

# Illustrated Lexicon of Germanic Deities



**Gunivortus Goos**

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## Foreword

From all of the combined periods of the Germanic tribes from the Roman era and subsequent centuries and up to the Vikings, many Germanic deities have been passed down to us, many more than are commonly known. Due to that huge amount, making a book about them may look like a lexicon or an encyclopedia. And many will see and use this book that way; this might be unavoidable. Undoubtedly, those who do so will have good reasons. Indeed, it is a correct and practical use handling the book that way. However, that was not really intended at first. The main intention was to provide a book that would provide a clearer picture of those many deities to an interested audience in a sense that gods and goddesses and their worshipers, embedded in their own cultures, gain a bit more of understanding and transparency.

Questions may arise concerning many parts of the content, but it is strongly recommended to read the next chapter and sections of the Afterword chapter first, because, probably, the desired answers will already be found here.

Surely, some of those gods are already well known to most readers, perhaps under different names. But there will be hardly any people who know them all. Nevertheless, although very many Germanic deities are presented here, it is not claimed to having covered them all. Perhaps some were left out unwillingly, for a few other names the divine status was too unclear. Concerning the provided information given for each god or goddess, in many cases that was not exhaustive, about some there could have been narrated much more. For a few deities complete books could be filled for each of them and in some cases such works already

exist. And certainly, the contents of the presented information here will not get the approval from everyone. Actually, quite a few things can be questioned and if that is done indeed, it is in the full sense of the author. The hope for critical-minded reading people, who discuss what they have read and develop (further) their own personal or scientific view is a secret underlying aim of this research- and writing-project.

With this in mind, it should be clear that this is not a religious book for a neo-pagan community as only archaeological, historical, mythological lore-based and linguistic information is presented, not adapted or considered are forms of so-called "Unverified" or "Unverifiable Personal Gnosis (UPG)", the belief, that the individual's direct experience with a deity is more authentic, than any scholarly (circumstantial) evidence, theory or presumption.

The present book contains scientifically based information about names of Germanic deities, including many citations from historical sources like documents from Classical Antiquity, inscriptions on votive altar stones, the two Eddas and more written sources from the Norse peoples and other sources from the Middle Ages and subsequent centuries. Many photos and some drawings of votive stones, other archaeological finds and runic inscriptions. are included.

Both text and illustrations will give a kind of 'vivid profile' to each god and goddess. And exactly that is the aim of this book. Nonetheless, it is up to the well-intentioned reader to assess whether this aim was achieved for them personally.

It has to be admitted that in most cases just reading and looking at it all is not enough to reach that aim thoroughly. Likely it will need some more initiative by the reader - to get a more complete picture, it may need some additional information this book does not give. Additional historical

information, mythological stories, folk tales and lore, and perhaps also a few related historical fiction books would help to get such a more complete overview, to get an impression who those gods and goddesses were, who the people were who venerated them, why they did it, and in which ways. The list of consulted sources at the end also provides such information, but if the wish exist for more, don't hesitate asking. Specialized librarians in a nearby library can certainly offer good advice on this.

This book is a translation from the German edition from 2020. Yet, the basis for that German work was the in 2014 published two-volume English work "Gods of the Germanic Peoples", with the subtitle "From Roman times to the Viking Age" by the same author. Much of that 2014 work is part of this book, partly even unchanged. Yet, many other parts of the contents of that work were edited for this book, as views were replaced by more recent ones, and based on newer research, new information was implemented. And quite a few more deities were also added.

The making of this book was a heartfelt desire and was realized with 'lifeblood'. Hopefully it will receive positive responses. It is a matter of course that constructive critical remarks on specific entries are very welcome and accepted as positive; they may very well contribute to a revised edition in the future. But reviews that simply run the book into the ground would be so very displeasing, that this foreword ends up with an old curse for such brutal criticasters:

Now may every oath      and every intention  
thee bite                      That thou hast sworn  
or planned                      To savage this book,  
By the water                      bright of Leipt,  
And the ice-cold                stone of Uðr.

Altered from the "Second Lay of Helgi  
Hundingsbane", part of the Poetic Edda

Usingen, September 2022  
Gunivortus Goos

## **Basic considerations**

For a better understanding of the main content of this book, this chapter informs about and discusses additional background information and views. Moreover, the following sections may contribute to own considerations and arguments perhaps leading to new perspectives. Therefore, reading this introductory chapter is highly recommended.

To point to the Germanic peoples from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, the technical term 'Germanics' is used here. It shortens 'Germanic peoples'. The word 'Germans' is avoided to obviate confusion of terms with the current Germans in Germany.

### **A matter of evidence**

From an 'objective' point of view, the existence of gods cannot be proven. That can only be a matter of belief, of personal knowledge and of religion. But we do have lots of evidence that people believed and still believe in gods, no matter which religion it concerns. That kind of evidence is offered here, you will not find any proof that this or that deity really exists—no philosophical, theological, mathematical or whatever other scientific argument is given for or against the existence of some god. Below it is restricted to historical, mythological and folkloric sources in which deities of Germanic peoples are attested—in that context the term 'evidence' is used, evidence in terms of their appearance in such sources.

The historical or mythological evidence for the existence of the deities mentioned here varies to a great extreme and for many, the evidence seems rather hard to accept, for others it seems convincing. For others again, one can speak at the utmost of restricted (circumstantial) evidence. And then there are quite a few for which no evidence exists, just indications and even those are of varying quality. Some are considered by scholars as so highly obscure that they even reject such indications, or because they are just mentioned in sources since the Renaissance era many scholars



consider them to be devised. Nevertheless, all names of deities and related evidence, circumstantial evidence and indications that could be found are presented here to let anyone read it and then decide her- or himself about the plausibility and reliability of the provided information. It must be admitted that in very many cases no conclusiveness can be offered. That is why often scholars differ here in their opinions.

## **Germani - Germanic Peoples**

The origin and etymology of the Latin word GERMANI has still not been satisfactorily clarified, although various suggestions have been made. Even the language from which it might be derived, is subject of disagreement.

The name probably originally only meant one smaller group of people in the Lower Rhine area of what is now Belgium, the so-called GERMANI CISRHENANI (i. e. left bank Germani). That should have been the ones whose residential area was on the right bank of the Rhine, but they dwelled on the left bank of the Rhine, thus providing a reason for that designation. One of the assumptions is that this foreign appellation was introduced by Gauls who had their settlement areas nearby. It's not even known whether these were actually Celts, Belgae or others who lived at the time in that Lower Rhine region. There is a tendency to assume here the southern area of the Lower Rhine where the river north of the German city of Duisburg makes a bend to the left, and then flows towards the North Sea.

The term *germani* was probably an adjective, but what quality would have been so outstanding among these peoples, that the Gauls knew who were meant by it, is not known. Although the Greek philosopher and historian Poseidonios around 80 BCE wrote, that **the** Germanic peoples had roasted limbs at lunchtime, and were drinking milk and unmixed wine to it, does that not make it clear, which people or which peoples he actually was pointing to. It was only in the war reports of Julius Caesar, that the term *germanic* attained more content. But Caesar's reasons for appointing the Rhine as "Cultural dividing Border" between Gaul and Germania, and his designating of all peoples to the east of the Rhine as being Germanic, are controversial in historical research up to this day.

In any case, the term was gaining popularity, and post-Caesarean authors spoke rather undifferentiated of Germanic peoples—it was enough for them, when their home was in "Germania", that is, right of the Rhine. Tacitus adopted this geographically justified term, and named the peoples living in Germania Germanic, similar to the Gauls, living in Gaul.

Long after the Middle Ages, the term *germanic* was transferred to all ethnic groups, who belonged to the same language family. This has led to the severe error, that there had been a unified population of all Germanic peoples. Even today, many do not want to accept that this is not and never was true.

Since the epochs of humanism and romanticism the terms 'Germanic' and 'Germanic Peoples' experienced a high flight, connected to the desire for a 'German identification', which not only got romantic traits, but it also degenerated in a pseudo-ethnicity of 'völkisch' (folkish in its meaning of ethnic based nationalism) movements, and found its rock bottom through abuse by National Socialism.

Because today in history, archaeology and linguistics, the term 'Germanic' is (correctly) not used in a uniform meaning, the terms 'Germanic' and 'Germanics' have become vague for many of those who are not well-up in the relevant fields of these sciences. This may be the reason why many people stick firmly to the outdated interpretations of the 19th century, believing that there was one unified Germanic people. Linguists determine the characteristics of the Germanic languages, archaeologists refer to finds due to the used material, the attached motifs and the place of discovery to classify them as Germanic, and historians define certain ethnic, cultural and social aspects as 'Germanic'.

When, for the sake of convenience, we speak about Germanics or Germanic peoples, it should deliberately be kept in mind, that here a fuzzy, but nevertheless explanatory umbrella term is used for all peoples, who for various reasons are designated as such. In this assignment, certain historical, linguistic or archaeological features may have been used, or it is simply the peoples who resided in Germania. To make this clear: The current scholarly view is supported here that 'Germanic' peoples were those peoples, who had quite a minimum of linguistic characteristics and a minimum of cultural and ethnic aspects in common, but beyond that they were independent peoples with each different ways of culture.

## **Germanic Deities sourced from Classical Antiquity**

Just very few Germanic gods and goddesses are mentioned in classical literature from Roman times in the first centuries CE, many more only become manifest in inscriptions. For the far most part that concerns votive stones and altars, each dedicated to one or more deities. Those inscriptions are all written in Latin and the Germanic origin of those gods then is for the most part a matter of linguistic, geographical and historical interpretation. Sometimes that seems rather easy to determine, on many other occasions it is little more than mere guesswork, often based on very uncertain etymological assumptions, e. g. the MATRONAE AFLIAE or the goddesses Arvolecia and Aueha. Nevertheless, such doubtful interpretations, proposals or suggestions are included here too, following the relevant scientific sources, the most recent possible but older sources are also used.

In related literature there is quite a lot of discussion about the possible origins of the names of deities which were recognized in inscriptions from the first centuries CE.

Linguistically, in many cases both a Celtic and Germanic origin is proposed. Names of deities found deep in Germanic territory which are assumed to originate from a Celtic language nevertheless are not necessarily Celtic deities. From historical documents it seems very likely that such names (this also concerns names of Germanic peoples and personal names) were communicated to the Romans through Celtic interpreters—Caesar was known to use Celtic interpreters and had sent out Celtic-speaking envoys. Related names then either were celticized by those envoys, i. e., translated into Celtic by these people, which, of course, also could have happened earlier. This may have also been the case with existing celticized Germanic terms or names. And as such in literature and inscriptions from Classical Antiquity they are passed down to us.

Thus, Germanic deities from Antiquity and Late Antiquity have come down to us almost exclusively through inscriptions in stone. The texts on these altars are all Latin, and the whole custom of donating a votive stone to deities out of gratitude or as a promise for a return service is Roman or Gaulish-Roman. Nevertheless, if a Germanic deity was honored with this Roman or Gallo-Roman practice, both the deity and its cult should be understood as Germanic.

A Germanic god name written in such a votive stone obviously shows that the worshipers were members of Germanic peoples who lived in the Roman Empire, maintained intensive contacts with the Romans, and had at least adopted parts of Roman culture. In addition, members of Germanic peoples, who lived in the wide Germanic-Celtic contact zone also adopted a lot of Celtic ideas.

In both cases, probably because the 'other' culture was seen as more advanced and by adapting those customs one became part of a higher culture. Perhaps a little cynically one could say that votive stones and a temple cult for Germanic deities were considered as more 'civilized' than traditional religious practices.

## **Celtic-Germanic**

In older literature many gods and goddesses whose names we know through inscriptions in stone were categorized as Celtic/Gaulish. Today on the basis of etymological research many of them are considered Germanic. However, many works on 'Celtic' literature and web pages uphold those older views and ignore the newer insights, perhaps because literature about Germanic topics does not belong to their field of studies.

Nevertheless, concerning Celtic or Germanic names, there still are a significant number of uncertainties here, especially in the contact zone where Celts and Germanics lived. Because the name of a deity is recognized as Germanic it does not automatically imply that the only worshipers were Germanics. The same applies for some deities with a Gaulish name. An example here is the goddess Nehalennia to whom Romans, Celts and Germanics offered votive stones. Her name is recognized as Germanic and the center of her veneration was on Germanic territory, bordering Celtic lands. Because Celts also offered to her, she is often considered to be a Germanic-Gaulish goddess.

There are deities whose names may best be interpreted as Gaulish, but because those votive stones were found deep in Germanic territory, they are considered Germanic or Gallo-Germanic. Several Germanic peoples in the first centuries CE were quite strongly influenced by Celtic culture and their leaders had Celtic names, thus raising their social status—this makes conclusive decisions in this context all the more difficult. Several *Matronae* (divine

mothers) even show etymological parts of both Celtic and Germanic languages in their names. An example:

The Latinized names of the *MATRONAE AMBIOMARCAE* or *AMBIAMARCAE* are actually seen as such mixed names:

- - The first part is often seen as Gaulish *ambi-*: 'fencing or river' and
- - the second part is seen as Germanic *marka*: 'border, borderland).

These *Matronae* could be responsible for a river which bordered a specific homeland and guard that border.

It seems to be an accepted assumption that such mixed names did not originate from just one people who spoke both languages, but (also) by smaller or bigger different groups of peoples who lived together in the same region, indulging in social contacts where one group spoke Gaulish and the other Germanic.

Additionally, the assumption exists, that in several cases locally the language of the people was a mix (a mixed dialect) of Germanic and Celtic. Apparently, especially under Roman rulership this seem to have be common. Hence, so called 'celticed' Germanics may have used such mixed names.

Then, there are Celtic-oriented conjectures, suggestions and theories based on the rather airy assumption that Celts inhabited all the land up to the Baltic and North Sea, including the area of the later Frisians, before Germanic peoples settled there. In a next conjecture, arriving Germanic tribes are said to have taken over the deities as their own which these Celts would have worshiped before they disappeared from these areas. And finally it is concluded from this, that a whole series of Germanic deities, such as Nerthus, Baduhenna, Sandraudiga, etc. actually would be originally Celtic and only got Germanic names as a result of the Germanic settlement.

All of this is strongly reminiscent of Saxo Grammaticus, who wrote a story of the Danes on behalf of his bishop, in which it should be made clear that Denmark was the cultural highlight of his time in a barbaric environment. He adapted or rewrote historical knowledge of his time in the way that this goal was achieved. Similarly, the Celts are apparently supposed to be 'upgraded'. Yet,

they don't need anything like that. Aside from such a 'Celtomania', they were an outstanding cultural authority in Europe in their time, and Germanic peoples recognized this not only in the contact zone between Celts and Germanic peoples.

## **Matronae**

We know the Latin plural term, MATRONAE from many inscriptions in stone from Roman times in the first four centuries CE. They were found in Gaul, northern Spain, northern Italy and England, but predominately in GERMANIA INFERIOR, the northwest province of the Roman Empire on the European mainland.

To the Romans the term MATRONA firstly had a different meaning than used on the votive stones. Basically it points to a married woman, a wife, but with a connotation of honorability. In Roman society, upper class women were designated in that way. Secondly, in a religious context, the term MATRONA was used as an honorary epithet, like the Vikings used the term *Frowe* for a divine 'noble Lady'.

Additionally, MATRONA also had a protective meaning, similar to the male PATRONUS (patron); during the Middle Ages the masculine term was maintained and the feminine form lost: Beyla is interpreted as a goddess who **patronizes** dairy farming, but we don't say **matronizes**.

Because many MATRONAE appear as Germanic deities, some clarification about them might be useful.

The literature from ancient Antiquity does not provide information about the Germanic goddesses known as MATRONAE, we even don't know the real indigenous name for the term *matrona* in this context. We only know the Latin, usually used as plural MATRONAE because they almost always appear as three figures with one name. Linguistically, several elements from names of Matronae are convincingly recognized as Germanic, e. g. through the suffix *(i)-ms*, which is one of the reasons of determining such names as Germanic.

In the German Rhine region and the eastern Dutch Rhine area, both belonging to the Roman province GERMANIA INFERIOR, these divine

mothers were honored with quite a bit of pomp and circumstance, sometimes they even had their own temples.

Many Germanic soldiers who served in Britain in the Roman army honored them too, but much more privately, like some kinds of 'house goddesses', likely because they lived far away from their homelands.

It is not clearly known from which culture the veneration of Matronae originated, but a Celtic origin is mostly assumed. However, because the oldest votive stone dedicated to Matronae that has been found, dated between 70-89 CE and has an inscription in Latin, a Roman influence may have existed from the beginning. The high tide of the veneration of the Matronae may definitely be seen as a Roman-Celtic-Germanic phenomenon.

In almost all cases, the inscriptions on the votive stones show contractions, abbreviations and shortenings. Often just the first letter of a word or name is shown, many times one sign stands for two letters, etc. The inscriptions in this book are all written out, which means many words and groups of words were interpreted by following the usual conventions in relevant scholarly literature. Although almost all inscriptions speak about redeeming a vow of the giver, they do not clearly say what exactly was promised, hence there is no direct indication to a specific competence of the goddesses. Only by trying to translate the names, assumptions can be made about those competences—these can only be conjectures, from which it is uncertain whether they hit the mark.

## **Deities from Viking mythology**

Many North Germanic deities are mentioned in mainly mythological sources from the Viking era, which is generally considered as the period from approx. 800 CE to approx. 1050 CE, and essentially concerns the Scandinavian Peninsula, Denmark, small regions of the European mainland bordering the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, and Iceland. Actually, those mythological and some historical sources were written down several centuries after that era, but their contents are broadly accepted as originating from an earlier time, s. pp. 317 for a related overview. The main source for Viking or Norse mythology is 'the' Edda:

That name 'Edda' refers to two different Icelandic manuscripts:  
The first is a collection of poems (songs) and we know it by the

name “Elder Edda” or “Poetic Edda”, in older sources also as “Sæmundar-Edda”. The second manuscript was written by the Icelandic author and historian Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241) as a teaching book for poets (Skalds) and contains an extensive presentation of the Norse-heathen mythology. This part is known as the “Younger Edda”, “Snorri's Edda” or “Prose Edda”. Both are usually but not always mentioned as one work under the covering name Edda and are regarded as a very important source for the pre-Christian religion of northern Europe. The Poetic Edda was written in approximately 1270, the poems themselves are assumed to have been created between 900 and 1200. The Prose Edda in its written form is dated to approximately 1220. However, because it cites parts of the Poetic Edda, it must definitely be the younger of the two. Divergent views exist concerning the historical value of the two Eddas, but in general there's a far-reaching agreement that while it gives a good impression of the Norse-heathen faith of the Viking era, it is considered very limited or not suitable at all as a source for provable history.

GardenStone, The Nerthus claim, p. 3

Additionally, there are also quite a few Old Norse epic poems and stories which are disputed as to whether they are sources from the Viking era, or were created in later times. Some consider them as part of the Eddas, others reject that idea. These different views are in most cases tied to different levels of reliability of such sources—or more precisely, to the opinion of scholars about that reliability. Some of the Norse deities appear only once in the sources and their competences remain unclear. Others are mentioned more than once, their competences are clearly mentioned, and they appear in multiple sources. In the following descriptions for each Norse deity, those attestations in the sources are not given extensively; if for a deity just one or a few records from Norse mythology are cited, it does not automatically mean there are no more records.

It appears to be common to divide the deities from Viking mythology into categories of greater or lesser importance, based on the myths themselves. Such a hierarchy is not followed here. In a few cases, the cults around gods are actually known, about most



others nothing similar is passed down, but that does not imply that there were no local or regional cults for them.

There was a time in parts of Sweden when the god Freyr and his cult may have been important for cattle breeders and farmers, thus making him the most important god in the field of agriculture. For the highest nobles in early Anglo-Saxon England, Woden may have been, as their royal divine ancestor, the most important; for the Royal House of Wessex in the early period at first *Seaxnēat*, (Saxnot) was seen as their ancestor, after seven generations he was alternated by Woden, who was added as the father of Seaxnēat as the related genealogy shows: (Woden), Seaxnēat, Gesecg, Andsecg, Swaepa, Sigefugel, Bedca, Offa, Æscwine et al.

In other regions and other times, Thor seems to have been seen as the highest one. The Old Icelandic myths show a divine hierarchy, but it is unknown whether that had existed similarly also among other Germanic people in other areas and other times. It is not even known whether all Viking people shared the hierarchic view which is widespread today.

Another issue which is often mentioned, e. g. in Rudolf Simek's "Dictionary of Germanic Mythology", are the considerations as to which parts of both Eddas do really rely on historical or mythological traditions, and which parts were interpreted or even invented by Snorri Sturluson or other contemporary authors. Also often in doubt is the reliability of sources Sturluson used—Part 3 of the Prologue of the Prose Edda is an example for that; see the citation below, meant for your own consideration. Some well known names of deities and humans can be recognized, both from Classical Antiquity as well as from Norse Mythology:

Near the earth's centre was made that goodliest of homes and haunts that ever have been, which is called Troy, even that which we call Turkland. This abode was much more gloriously made than others, and fashioned with more skill of craftsmanship in manifold wise, both in luxury and in the wealth which was there in abundance. There were twelve kingdoms and one High King, and many sovereignties belonged to each kingdom; in the stronghold were twelve chieftains. These chieftains were in every manly part greatly above other men that have ever been in the world. One king among them was called Múnón or Mennón; and he was wedded to the daughter of the High King Priam, her who was called Tróán;

they had a child named Trór, whom we call Thor. He was fostered in Thrace by a certain war-duke called Lóríkus; but when he was ten winters old he took unto him the weapons of his father. He was as goodly to look upon, when he came among other men, as the ivory that is inlaid in oak; his hair was fairer than gold. When he was twelve winters old he had his full measure of strength; then he lifted clear of the earth ten bear-skins all at one time; and then he slew Duke Lóríkus, his foster-father, and with him his wife Lórá, or Glórá, and took into his own hands the realm of Thrace, which we call Thrúdheim. Then he went forth far and wide over the lands, and sought out every quarter of the earth, overcoming alone all berserks and giants, and one dragon, greatest of all dragons, and many beasts. In the northern half of his kingdom he found the prophetess that is called Síbil, whom we call Sif, and wedded her. The lineage of Sif I cannot tell; she was fairest of all women, and her hair was like gold. Their son was Lóridi, who resembled his father; his son was Einridi, his son Vingethor, his son Vingener, his son Móda, his son Magi, his son Seskef, his son Bedvig, his son Athra (whom we call Annarr), his son Ítermann, his son Heremód, his son Skjaldun (whom we call Skjöld), his son Bjáf (whom we call Bjárr), his son Ját, his son Gudólfr, his son Finn, his son Fríallaf (whom we call Fridleifr); his son was he who is named Vóden, whom we call Odin: he was a man far-famed for wisdom and every accomplishment. His wife was Frígídá, whom we call Frigg.

Brodeur translation

In addition, there are also different views on the question whether the ideas of goddesses and gods, described in both Eddas and Skaldic poetry, came into existence by human acting.

The Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus wrote in the second half of the 12th century his multivolume work *GESTA DANORUM*, which presents the history of the Danes from his own point of view. Quite a few deities, whose names are known from the Eddas, appear in it as humans, and many described events show extensive correspondences with Eddic stories. Yet, only a few decades later, the two Eddas were published in Iceland. Did Saxo modify existing myths about pagan deities in such a way that they became deeds

of people in 'Danaland' from before the start of the Common Era—subsequently to the first historical records available to him?

Or were the myths he had collected really stories about humans?

Were these beings supernatural in the Icelandic author's understanding from the beginning?

There may have been different versions of these ancient myths that the Icelandic authors probably used before Saxo's publication. Would they, depending on the storyteller and the region, tell either of deities or of humans?

No conclusive answer can be given to these and related questions.

In any case, according to Snorri Sturluson and his contemporary scholars, who were all sincere Christians, the Æsir and Vanir they described were not Gods, but mythical ancestors, people from the past. For this much evidence exist, such as chapter 2 of the Gylfaginning in the Prose Edda, which clearly shows this 'humanization' of the gods:

King Gylfi was a wise man and skilled in magic; he was much troubled that the Æsirpeople were so cunning that all things went according to their will. He pondered whether this might proceed from their own nature, or whether the divine powers which they worshipped might ordain such things.

Brodeur, The Prose Edda, p. 13,14

## Jötnar

When it comes to the Norse deities, then the Jötnar, except for a few well-known ones, are a rather forgotten group. The view that they are goddesses and gods or possibly could have been considered as such has only risen significantly in the last ten years. Therefore, they will also have their place here. The Old Norse word *Jötnar* (singular: *Jötunn*) is one of the terms in this language for giants and giantesses. Other terms are *Risi*, *Thursen* and *Trolls*. While the last two terms mentioned usually have a negative connotation, Jötnar has a more neutral content without reference to a respective disposition.

The Old Norse word ***Jötunn*** (*jötunn*) was developed from the Proto-European male noun *\*etunaz*. This is related to Old Norse

*etall*: 'consuming', and Old High German *filuezzalem*: 'greedy'. The name is then interpreted as 'the voracious ones'.

Old Norse **Risi** and Old High German *Riso* are derived from the Proto-Germanic masculine noun *\*wrisjon*. And the Old Saxon adjective *wrisi-like*: 'enormous' is also associated with it.

Old Norse **purs** and Old High German **duris**: 'devil', 'evil spirit' comes from the proto-European masculine noun *\*pur (i) saz*, which is derived from Proto-European *\*purēnan*. It means 'giant' and also 'fiend', and that is associated etymologically with Sanskrit *turá*: 'strong, mighty, rich'.

The word **troll** or **tröll**, Old Norse **troll**, means 'fiend' or 'monster'. The origin is not historically confirmed. There may be a connection to the Middle High German verb *trollen* and with the English *to troll*: 'walk around, toddling off'. Likewise is a reference presumed with the old Norwegian verb *troll* (New Norwegian: *trylle*): 'working magic, practicing sorcery, as well as the Danish *trylle*: 'to in- or evoke'.

The total number of giants in the Old Norse documents is a bit controversial, but generally accepted are more than 250 mentions.

The Jötnar are often associated with natural phenomena in the world and with the elemental forces. The destructive, chaotic energies of the environment were life threatening for our ancestors, and thus giants were often considered deadly, destructive beings. Jötnar could through their working in the various wild, invincible natural forces of the elements both be friends and enemies of humans—sometimes even both at the same moment.

Although in many mythological stories Jötnar are the main opponents of the Æsir and Vanir, they are also wives, parents, grandparents and friends of those Norse gods.

They are the 'First People' that came into being when the universe was created. Just like the Æsir, there is hardly a Norse story or a poem in which no Jötunn is part of. The first song of the Poetic Edda, the *Völuspá*, after in the first verse the audience is exhorted to listen, starts with the oldest memories, and that is about the Jötnar:

Ek man jötna  
ár of borna,

I still remember the Jötnar,  
the firstborn,

The discussion as to whether all Jötnar are also deities, may probably never come to a satisfactory end. Some whom we know from mythology are deities, such as Skaði and Gerðr. Many other goddesses and gods are descendants of Jötnar, the most prominent of which is Odin.

Considering marital connections, it may be that in Norse Mythology Æsir, Vanir and Jötnar either are one 'people' altogether or Æsir and Vanir are special groups of the Jötnar.

In the Norse creation myth, the body of the primordial giant Ymir, father of the lineage of Giants, was used for the creation of the earth and the stars. He is also Odin's great-grandfather, who, for whatever reason, with two other gods created the first humans.

If a communicative connection between members of the giant people and humans is a condition to classify them as gods, then many Jötnar are likely no gods. Since we know very little about the deities who in everyday life actually were worshiped by Norse peoples, in this consideration it can not be clearly determined, which Jötnar have been considered as gods. In addition, we don't even know all the giants by name. Therefore, by far not all Jötnar are included in the following catalog. There are some of them who are in the myths referred to, or interpreted as goddesses or gods, and a few more, who possibly can be seen as such. Those who are included in the lexicon, are all interpreted as deities.

In the old sources, such as the "Prose Edda", many sagas, and the *GESTA DANORUM* (History of the Danes) from the 12th and 13th century, be they Æsir, Vanir or Jötnar, are presented as mythical ancestors of the humans.

## **Old Norse translations**

"Old Norse" is a collective term for the North-Germanic languages and dialects, spoken by the inhabitants of Scandinavia and their overseas settlements starting ca. 800 (which is also the beginning of the Viking Era) until at least ca. 1350. Already during this period the process of an ongoing gradual differentiation took place in which the languages in the several regions were drifting away from each other leading slowly to the modern Scandinavian languages.

Therefore, concerning mythology and history, no Old Norse editions are widely used but almost entirely translations of the Prose and Poetic Edda and other relevant sources. Many such

translations exist and none of them is equal to the others. There are several reasons for that.

- Firstly, many Old Norse terms have more than one meaning and there are many cases where in the context of a text several meanings would fit. Choosing from them is the choice of each translator.
- Secondly, the aims of the translators were often different; some sought to make a translation which was as literal as possible, others primarily tried to keep the unique metric system of the poems which caused a more free translation. Others again tried to translate in a way which they thought their readers would best understand the contents; which often led to quite heavy and differing interpretations.
- And in the third place, not all Old Norse terms are clear today; e. g. in the Old Norse line *grét ok at Óði gull Freyja* from the "Nafnaþulur" (part of the Prose Edda), the word *grét* does not appear in consulted Old Norse dictionaries or lexicons of Old Norse names, so the word can only be interpreted. The goddess Freyja and her husband Ódr can be recognized easy and Old Norse dictionaries give for *gull* the meaning 'gold'. *Grét* likely might deal with tears and crying because from chapter 35 of the Gylfaginning, part of the Prose Edda, we know that Freyja wept red-golden tears because Ódr seemed to be lost on his long journeys. Knowing that, *grét* can be connected as a form of the Old Norse verb *gráta*: 'to weep, crying out loud'.

Correspondingly, the citations used below from different Edda translations are not necessarily the most literal ones.

For the relevant citations below from the Prose or Poetic Edda, a handful of different translations of each were consulted and they also show differences in their stanza numbering. As an example: in the Bellows and Larrington translations of the Poetic Edda in stanza 62 of the *Völuspá* we are told about the return of Baldr and Hodr after Ragnarök, while the same information appears in the Thorpe translation in stanza 60.

Another issue is that comparing such translations can be problematic, because not all translations are complete, a few only contain the major parts and most of them even miss the "Nafnaþulur", the last section of the "Skáldskaparmál", part of the

Prose Edda, in which e. g. all kinds of beings from Norse mythology are listed in verse.

## **Backprojecting Norse deities to the Roman era**

Several deities we know from the Norse sources from the 13th Century and later are often identified with deities on the European mainland from many centuries earlier, although such a comparison is not documented at all in contemporary sources.

The Roman god Mercury mentioned in a Germanic context is in hindsight equated with Wodan or Odin and Hercules with Donar or Thor. Often such equivalencies are brought forward as hard facts. However, they are only theories, in essence mainly based on linguistic interpretations:

- First Proto-Germanic and Germanic words are reconstructed by linguists—it would be more correct to speak of attempts at reconstruction—words which are presumed to have belonged to everyday contemporary language.
- Then some of those words are presumed to have had additionally included a religious content. After accepting such a presumption, a theonym (god name) is 'concluded'.
- In the next step, both the everyday mundane words and the corresponding theonyms are attributed to all Germanic peoples who likely spoke a Germanic language.

After having been 'assessed' this way that **the** Germanic peoples in Roman times worshiped these gods, the assumed spheres of competence of these deities are compared with Roman god names mentioned in a Germanic context. After a few similarities in those competences are assigned, it is concluded that e. g. with Hercules in such a context Donar was meant and Mercury 'only would have been' Wodan.

Thinking critically about such equations is not the problem. The main problem is that when that is said or written openly, many people feel attacked because in their opinions such traditional equations would be as clear as facts—however, they are not. Instead of really thinking it over, the speaker/writer is either ignored or is just ridiculed. (See for a related discussion: "The Mercury—Woden complex").

Another topic is the outdated but still circulating opinion, that in the first centuries CE hardly any differences existed between the different Germanic languages throughout Europe. The study of the inscriptions in stone concerning the Matronae shows that already in the 2nd-3rd Century no overall Germanic language existed—even inside North Sea Germanic different languages (dialects) could be ascertained. That makes comparisons between Norse languages from the Viking era (which also wasn't one uniform language) and 'West Germanic' more difficult and notional than generally is thought.

Despite the aforementioned problematics, one surely can reflect on whether with the god name Mercury Wodan/Odin is meant, with Hercules Donar/Thor and with Mars, the god of war, Týr, etc. But, to state it clearly, convincing clarification about that can not be obtained, because those Norse gods only clearly make their appearance in medieval texts. Whether they have been worshiped under those passed down names (or in recognizable variations in Proto-Germanic) with their characters as described in the Norse sources since the early Germanic period and for all Germanic peoples is simply an unanswerable question.

See also the related discussion in the following lexicon.

## **Underlying aims of Classical and Norse medieval works**

The lack of a few words concerning a careful and reserved use of the sources from Classical Antiquity and the Viking Era would be inexcusable. Therefore, a short, sketchy discussion of a few of these sources may serve as examples for the kinds of issues involved.

The "Germania" from the end of the 1st Century CE by the Roman historian and member of the Roman senate Publius Cornelius Tacitus (ca. 58 CE-ca. 120) was seen until the early 20th Century as a reliable historical source for information about the geographic region called "Germania" and its inhabitants, the Germanic peoples, including their cultures and religions.

Since then many scholars published the results of their critical research of the "Germania" and quite a few underlying aims were clearly and convincingly brought to the surface in which was demonstrated that much information of the "Germania" was wrong,



either because the use of old written sources (Pliny, Caesar) or second- or third hand inaccurate oral information from merchants or other private informants, or because of the use of stylization according to literary conventions which prevailed over the correctness of the information. Tacitus likely had more than one aim for writing his *Germania*, one of them was to use his ethnological essay for pointing out social, moral, and political subject matters which were topics of conversation in the Roman society of his time.

Tacitus points out similarities between the Germani and the Romans, not as they were in his day, but as they were in the idealized past. It is above all in passages like these that the Germani appear as moral exemplars for contemporary Romans.

J. B. Rives, *Tacitus Germania*, p. 62

To make this aim as clear as possible to his readers, it is assumed that Tacitus adjusted his information accordingly.

Likely another aim of Tacitus was to convince the Roman emperor, who was in *Germania* at that time, that both the Germanic peoples and their improvident territories would be of low interest for Rome. It would be better to let the tribes continue to strive against, and tearing each other apart. That surely also is assumed to have been led to altering of information in accordance with that aim. The next problem concerning the reliability is that Tacitus saw the Germanic peoples and their homelands through the lens of the Roman ethnographic tradition, and because of that, his information was formed and shaped by the rather narrow expectations of the contemporary Roman views on 'barbarian' peoples.

The "*Germania*", a narrative without the usual introduction, unusable for military use because its geographical information was too vague, was likely also meant as light-reading; through its literary schemes and well-spread dramatic descriptions it was meant to entertain.

The discussion about the degree of reliability of Tacitus' "*Germania*" has not ended yet; although scholars dealing widely with related history reject the work as a reliable historical source, the arguments and the degree of rejection differ. There are quite a few more issues about these reliability problematics which are left out here, but the ones described here meet the problem sufficiently.

The same questionability applies to many other texts from Classical Antiquity.

Although the unique and beautifully expressive Norse sources passed down an abundance of richness of mythological information from Viking times, some critical notes should not be left out about them.

Until the beginning of the 20th Century the narratives of Saxo Grammaticus (ca. 1140- ca.1220), in his *GESTA DANORUM* (Deeds of the Danes) were largely viewed as reliable information about the earliest history of Denmark. Then in 1915, the Scanian brothers and scholars Curt and Lauritz Weibull proved without a doubt that Saxo was not a reliable, meticulously working historian at all, but that he subordinated his presentation to ideological purposes. For the first nine volumes of his work, Saxo used mythological sources to create an ongoing Danish history in an analogy to European history from the start of the Common Era (birth of Christ) until 1185, after the conversion to Christianity had taken place. Saxo wrote his work not on his own initiative, he was ordered by an archbishop to write a Danish history. An underlying purpose was to create a long and famous historical overview to prove that Denmark was at the time the center of the cultural Norse world, surrounded by 'barbarian' peoples.

What Saxo changed in the mythological sources he had at his disposal in favor of his political purposes can not be verified anymore; but due to related research quite a lot may have been distorted, which meanwhile decreased the level of reliability of his work greatly.

Together the "Prose Edda" by the Icelandic scholar and politician Snorri Sturluson and the "Poetic Edda" are unique presentations of Icelandic mythology, mixed with quite a few aspects from Norway. However, seeing those works also as a representation of **the** Norse or Germanic religion is wrong.

- - Firstly, that view is a fallacy because such a pure and consistent religion never existed, as it is a basic cultural characteristic of religion that it is 'fed' by a wide variety of different sources in a continuous change and development.

- - Secondly, the Eddas present us many specific Icelandic traditions which most likely differed from Norway, Sweden and Denmark. This can be observed when the myths Saxo narrated are compared with the ones from Iceland. Parallels may be visible, perhaps different names for the same deities are used, but that certainly can not be expected as a self-propelling automatism. Different heathen religions based on or closely related to natural phenomena all necessarily show a lot of similarities, but most likely each people gave them their own content which also had its own development. The bigger differences must have been found by comparing them to earlier times and different regions.

Because of that it is a widely accepted view today among related sciences, that the Germanic peoples from Roman times until the Christianization in the different regions had many religions which both had similarities to and differences between them.

- - Thirdly, it must be considered that concerning the Edda and the Skaldic poetry, Sturluson and the Icelandic poets since the 10th Century did not aim to write historical works. Snorri's aim was to write a teaching book for Skalds (poets and singers); to keep the attention of the audience as effective as possible, the skalds presented in a highly imaginative and extremely vivid way descriptions of how they interpreted the myths they had gathered or learned—it surely is understandable and acceptable that they made their contributions attractive, and that they weren't very distinctive in valid tradition and embellished fiction—that attitude likely even was necessary to present it in the typical Norse poetical meter.
- - And in the fourth place, at the time those works were published, Iceland was already Christianized for almost two centuries. Much of the heathen past surely remained in oral narratives and myths, most likely partially only fragmentary and murky.

Sturluson will have bridged the gaps in his information according to his own logic and knowledge, but those

interpretations today are assumed to have led to mistakes and errors that are recognizable today.

Probably he gathered much information orally from the people in his neighborhood including also Celtic (Irish) people; many of the Norwegian settlers on Iceland had lived for some generations in Ireland and brought their Irish wives and also servants with them—because of that, very likely Celtic folk tales and lore were mixed with Scandinavian myths and some of them may also be found in the written Icelandic mythology.

For this reason it is unquestionably assumed that Irish folk tales and traditions were mixed up with Scandinavian myths. Likely, some of them have found their way into written Icelandic mythology.

Generally ... Behind every seemingly objective statement in related literature that "this author wrote, that ...", "that poet versified, ...", should follow the question why that was written or versified. Sometimes the aim is clear, e. g. a poem, meant as hymn of praise for a king: the deeds of that king are set positively in the limelight (making him a hero), even deeds are often adjusted or sometimes even invented for that aim.

History is usually written by the victors, those who are reigning, those who are politically in command; that implies that their own negative actions either are left out or are presented positively. It means that history and mythology do not necessarily touch 'historical truth'.

A major problem is that hidden aims of historical, mythological or poetical relics of the past, apart from a few exceptions, cannot be traced anymore and thus remain unclear.

What is more, the contents of passed down myths and stories can not be compared with contemporary common daily life, because exactly about the everyday life of those common people hardly any precise information is passed down.

## **Heathen deities from later sources**

Many of the deities mentioned in this book whose names are at earliest recorded after the Viking era cannot be traced back to the time before the Renaissance period (starting at the end of the 14th Century and ending in the beginning of the 17th Century). Such

god names are often ignored in today's scholarly literature because they are considered as too obscure or even as not having existed at all. Most of those names were discovered as a scholarly interest awoke for the lore and folk tales of the common people. Myths, folk tales and lore surely are indeed a very uncertain source to rely on and usually they cannot be verified as having their origins in heathen times, so we have to live with that uncertainty..... as we similarly also have to with many deities mentioned in Norse mythology: Is Thialfi, who became Thor's companion, a god? And Kvasir, or Mithotin? On the other hand, we have from the Poetic Edda the story in which the ferryman Harbardr refuses to ferry Thor, followed by a verbal 'contest'. Harbardr is seen as an epithet of Odin, in an older view Loki was favored for that role. But those are just interpretations, perhaps Harbardr might be just another divine being, a separate god: Why would Odin be the only one with a gray beard? (that is what the name *Harbardr* means); why would he cheat his own son?; why didn't Thor recognize his own father?; perhaps the ferryman was just a grouchy, wise, old and bearded human.

Quite a few of the inscriptions in the much older votive stones also have their uncertainties. It often looks like a kind of personal taste to decide the level of uncertainty and on the basis of that to refuse or accept the existence of such deities at least as a possibility.

Concerning the Germanic gods and goddesses whose names we know from Classical Antiquity, from the Viking era, from post-Viking centuries and since the Renaissance period there are very many of them who are fraught with that uncertainty—very divergent opinions exist about the reliability of related Roman literature, about etymological interpretations, about the myths from the Eddas, about the related late medieval and later sources, and about related folk tales, folk belief and lore.

Many of the current names of deities are based on legends, the vast majority of which are written in the 19th century. The book author and editor in a broadcasting company, Gerd Bauer writes in a critical comment:

Based on the activities of the Brothers Grimm, a broad stream of more or less legendary works poured into the salons of the bourgeoisie, especially around the middle of the (19th) century. What was collected there was by no means the raw material

from the mouth of the people, but their versions were formed in the spirit of the authors—expanded, processed, poetically worded, condensed, interpreted and modeled. In short: there was a lot of manipulation. Such spoofing was considered inevitable, after all, the goat herder on the Glauberg hill was no more proficient in the erudite language than the herb picking woman from the high Vogelsberg area. And the learned collectors knew best what the suppliers of sagas from the common people "actually" wanted to tell. So the oral material was reformatted into sublime folk poetry. The common people were only supposedly embraced, but in reality they were simply appropriated. The zeitgeist of the educated drove the poet's baggage train through the plains of the »little people« at a gallop. In the runup to the »unification of the German tribes«, by accessing to the world of legends »that dreamland of national unity was created, which in reality began to emerge with great reluctance and only hesitantly with the establishment of the customs union.« [...] Following on from the myth research of the Brothers Grimm, one was now widely on the trail of old German gods. Every anecdote from the Wetterau area, every Odenwald narrative, was clapped through this grid. And lo and behold, in the legends of German districts, there was an endless coming and going of the gods of Germania. The author J. W. Wolf once again: »Each of these brightly colored pictures becomes an awe-inspiring, serious monument to ancient Germanic glory, before which the fathers faithfully bowed their knees and iron necks more than a millennium ago. The gods and goddesses, believed to be lost, looked upon them with their old strength, with their old defiance and anger, and with their old love and kindness and mildness, upon those, who then 'learn' again to be one proud people. ...«

Translated from Gerd Bauer, *Geheimnisvolles Hessen*, p. 58

So it is very often a personal decision concerning those uncertain records whether to accept or refuse the possible existence of the mentioned deities in the belief of the people from the corresponding times. In almost all cases such choices may rely on subjective personal 'thumbs up or thumbs down' without really objective reasons. As long as it is accepted as such, knowing such