall slay him soon.

48. How fare the gods? how fare the elves?
All Jotunheim groans, the gods are at council;
Loud roar the dwarfs by the doors of stone,
The masters of the rocks: would you know yet more?

49. Now Garm howls loud before Gnipahellir,
The fetters will burst, and the wolf run free
Much do I know, and more can see
Of the fate of the gods, the mighty in fight.

50. From the east comes Hrym with shield
held high:
In giant-wrath does the serpent writhe:
O'er the waves he twists, and the tawny eagle
Gnaws corpses screaming; Naglfar is loose.

51. O'er the sea from the north there sails a ship
With the people of Hel, at the helm stands
Loki;
After the wolf do wild men follow,
And with them the brother of Byleist goes.

52. Surt fares from the south with the scourge
of branches.
The sun of the battle-gods shone from his sword:
The crags are sundered, the giant-women sink,
The dead throng Hel-way, and heaven is cloven.

53. Now comes to Hlin yet another hurt,
When Odin fares to fight with the wolf,
And Beli's fair slayer seeks out Surt,
For there must fall the joy of Frigg.

54. Then comes Sigfather's mighty son,
Vithar, to fight with the foaming wolf;
In the giant's son does he thrust his sword
Full to the heart: his father is avenged.

55. Hither there comes the son of Hlothyr,
The bright snake gapes to heaven above:
.....
Against the serpent goes Odin's son.

56. In anger smites the warden of earth,--
Forth from their homes must all men flee;
Nine paces fares the son of Fjorgyn,
And, slain by the serpent, fearless he sinks.

57. The sun turns black, earth sinks in the sea,
The hot stars down from heaven are whirled;
Fierce grows the steam and the life-feeding flame,
Till fire leaps high about heaven itself.

58. Now Garm howls loud before Gnipahellir,
The fetters will burst, and the wolf run free;
Much do I know, and more can see
Of the fate of the gods, the mighty in fight.

59. Now do I see the earth anew
Rise all green from the waves again;
The cataracts fall, and the eagle flies,
And fish he catches beneath the cliffs.

60. The gods in Ithavoll meet together,
Of the terrible girdler of earth they talk,
And the mighty past they call to mind,
And the ancient runes of the Ruler of Gods.

61. In wondrous beauty once again
Shall the golden tables stand mid the grass,
Which the gods had owned in the days of old.
.....

62. Then fields unsown bear ripened fruit,
All ills grow better, and Baldr comes back;
Baldr and Hoth dwell in Hropt's battle-hall,
And the mighty gods: would you know yet more?

63. Then Hömir wins the prophetic wand.
.....
And the sons of the brothers of Tveggi abide
In Vindheim now: would you know yet more?

64. More fair than the sun, a hall I see,
Roofed with gold, on Gimle it stands:

There shall the righteous rulers dwell,
And happiness ever there shall they have.

65. There comes on high, all power to hold,
A mighty lord, all lands he rules.
("Rule he orders, and rights he fixes,
Laws he ordains that ever shall live.")

66. From below the dragon dark comes forth,
Nithhogg flying from Nithafjoll;
The bodies of men on his wings he bears,
The serpent bright: but now must I sink.

Sets of dots indicate that a line is missing from the original text.