

Gnostic Runology – Nordic Mythology: Odin (aka Wotan)

<http://www.GnosticStudies.org/Runes>

The following information is a paraphrase from *Norse Mythology* (1884) by Rasmus B. Anderson:

The Mythological and Historical Odin

The Sagas of Nordic Mythology paint Odin as the most persuasive of men. Nothing could resist the force of his words. He sometimes enlivened his people with poetic verses and he was not only a great poet, but it was he who taught the art of poetry to the Norsemen. He was the inventor of the runic characters, which may very well be called a sort of second speech. But what most contributed to him passing for a god was his skill in magic. He could run over the world in the twinkling of an eye; he had the command of the air and the tempests; he could transform himself into all sorts of shapes, could raise the dead, could foretell the future, could deprive his enemies of health and strength through enchantments and even discover all the treasures concealed in the earth. He knew how to sing so tender and melodious that the very plains and mountains would open and expand with delight; the ghosts (attracted by the sweetness of his songs) would leave their infernal caverns and stand motionless around him. Such is the legendary Odin of the North, and he was the great example that the Norsemen had to imitate in war and in peace.

Various classes of beings are mentioned in the Nordic Sagas. Life is a conflict between these beings, for the spiritual everywhere seeks to penetrate and govern the physical; but it also everywhere meets resistance. The Nordic divinities called *Asa*, *Aesir* or *Æsir* (pronounced "ICE-ir") unite themselves with another group of divinities called *Van* or *Vanir*, and rule over heaven and earth. The giants war against the *Aesir* & *Vanir*. The elves belong to the *Aesir*, while the dwarfs align with the giants, yet also serve the *Aesir*.

Odin commanded the *Aesir* (whose country was situated between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, and whose principal city was *Asgard*). Odin, having united under his banners the youth of the neighboring nations, marched toward the west and north of Europe, subduing all the peoples he met on his way and giving their kingdoms to his sons. Many Royal Families of Northern Europe are said to be descended from these sons. Thus Hengist and Horsa (the Saxon chiefs who conquered Britain in the fifth century) counted Odin in the number of their ancestors. The Royal Families of East Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway all also claim lineage from Odin.

After Odin had finished this glorious achievements he retired into Sweden, where (perceiving his end to be near) he gathering round him the friends and companions of his fortune. He gave himself nine wounds in the form of a circle with the point of a spear, and many other cuts in his skin with his sword. As he was dying he declared he was going back to *Asgard* to take his seat among the gods at an eternal banquet, where he would receive (with great honors) all who should expose themselves intrepidly in battle and die bravely with their swords in their hands. As soon as he had breathed his last breath, they carried his body to *Sigtuna*, where (in accordance with a custom introduced by him) his body was burned with much pomp and magnificence.

Odin: the All-Father

Odin is the first and eldest of the *Aesir*. The name 'Odin' is derived from the verb *vada* (imperfect *ód*) "to walk" (compare *watan*, *wuot*, *wuth*, *wüthen*, *wuothan*, *wodan*). He is called "All-father", because he is the father of all the gods. With the gods *Hoener* and *Loder*, he makes the first man & woman and gives them spirit. All enterprise in peace and in war proceeds from him. He is the author of war and the inventor of poetry. All knowledge comes from him and (as has been said) he is the inventor of the runes.

Odin is the all-pervading spirit of the world, and produces life & spirit (*önd* & *aand*). As such, he permeates all animate and inanimate matter, the whole universe. He governs all things and although the other deities are powerful, they all serve and obey him as children do their father. He confers many favors on gods and men...

Besides "All-father", Odin is also called *Valfather* (father of the slain), because he chooses all who fall in combat as his children. For their abode he has prepared *Valhal* (or *Valhallah*) and *Vingolf*, where they are called *einherjes* (heroes). The heroes are constantly the object of his care. He guides and protects the brave heroes through their whole life; he watches over their birth and over their whole development; gives them wonderful weapons, teaches them new arts of war; assists them in critical emergencies, accompanies them in war, and takes the impetus out of the enemy's weapons; and when the warrior has at last grown old, he provides that they may not die upon their bed, but instead fall in honorable combat. Finally, he protects the social organization: he revenges murder, protects the sanctity of the oath, subdues hatred, and dispels anxieties and sorrows.

Odin: Inventor and Master of the Runes

The original meaning of the word 'rune' is "secret", and it was used to signify a mysterious song, mysterious doctrine, mysterious speech, and mysterious writing. It is said that the Nordic peoples had an alphabet called runes, before they learned the so-called Roman characters... But what does it mean that Odin is the inventor of the runes? Odin's runes are an expression of his being and represent the might and wisdom with which he rules all of nature, even its most secret phenomena. Odin, as master of the runes, is the spirit that subdues and controls physical nature. He governs the wind, the sea, the fire, and the spirit of the human being, the hate of the enemy and the love of women, etc. Everything submits to his mighty sway, and thus the runes were carved on all possible things in heaven and on earth.

The runes of Odin were carved on the shield which stands before the shining god, on the ear of *Aarvak* (the ever-wakeful), and on the hoof of *Alsvin*; on the wheels that roll under *Rogner's* chariot, on his horse's reins, on the paw of the bear and on the tongue of *Brage*; on the claws of the wolf, on the beak of the eagle, on bloody wings and on the end of the rainbow bridge (the *Bifröst*); on glass, on gold, on wine and on herb; on *Vile's* heart, on the point of his spear, on *Grane's* breast, on the nails of the *Norns* (who rule the destiny of gods & men) and on the beak of the owl. All that were carved were afterwards scraped off, mixed with the holy mead and sent out into all parts of the world: some are with the *Aesir*, some with the elves, and some are with the sons of men.

Odin hung nine days on the *Yggdrasil*-World tree (the Nordic "tree of life") and sacrificed himself to himself. As mentioned earlier, he also wounded himself with his own weapon. Do you know that knowledge cannot be acquired without labor, struggle, sacrifice, and without solemn consecration of one's self to a subject? Did you know that Odin gave his own eye for a drink from *Mimer's* fountain? For the sake of this struggle to acquire knowledge, the spirit offers itself to itself. It knows that hardships and sufferings must be encountered on the road to knowledge, but it bravely faces these obstacles; that is its greatness, its glory, and its power.

Nine nights Odin hangs on the *Yggdrasil*-World tree. Rome was not built in a day, nor is knowledge acquired in a day. The spirit is developed through a slow process. During those nine nights, Odin neither eats nor drinks: he fasts. You must also curb your bodily appetites, and, like Odin, look down into the depths and penetrate the mysteries of nature with your spirit. Then you will learn all those wonderful rune songs that Odin learned, crying, before he fell from the tree. Odin is the author of the runic incantations that played such a conspicuous part in the social and religious life of the Norsemen. The belief in occultism was universal among Nordic peoples, and had its origin in their mythology, and (not surprisingly) Odin is also the inventor of the magical arts.