

Norse gods mythology



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Viking gods of the Norse mythology had their roots in the Scandinavian prehistory, particularly during the Germanic-Iron Age that has come to be known as the Proto-Norse Age. The mythology flourished consequent to Christianization of the Scandinavians. This took place during the Vikings Age and that's why Norse gods are today referred to as the Viking gods.

The surviving aspects of the Norse mythology are mainly because it became overly popular during the High Middle Ages such that, the gods were phrased into the Scandinavian folklore. The Vikings established footholds and colonies in a host of regions stretching from England to Greenland. They spread the Norse heritage wherever they went. Up until the Elizabethan age, most villages in these regions were named after Norse gods.

While the mythology brewed up only as a cultural expression of the Romanists Viking revival, Norse gods became an undying influence to popular culture and literature of the time. Today, we still have depictions of the Norse gods around the world and in our surviving literature. Three days of our calendar week and the sun itself, bear the names of Norse Gods, (Sunday named after Odin, Thursday named after Thur, Friday named after Freyr).

Regions, Peoples and Cultures

Norse gods are thought to have originated in Norway. However, documented evidence shows that the mythology was distributed in its origins in the entire Scandinavian region that includes Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Actually, the Vikings were Swedes and they mostly traveled eastwards while Norwegians and Danes mostly traveled westwards (Lindow, 2001). This

helped the Norse mythology to spread slightly in Finland, then greatly in Iceland by 800AD. Both of these regions lay on the eastward path of the Swedes.

With time however, the Norse mythology had spread in the entire Scandinavian region equally, thus covering Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and ultimately everywhere else the Vikings traveled to, including some Germanic territories. The Norse gods thus entered into numerous cultures, tribes and folklores such that it is very hard to pin the original thread of the mythology before the gods became a regional phenomena (Lindow, 2001).

The Anthropogenesis of Norse Gods

The Genesis of Norse gods accrue from a very interesting tale. According to the Norse myth, life begun in two worlds, that of fire (Muspelheim) and that of ice (Niflheim). In an isolated event, warm air from Muspelheim collided with cold Niflheim, two creatures emerged namely Audhumla the icy cow and jotunn Ymir. Ymir's foot began to breed immediately and the blood became a man and a son. From his armpits, there emerged a woman. According to the tale, Ymir was the progenitor of Jotnar.

When Ymir slept, Muspelheim's heat made him sweat profusely and the sweat became Surtr. It was then that Ymir woke up and milked Audhumbla the icy cow. He drank the milk as Audhumbla herself licked a salt stone. This salt stone developed man's hair the next day and a head on the second day. On the following day, a grown up man (Buri) emerged from the salt stone.

Buri fathered Borr with an unknown woman. It was Borr who then fathered the three Norse gods namely, Ve, Odin and Vili.

The gods soon became very strong such that, they were able to kill Ymir. Ymir's blood caused a flood all over the world, drowning everyone else but the gods. But within no time, they were able to populate and even exceed the numbers in the world before Ymir died. They are said to have used Ymir's flesh to create seven more worlds. Ymir's blood was used to create the rivers, lakes, oceans and seas while the brain was used for the clouds. Muspelheim sparks yielded the stars. Ymir's skull was used to create the heaven; thus emerged the universe.

On a sunny afternoon as the gods were walking by, they saw two tree trunks somewhere and they transformed the trunks into a human shape. God Odin gave the trunks life, god Vili added the mind and god Ve contributed the ability to see, hear and speak. These two mortals were named by the gods as Embla and Ask. The gods established a kingdom at the middle of the earth for the mortals and fenced them in with a gigantic fence created from Ymir's eyelashes; thus emerged the humans and their world.

Norse Gods and Cosmology

The Norse gods created a total of nine worlds namely Asgard the world of Esir, Vanaheimr the world of Vanir, Midgard the middle world assigned to humans, Musphellheim the world of fire, Nifilheim the world of ice, Svartalfaheim the world of Surt, Alfheimr the world of elves and Hel the dead's underworld.

Norse Gods Worship Practices

The Swedish temple, Gamla Uppsala was the Norse god's centre of worship until it was destroyed during the 11th century. From there on, Norse worship rarely had temples. Worshippers created sacred groves in their homes with an altar made from piled stones. They also kept wooden statues representing gods Thor, Odin and Freyr.

Priesthood in Norse worship existed though not as a professional outfit. Anthropologists believe that most Germanic kingships evolved from the priestly office of Norse worship. Such offices were responsible for conducting sacrifice offerings and were ordained from specific families. According to Eric C. (2002), some of these sacrifices have been said to involve human offerings (human sacrifices). Rather than being by force however, most of those sacrificed had volunteered to be buried with dead lords as their accompaniment. Some two Swedish kings, King Olof Tratalja and King Dolmalde were allegedly sacrificed to purge the causes of a seven-year drought (Eric, 2002).

Modern Depictions of Norse Gods

Today, we have several stone images depicting the Norse gods such as Loki in Denmark, which bears curled lips and dandy-like mustaches. In Britain, we have the Gosforth Cross with a host of Norse mythological images sewn together. Smaller images like figurines and which depict the one-eyed Norse god Odin, god Tena with her shiny magic staff and god Thor with his hammer are to be found all over Sweden and Norway.