

Odin

This article is about the Germanic god. For other uses, see **Odin** (disambiguation).

Germanic mythology, **Odin** (from Old Norse **Óðinn**) is a widely revered god. In Norse mythology, from which stems most of our information about the god, Odin is associated with healing, death, royalty, the gallows, knowledge, battle, sorcery, poetry, frenzy, and the runic alphabet, and is the husband of the goddess Frigg. In wider Germanic mythology and paganism, Odin was known in Old English as **Wōden**, in Old Saxon as **Wōdan**, and in Old High German as **Wuotan** or **Wōtan**, all stemming from the reconstructed Proto-Germanic theonym **wōdanaz**.

Odin is a prominently mentioned god throughout the recorded history of the Germanic peoples, from the Roman occupation of regions of Germania through the tribal expansions of the Migration Period and the Viking Age. In the modern period, Odin continued to be acknowledged in the rural folklore of Germanic Europe. References to Odin appear in place names throughout regions historically inhabited by the ancient Germanic peoples, and the day of the week Wednesday bears his name in many Germanic languages, including English.

In Anglo-Saxon England, Odin held a particular place as a euhemerized ancestral figure among royalty, and he is frequently referred to as a founding figure among various other Germanic peoples, including the Langobards. Forms of his name appear frequently throughout the Germanic record, though narratives regarding Odin are mainly found in Old Norse works recorded in Iceland, primarily around the 13th century. These texts make up the bulk of modern understanding of Norse mythology.

In Old Norse texts, Odin is depicted as one-eyed and long-bearded, frequently wielding a spear named Gungnir, and wearing a cloak and a broad hat. He is often accompanied by his animal companions—the wolves Geri and Freki and the ravens Huginn and Muninn, who bring him information from all over Midgard—and rides the flying, eight-legged steed Sleipnir across the sky and into the underworld. Odin is attested as having many sons, most famously the god Baldr with Frigg, and is known by hundreds of names. In these texts, he frequently seeks greater knowledge, at times in disguise (most famously by obtaining the Mead of Poetry), makes wagers with his wife Frigg over the outcome of exploits, and takes part in both the creation of the world by way of slaying the

primordial being Ymir and the gift of life to the first two humans Ask and Embla. Odin has a particular association with Yule, and mankind's knowledge of both the runes and poetry is also attributed to him.

In Old Norse texts, Odin is given primacy over female beings associated with the battlefield—the valkyries—and oversees Valhalla, where he receives half of those who die in battle, the einherjar. The other half are chosen by the goddess Freyja for her afterlife location, Fólkvangr. Odin consults the disembodied, herb-embalmed head of the wise being Mimir for advice, and during the foretold events of Ragnarök, Odin is told to lead the einherjar into battle before being consumed by the monstrous wolf Fenrir. In later folklore, Odin appears as a leader of the Wild Hunt, a ghostly procession of the dead through the winter sky. He has also been associated with charms and other forms of magic, particularly in Old English and Old Norse texts.

Odin has been a frequent subject of study in Germanic studies, and numerous theories have been developed regarding his characterization. Some of these focus on Odin's particular relation to other figures; for example, the fact that Freyja's husband Óðr appears to be something of an etymological doublet of the god, whereas Odin's wife Frigg is in many ways similar to Freyja, and that Odin has a particular relation to the figure of Loki. Other approaches focus on Odin's place in the historical record, a frequent question being whether the character of Odin is derived from Proto-Indo-European religion, or whether he developed later in Germanic society. In the modern period, Odin has inspired numerous works of poetry, music, and other forms of media. He is venerated in most forms of the new religious movement Heathenry, together with other gods venerated by the ancient Germanic peoples; some branches focus particularly on him.

1 Etymology, other names, and Wednesday

The Old Norse theonym *Óðinn* (popularly anglicized as *Odin*) and its cognates, including Old English *Wōden*, Old Saxon *Wōden*, and Old High German *Wuotan*, derive from the reconstructed Proto-Germanic theonym **wōdanaz*. The masculine noun **wōdanaz* developed from the Proto-Germanic adjective **wōđaz*, related to Latin *vātēs* and Old Irish *fáith*, both meaning 'seer, prophet'. Adjectives stemming from **wōđaz* include

Gothic *wops* 'possessed', Old Norse *óðr*, 'mad, frantic, furious', and Old English *wōd* 'mad'.^[1]

The adjective **wōdaz* (or **wōdō*) was further substantivized, leading to Old Norse *óðr* 'mind, wit, soul, sense',^[2] Old English *ellen-wōd* 'zeal', Middle Dutch *woet* 'madness', and Old High German *wuot* 'thrill, violent agitation'. Additionally the Old Norse noun *æði* 'rage, fury' and Old High German *wuotī* 'madness' derive from the feminine noun **wōdīn*, from **wōdaz*. The weak verb **wōdjanan*, also derived from **wōdaz*, gave rise to Old Norse *æða* 'to rage', Old English *wēdan* 'to be mad, furious', Old Saxon *wōdian* 'to rage', and Old High German *wuoten* 'to be insane, to rage'.^[1]

Over 170 names are recorded for the god Odin (see List of names of Odin). These names are variously descriptive of attributes of the god, refer to myths involving him, or refer to religious practices associated with the god. This multitude of names makes Odin the god with the most names known among the Germanic peoples.^[3]

The weekday name *Wednesday* derives from Old English *wōdnesdæg*. Cognate terms are found in other Germanic languages, such as Middle Low German *wōdensdach* (Dutch *Woensdag*), and Old Norse *Óðinsdagr* (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish *Onsdag*). All of these terms derive from Proto-Germanic **Wodensdag*, itself a Germanic interpretation of Latin *Dies Mercurii* ("Day of Mercury"). However, in Old High German, the name derived from Odin's was replaced by a translation of Church Latin *media hebdomas* ('middle of the week') hence modern German *Mittwoch*.^[4]

2 Attestations

2.1 Roman Era to Migration Period

The earliest records of the Germanic peoples were recorded by the Romans, and in these works Odin is frequently referred to—via a process known as *interpretatio romana* (where characteristics perceived to be similar by Romans result in identification of a non-Roman god as a Roman deity)—as the Roman god *Mercury*. The first clear example of this occurs in the Roman historian Tacitus's late 1st-century work *Germania*, where, writing about the religion of the Suebi (a confederation of Germanic peoples), he comments that "among the gods Mercury is the one they principally worship. They regard it as a religious duty to offer to him, on fixed days, human as well as other sacrificial victims. Hercules and Mars they appease by animal offerings of the permitted kind" and adds that a portion of the Suebi also venerate "Isis". In this instance, Tacitus refers to the god Odin as "Mercury", Thor as "Hercules", and Týr as "Mars", and the identity of the "Isis" of the Suebi has been debated.^[5]

Anthony Birley has noted that Odin's apparent identification with Mercury has little to do with Mercury's classi-

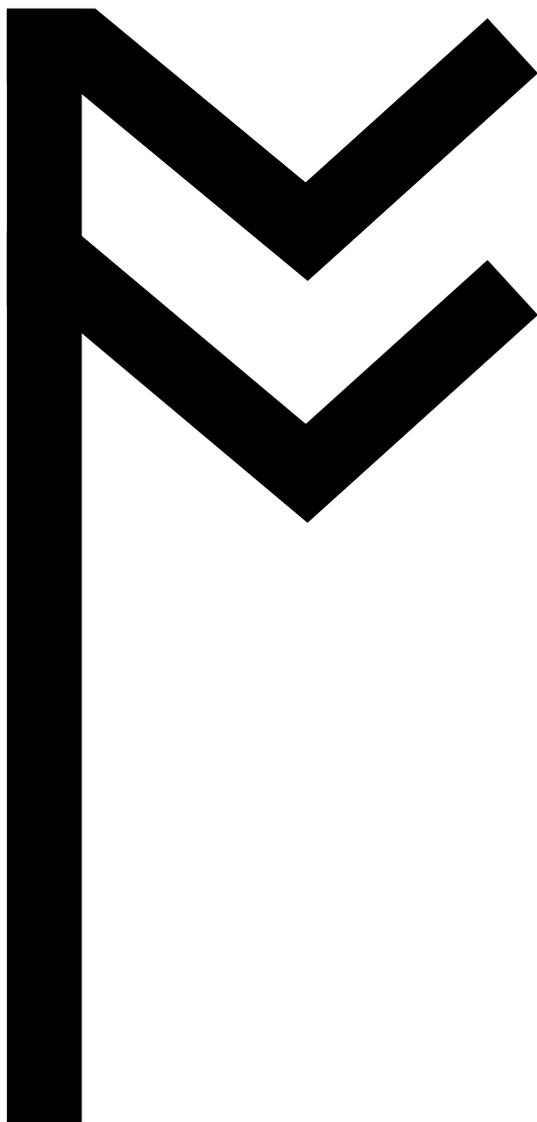
cal role of being messenger of the gods, but appears to be due to Mercury's role of psychopomp.^[5] Other contemporary evidence may also have led to the equation of Odin with Mercury; Odin, like Mercury, may have at this time already been pictured with a staff and hat, may have been considered a trader god, and the two may have been seen as parallel in their roles as wandering deities. But their rankings in their respective religious spheres may have been very different.^[6] Also, Tacitus' "among the gods Mercury is the one they principally worship" is an exact quote from Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (1 BCE) in which Caesar is referring to the Gauls and not the Germanic peoples. Regarding the Germanic peoples, Caesar states: "[T]hey consider the gods only the ones that they can see, the Sun, Fire and the Moon", which scholars reject as clearly mistaken, regardless of what may have led to the statement.^[5]

Although the English kingdoms were converted as a result of Christianization of the Germanic peoples by the 7th century, Odin is frequently listed as a founding figure among the Old English royalty.^[7] He is also either directly or indirectly mentioned a few times in the surviving Old English poetic corpus, including the *Nine Herbs Charm* and likely also the *Old English rune poem*. Odin may also be referenced in the riddle *Solomon and Saturn*. In the *Nine Herbs Charm*, Odin is said to have slain a *wyrm* by way of nine "glory twigs". Preserved from an 11th-century manuscript, the poem is, according to Bill Griffiths, "one of the most enigmatic of Old English texts". The section including Odin is as follows:

The emendation of *nan* to 'man' has been proposed. The next stanza comments on the creation of the herbs chervil and fennel while hanging in heaven by the 'wise lord' (*witig drihten*) and before sending them down among mankind. Regarding this, Griffiths comments that "In a Christian context 'hanging in heaven' would refer to the crucifixion; but (remembering that Woden was mentioned a few lines previously) there is also a parallel, perhaps a better one, with Odin, as his crucifixion was associated with learning."^[8] The Old English gnomic poem *Maxims I* also mentions Odin by name in the (alliterative) phrase *Woden worhte weos*, 'Woden made idols', in which he is contrasted with and denounced against the Christian God.^[9]

The Old English rune poem is a *rune poem* that recounts the Old English runic alphabet, the futhorc. The stanza for the rune *ós* reads as follows:

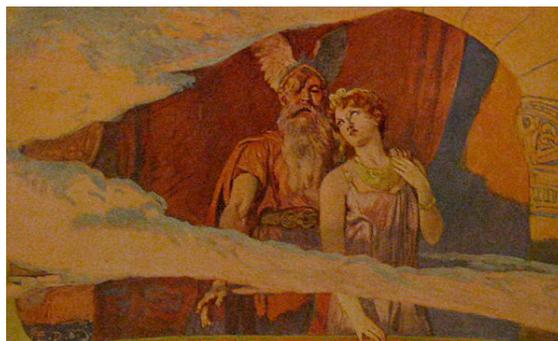
The first word of this stanza, *ōs* (Latin 'mouth') is a homophone for Old English *os*, a particularly heathen word for 'god'. Due to this and the content of the stanzas, several scholars have posited that this poem is censored, having originally referred to Odin.^[11] Kathleen Herbert comments that "*Os* was cognate with *As* in Norse, where it meant one of the *Æsir*, the chief family of gods. In Old English, it could be used as an element in first names: Osric, Oswald, Osmund, etc. but it was not used as a word to



The Old English rune *os*, which is described in the Old English rune poem

refer to the God of Christians. Woden was equated with Mercury, the god of eloquence (among other things). The tales about the Norse god Odin tell how he gave one of his eyes for the price of wisdom; he also won the mead of poetic inspiration. Luckily for Christian rune-masters, the Latin word 'os' could be substituted without ruining the sense, to keep the outward form of the rune name without obviously referring to Woden.^[12]

In the poem *Solomon and Saturn*, "Mercurius the Giant" (*Mercurius se gygand*) is referred to as an inventor of letters. This may also be a reference to Odin, who is in Norse mythology the founder of the runic alphabets, and the gloss a continuation of the practice of equating Odin with Mercury found as early as Tacitus.^[13] The poem is additionally in the style of later Old Norse material featuring Odin, such as the Old Norse poem *Vafþrúðnismál*, featuring Odin and a *jötunn* engaging in a deadly game of wits.^[14]



Godan and Frea look down from their window in the heavens to the Winnili women in an illustration by Emil Doepler, 1905.



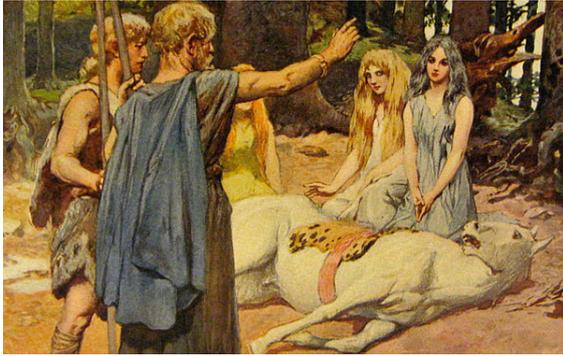
Winnili women with their hair tied as beards look up at Godan and Frea in an illustration by Emil Doepler, 1905.

The 7th-century *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, and Paul the Deacon's 8th-century *Historia Langobardorum* derived from it, recount a founding myth of the Langobards, a Germanic people who ruled a region of what is now Italy. According to this legend, a "small people" known as the *Winnili* were ruled by a woman named *Gambara* who had two sons, *Ybor* and *Agio*. The Vandals, ruled by *Ambri* and *Assi*, came to the Winnili with their army and demanded that they pay them tribute or prepare for war. *Ybor*, *Agio*, and their mother *Gambara* rejected their demands for tribute. *Ambri* and *Assi* then asked the god *Godan* for victory over the Winnili, to which *Godan* responded (in the longer version in the *Origo*): "Whom I shall first see when at sunrise, to them will I give the victory."^[15]

Meanwhile, *Ybor* and *Agio* called upon *Freia*, *Godan's* wife. *Freia* counseled them that "at sunrise the *Winnil[i]* 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". At sunrise, *Freia* turned *Godan's* bed around to face east and woke him. *Godan* saw the *Winnili*, including their whiskered women, and asked "who are those Long-beards?" *Freia* responded to *Godan*, "As you have given them a name, give them also the victory". *Godan* did so, "so that they should defend themselves according to his counsel and obtain the victory". Thenceforth the *Winnili* were known as the *Langobards* ('long-beards').^[16]

Writing in the mid-7th century, *Jonas of Bobbio* wrote that earlier that century the Irish missionary *Columbanus* disrupted an offering of beer to *Odin* (*vodano*) "(whom others called Mercury)" in *Swabia*.^[17] A few centuries later, 9th-century document from what is now *Mainz*, Germany, known as the *Old Saxon Baptismal Vow* records the names of three Old Saxon gods, *UUôden* ('Woden'),

Saxnôte, and *Thunaer* ('Thor'), whom pagan converts were to renounce as demons.^[18]



Wodan Heals Balder's Horse by Emil Doepler, 1905

A 10th-century manuscript found in what is now Merseburg, Germany, features a heathen invocation known as the *Second Merseburg Incantation*, which calls upon Odin and other gods and goddesses from the continental Germanic pantheon to assist in healing a horse:

2.2 Viking Age to post-Viking Age



A 16th-century depiction of Norse gods by Olaus Magnus: from left to right, *Frigg*, *Thor*, and *Odin*

In the 11th century, chronicler Adam of Bremen recorded in a scholion of his *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* that a statue of Thor, who Adam describes as “mightiest”, sat enthroned in the Temple at Uppsala (located in Gamla Uppsala, Sweden) flanked by Wodan (Odin) and “Fricco”. Regarding Odin, Adam defines him as “frenzy” (*Wodan, id est furor*) and says that he “rules war and gives people strength against the enemy” and that the people of the temple depict him as wearing armor, “as our people depict Mars”. According to Adam, the people of Uppsala had appointed priests (*gothi*) to each of the gods, who were to offer up sacrifices (*blót*), and in times of war sacrifices were made to images of Odin.^[20]

In the 12th century, centuries after Norway was “officially” Christianized, Odin was still being invoked by the population, as evidenced by a stick bearing a runic message found among the Bryggen inscriptions, Bergen, Norway. On the stick, both Thor and Odin are called upon for help; Thor is asked to “receive” the reader, and Odin to “own” them.^[21]

2.2.1 Poetic Edda



The trio of gods gifting the first humans, *Ask and Embla*, by Robert Engels, 1919

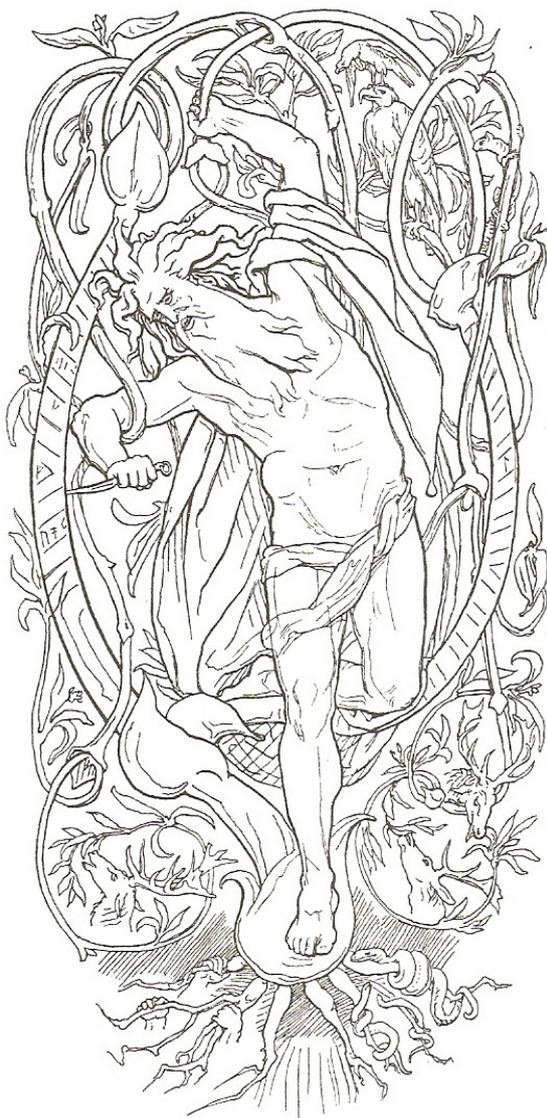
Odin is mentioned or appears in most poems of the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from traditional source material reaching back to the pagan period.

The poem *Völuspá* features Odin in a dialogue with an undead *völva*, who he imparts in him wisdom from ages past and foretells the onset of *Ragnarök*; the destruction and rebirth of the world. Among the information the *völva* recounts is the first human beings (*Ask and Embla*), found and given life by a trio of gods; Odin, *Hœnir*, and *Lóðurr*: In stanza 17 of the *Poetic Edda* poem *Völuspá*, the *völva* reciting the poem states that *Hœnir*, *Lóðurr* and *Odin* once found *Ask and Embla* on land. The *völva* says that the two were capable of very little, lacking in *ørlog* and says that they were given three gifts by the three gods:

The meaning of these gifts has been a matter of scholarly disagreement and translations therefore vary.^[25]

Later in the poem, the *völva* recounts the events of the *Æsir-Vanir War*, the war between *Vanir* and the *Æsir*, two groups of gods. During this, the first war of the world, *Odin* flung his spear into the opposing forces of the *Vanir*.^[26] The *völva* tells *Odin* that she knows where he has hidden his eye; in the spring *Mímisbrunnr*, and from it

"Mímir drinks mead every morning".^[27] After Odin gives her necklaces, she continues to recount more information, including a list of *valkyries*, referred to as *nonnor Herians* 'the ladies of War Lord'; in other words, the ladies of Odin.^[28] In foretelling the events of Ragnarök, the *völva* predicts the death of Odin; Odin will fight the monstrous wolf *Fenrir* during the great battle at Ragnarök. Odin will be consumed by the wolf, yet Odin's son *Víðarr* will avenge him by stabbing the wolf in the heart.^[29] After the world is burned and renewed, the surviving and returning gods will meet and recall Odin's deeds and "ancient runes".^[30]

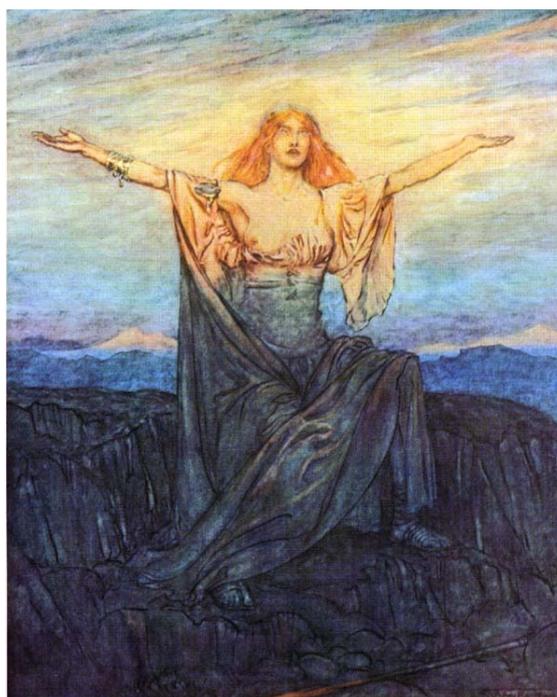


Odin sacrificing himself upon Yggdrasil as depicted by Lorenz Frølich, 1895

The poem *Hávamál* (Old Norse 'Sayings of the High One') consists entirely of wisdom verse attributed to Odin. This advice ranges from the practical ("A man shouldn't hold onto the cup but drink in moderation, it's necessary to speak or be silent; no man will blame you for impoliteness if you go early to bed"), to the mythological

(such as Odin's recounting of his retrieval of *Óðrœrir*, the vessel containing the mead of poetry), and to the mystical (the final section of the poem consists of Odin's recollection of eighteen charms).^[31] Among the various scenes that Odin recounts is his self-sacrifice:

While the name of the tree is not provided in the poem and other trees exist in Norse mythology, the tree is near universally accepted as the cosmic tree *Yggdrasil*, and if the tree is *Yggdrasil*, then the name *Yggdrasil* (Old Norse 'Ygg's steed') directly relates to this story. Odin is associated with hanging and gallows; John Lindow comments that "the hanged 'ride' the gallows".^[35]



After being put to sleep by Odin and being awoken by the hero Sigurd, the valkyrie Sigrífa says a pagan prayer; illustration (1911) by Arthur Rackham

In the prose introduction to the poem *Sigrdrífumál*, the hero *Sigurd* rides up to *Hindarfell* and heads south towards "the land of the Franks". On the mountain *Sigurd* sees a great light, "as if fire were burning, which blazed up to the sky". *Sigurd* approaches it, and there he sees a *skjaldborg* with a banner flying overhead. *Sigurd* enters the *skjaldborg*, and sees a warrior lying there—asleep and fully armed. *Sigurd* removes the helmet of the warrior, and sees the face of a woman. The woman's corslet is so tight that it seems to have grown into the woman's body. *Sigurd* uses his sword *Gram* to cut the corslet, starting from the neck of the corslet downwards, he continues cutting down her sleeves, and takes the corslet off of her.^[36]

The woman wakes, sits up, looks at *Sigurd*, and the two converse in two stanzas of verse. In the second stanza, the woman explains that Odin placed a sleeping spell on her she could not break, and due to that spell she has been asleep a long time. *Sigurd* asks for her name, and the

woman gives Sigurd a horn of mead to help him retain her words in his memory. The woman recites a heathen prayer in two stanzas. A prose narrative explains that the woman is named *Sigrdrífa* and that she is a valkyrie.^[37]

A narrative relates that *Sigrdrífa* explains to Sigurd that there were two kings fighting one another. Odin had promised one of these—*Hjalmgunnar*—victory in battle, yet she had “brought down” *Hjalmgunnar* in battle. Odin pricked her with a sleeping-thorn in consequence, told her she would never again “fight victoriously in battle”, and condemned her to marriage. In response, *Sigrdrífa* told Odin she had sworn a great oath that she would never wed a man who knew fear. Sigurd asks *Sigrdrífa* to share with him her wisdom of all worlds. The poem continues in verse, where *Sigrdrífa* provides Sigurd with knowledge in inscribing runes, mystic wisdom, and prophecy.^[38]

2.2.2 Prose Edda

Odin is mentioned throughout the books of the *Prose Edda*, authored by *Snorri Sturluson* in the 13th century and drawing from earlier traditional material. In the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning* (chapter 38), the enthroned figure of *High* (*Harr*), tells *Gangleri* (king *Gylfi* in disguise) that two ravens named *Huginn* and *Muninn* sit on Odin’s shoulders. The ravens tell Odin everything they see and hear. Odin sends *Huginn* and *Muninn* out at dawn, and the birds fly all over the world before returning at dinner-time. As a result, Odin is kept informed of many events. *High* adds that it is from this association that Odin is referred to as “raven-god”. The above-mentioned stanza from *Grímnismál* is then quoted.^[39]

In the same chapter, the enthroned figure of *High* explains that Odin gives all of the food on his table to his wolves *Geri* and *Freki* and that Odin requires no food, for wine is to him both meat and drink.^[39]

2.2.3 Heimskringla and sagas



Óðinn throws his spear at the *Vanir* host in an illustration by *Lorenz Frølich* (1895).

Odin is mentioned several times in the sagas that make up *Heimskringla*. In *Ynglinga saga*, the first section of *Heim-*

skringla, an euhemerized account of the origin of the gods is provided. Odin is introduced in chapter two, where he is said to have lived in “the land or home of the *Æsir*” (Old Norse *Ásaland eða Ásaheimr*), the capital of which being *Ásgarðr*. *Ásgarðr* was ruled by Odin, a great chieftain, and was “a great place for sacrifices”. It was the custom there that twelve temple priests were ranked highest; they administered sacrifices and held judgements over men. “Called *diar* or chiefs”, the people were obliged to serve under them and respect them. Odin was a very successful warrior and traveled widely, conquering many lands. Odin was so successful that he never lost a battle. As a result, according to the saga, men came to believe that “it was granted to him” to win all battles. Before Odin sent his men to war or to perform tasks for him, he would place his hands upon their heads and give them a *bjannak* (‘blessing’, ultimately from Latin *benedictio*) and the men would believe that they would also prevail. The men placed all of their faith in Odin, and wherever they called his name they would receive assistance from doing so. Odin was often gone for great spans of time.^[40]

Chapter 3 says that Odin had two brothers, *Vé* and *Vili*. While Odin was gone, his brothers governed his realm. Once, Odin was gone for so long that the *Æsir* believed that Odin would not return. His brothers began to divvy up Odin’s inheritance, “but his wife *Frigg* they shared between them. However, afterwards, [Odin] returned and took possession of his wife again”.^[40] Chapter 4 describes the *Æsir-Vanir* War. According to the chapter, Odin “made war on the *Vanir*”. However, the *Vanir* defended their land and the battle turned to a stalemate, both sides having devastated one another’s lands. As part of a peace agreement, the two sides exchanged hostages. One of the exchanges went awry and resulted in the *Vanir* decapitating one of the hostages sent to them by the *Æsir*, *Mímir*. The *Vanir* sent *Mímir*’s head to the *Æsir*, whereupon Odin “took it and embalmed it with herbs so that it would not rot, and spoke charms [Old Norse *galdr*] over it”, which imbued the head with the ability to answer Odin and “tell him many occult things”.^[41]

In *Völsunga saga*, the great king *Rerir* and his wife (unnamed) are unable to conceive a child; “that lack displeased them both, and they fervently implored the gods that they might have a child. It is said that *Frigg* heard their prayers and told Odin what they asked”, and the two gods subsequently send a valkyrie to present *Rerir* an apple that falls on to his lap while he sits on a burial mound and *Rerir*’s wife subsequently becomes pregnant with the namesake of the *Völsung* family line.^[42]

In the 13th century legendary saga *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, the poem *Heiðreks gátur* contains a riddle that mentions *Sleipnir* and Odin:

36. *Gestumblindi* said:

“Who are the twain
that on ten feet run?
three eyes they have,



Odin sits atop his steed Sleipnir, his ravens Huginn and Muninn and wolves Geri and Freki nearby (1895) by Lorenz Frølich.

but only one tail.
All right guess now
this riddle, Heithrek!"

Heithrek said:
"Good is thy riddle, Gestumblindi,
and guessed it is:
that is Odin riding on Sleipnir."^[43]

2.3 Modern folklore

Local folklore and folk practice recognized Odin as late as the 19th century in Scandinavia. In a work published in the mid-19th century, Benjamin Thorpe records that on the island of Gotland, Sweden, "many traditions and stories of Odin the Old still live in the mouths of the people". Thorpe notes that in Blekinge, Sweden, "it was formerly the custom to leave a sheaf on the field for Odin's horses", and cites other examples, such as in Kråktorpsgård, Småland, where a barrow was purported to have been opened in the 18th century, purportedly containing the body of Odin. After Christianization, the mound was known as *Helvetesbackke* (Swedish "Hell's Mound"). Local legend dictates that after it was opened, "there burst forth a wondrous fire, like a flash of lightning", and that a coffin full of flint and a lamp were excavated. Thorpe additionally relates that legend has it that a priest who dwelt around Troienborg had once sowed some rye, and that when the rye sprang up, so came Odin riding from the hills each evening. Odin was so massive that he towered over the farm-yard buildings, spear in hand. Halting before the entry way, he kept all from entering or leaving all night, which occurred every night until the rye was cut.^[44]

Thorpe relates that "a story is also current of a golden ship, which is said to be sunk in Runemad, near the Nyckelberg, in which, according to tradition, Odin fetched

the slain from the battle of Bråvalla to Valhall", and that Kettilsås, according to legend, derives its name from "one Ketill Runske, who stole Odin's runic staves" (*runekaftar*) and then bound Odin's dogs, bull, and a mermaid who came to help Odin. Thorpe notes that numerous other traditions existed in Sweden at the time of his writing.^[45]

Thorpe records (1851) that in Sweden, "when a noise, like that of carriages and horses, is heard by night, the people say: 'Odin is passing by'".^[46]

Odin and the gods Loki and Hœnir help a farmer and a boy escape the wrath of a bet-winning jötunn in *Loka Táttur* or *Lokka Táttur*, a Faroese ballad dating to the late Middle Ages.^[47]

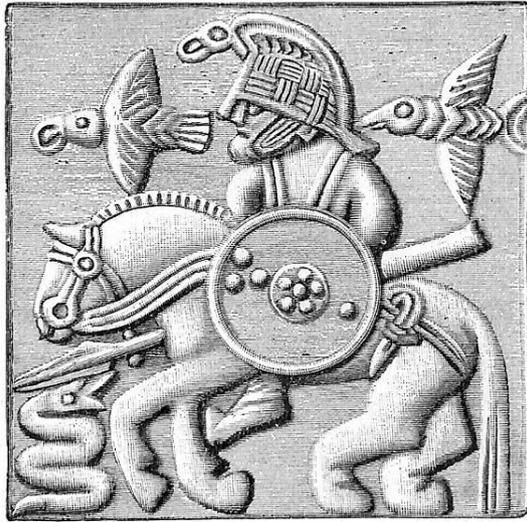
3 Archeological record



A C-type bracteate (DR BR42) featuring a figure above a horse flanked by a bird

Referenced to or depictions of Odin appear on numerous objects. Migration Period (5th and 6th century CE) gold bracteates (types A, B, and C) feature a depiction of a human figure above a horse, holding a spear and flanked by one or more often two birds. The presence of the birds has led to the iconographic identification of the human figure as the god Odin, flanked by Huginn and Muninn. Like Snorri's *Prose Edda* description of the ravens, a bird is sometimes depicted at the ear of the human, or at the ear of the horse. Bracteates have been found in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and, in smaller numbers, England and areas south of Denmark.^[48] Austrian Germanist Rudolf Simek states that these bracteates may depict Odin and his ravens healing a horse and may indicate that the birds were originally not simply his battlefield companions but also "Odin's helpers in his veterinary function."^[49]

Vendel era helmet plates (from the 6th or 7th century) found in grave in Sweden depict a helmeted figure holding a spear and a shield while riding a horse, flanked by



A plate from a Vendel era helmet featuring a figure riding a horse, holding a spear and shield, and confronted by a serpent

two birds. The plate has been interpreted as Odin accompanied by two birds; his ravens.^[50]

Two of the 8th century picture stones from the island of Gotland, Sweden depict eight-legged horses, which are thought by most scholars to depict Sleipnir: the *Tjängvide image stone* and the *Ardre VIII image stone*. Both stones feature a rider sitting atop an eight-legged horse, which some scholars view as Odin. Above the rider on the *Tjängvide image stone* is a horizontal figure holding a spear, which may be a valkyrie, and a female figure greets the rider with a cup. The scene has been interpreted as a rider arriving at the world of the dead.^[51] The mid-7th century *Eggja stone* bearing the Odinic name *haras* (Old Norse 'army god') may be interpreted as depicting Sleipnir.^[52]

A pair of identical Germanic Iron Age bird-shaped brooches from Bejsebakke in northern Denmark may be depictions of Huginn and Muninn. The back of each bird feature a mask-motif, and the feet of the birds are shaped like the heads of animals. The feathers of the birds are also composed of animal-heads. Together, the animal-heads on the feathers form a mask on the back of the bird. The birds have powerful beaks and fan shaped tails, indicating that they are ravens. The brooches were intended to be worn on each shoulder, after Germanic Iron Age fashion.^[53] Archaeologist Peter Vang Petersen comments that while the symbolism of the brooches is open to debate, the shape of the beaks and tail feathers confirms the brooch depictions are ravens. Petersen notes that "raven-shaped ornaments worn as a pair, after the fashion of the day, one on each shoulder, makes one's thoughts turn towards Odin's ravens and the cult of Odin in the Germanic Iron Age." Petersen says that Odin is associated with disguise and that the masks on the ravens may be portraits of Odin.^[53]

The *Oseberg tapestry fragments*, discovered within the Viking Age Oseberg ship burial in Norway, features a scene containing two black birds hovering over a horse, possibly originally leading a wagon (as a part of a procession of horse-led wagons on the tapestry). In her examination of the tapestry, scholar Anne Stine Ingstad interprets these birds as Huginn and Muninn flying over a covered cart containing an image of Odin, drawing comparison to the images of *Nerthus* attested by Tacitus in 1 CE.^[54]

Excavations in Ribe, Denmark have recovered a Viking Age lead metal-caster's mold and 11 identical casting-moulds. These objects depict a mustached man wearing a helmet that features two head-ornaments. Archaeologist Stig Jensen proposes these head-ornaments should be interpreted as Huginn and Muninn, and the wearer as Odin. He notes that "similar depictions occur everywhere the Vikings went—from eastern England to Russia and naturally also in the rest of Scandinavia."^[55]

A portion of *Thorwald's Cross* (a partly surviving rune-stone erected at Kirk Andreas on the Isle of Man) depicts a bearded human holding a spear downward at a wolf, his right foot in its mouth, and a large bird on his shoulder.^[56] Andy Orchard comments that this bird may be either Huginn or Muninn.^[57] Rundata dates the cross to 940,^[58] while Pluskowski dates it to the 11th century.^[56] This depiction has been interpreted as Odin, with a raven or eagle at his shoulder, being consumed by the monstrous wolf Fenrir during the events of Ragnarök.^{[56][59]}



The *Ledberg stone* at *Ledberg Church*, *Östergötland*, *Sweden*

The 11th century *Ledberg stone* in Sweden, similarly to

Thorwald's Cross, features a figure with his foot at the mouth of a four-legged beast, and this may also be a depiction of Odin being devoured by Fenrir at Ragnarök.^[59] Below the beast and the man is a depiction of a legless, helmeted man, with his arms in a prostrate position.^[59] The Younger Futhark inscription on the stone bears a commonly seen memorial dedication, but is followed by an encoded runic sequence that has been described as "mysterious,"^[60] and "an interesting magic formula which is known from all over the ancient Norse world."^[59]

In November 2009, the Roskilde Museum announced the discovery and subsequent display of a niello-inlaid silver figurine found in Lejre, Denmark, which they dubbed *Odin from Lejre*. The silver object depicts a person sitting on a throne. The throne features the heads of animals and is flanked by two birds. The Roskilde Museum identifies the figure as Odin sitting on his throne Hliðskjálf, flanked by the ravens Huginn and Muninn.^[61]

Various interpretations have been offered for a symbol that appears on various archaeological finds known modernly as the valknut. Due to the context of its placement on some objects, some scholars have interpreted this symbol as referring to Odin. For example, Hilda Ellis Davidson theorizes a connection between the valknut, the god Odin and "mental binds":

For instance, beside the figure of Odin on his horse shown on several memorial stones there is a kind of knot depicted, called the *valknut*, related to the triskele. This is thought to symbolize the power of the god to bind and unbind, mentioned in the poems and elsewhere. Odin had the power to lay bonds upon the mind, so that men became helpless in battle, and he could also loosen the tensions of fear and strain by his gifts of battle-madness, intoxication, and inspiration.^[62]

Davidson says that similar symbols are found beside figures of wolves and ravens on "certain cremation urns" from Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in East Anglia. According to Davidson, Odin's connection to cremation is known, and it does not seem unreasonable to connect with Odin in Anglo-Saxon England. Additionally, Davidson proposes further connections between Odin's role as bringer of ecstasy by way of the etymology of the god's name.^[62]

4 Origin, theories, and interpretation

Beginning with Henry Petersen's doctoral dissertation in 1876, which proposed that Thor was the indigenous god of Scandinavian farmers and Odin a later god proper to chieftains and poets, many scholars of Norse mythology in the past viewed Odin as having been imported from

elsewhere. The idea was developed by Bernhard Salin on the basis of motifs in the petroglyphs and bracteates and with reference to the Prologue of the *Prose Edda*, which presents the Æsir as having migrated into Scandinavia; he proposed that both Odin and the runes were introduced from southeastern Europe in the Iron Age. Other scholars placed his introduction at different times; Axel Olrik, during the Migration Age as a result of Gaulish influence.^[63]

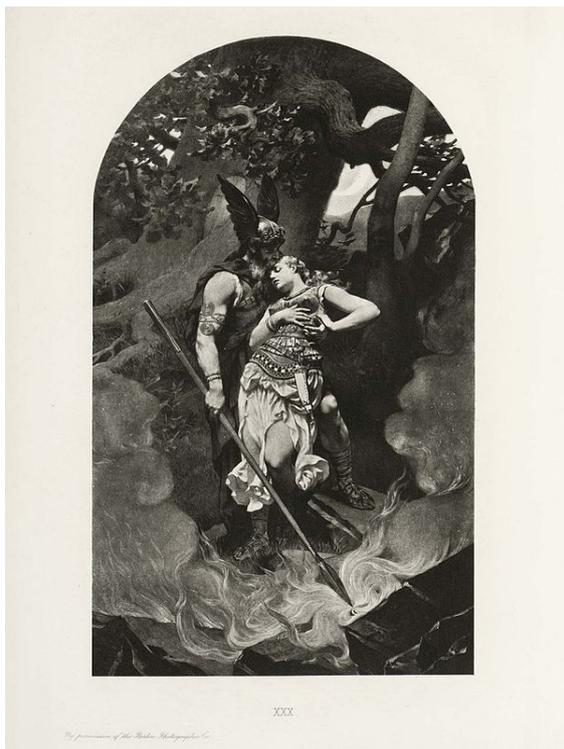
More radically, both the archeologist and comparative mythologist Marija Gimbutas and the Germanicist Karl Helm argued that the Æsir as a group were late introductions into northern Europe and that the indigenous religion of the region had been Vanic.^{[64][65]}

Although the view of Odin as in some way a late-comer dominated until the mid-20th century, it was then superseded by the trifunctional hypothesis of Georges Dumézil, under which Odin is assigned one of the core functions in the Indo-European pantheon, as a representative of the first function (sovereignty) corresponding to the Hindu Varuṇa (fury and magic) as opposed to Týr, who corresponds to the Hindu Mitrá (law and justice); while the Vanir represent the third function (fertility).^{[66][67]} As a result, the early debate over his origins has rarely been revisited.

Another approach to Odin has been in terms of his function and attributes. Many early scholars interpreted him as a wind-god or especially as a death-god.^[68] He has also been interpreted in the light of his association with ecstatic practices, and Jan de Vries compared him to the Hindu god Rudra and the Greek Hermes.^[69]

5 Modern influence

The god Odin has been a source of inspiration for a variety of modern artists working in fine art, literature, and music. Fine art depictions of Odin in the modern period include the pen and ink drawing *Odin byggande Sigtuna* (1812) and the sketch *King Gylfe receives Oden on his arrival to Sweden* (1816) by P. Hörberg; the drinking horn relief *Odens möte med Gylfe* (1818), the marble statue *Odin* (1830) and the colossal bust *Odin* by B. E. Fogelberg, the statues *Odin* (1812/1822) and *Odin* (1824/1825) by H. E. Freund, the sgraffito over the entrance of Villa Wahnfried in Bayreuth (1874) by R. Krausse, the painting *Odin* (around 1880) by E. Burne-Jones, the drawing *Thor und Magni* (1883) by K. Ehrenberg, the marble statue *Wodan* (around 1887) by H. Natter, the oil painting *Odin und Brunhilde* (1890) by Konrad Dietz, the graphic drawing *Odin als Kriegsgott* (1896) by H. Thoma, the painting *Odin and Fenris* (around 1900) by Dorothy Hardy, the oil painting *Wotan und Brünhilde* (1914) by K. Moser, the painting *The Road to Walhall* by S. Nilsson, the wooden Oslo City Hall relief *Odin og Mime* (1938) and the colored wooden relief in the courtyard of the Oslo



Wotan takes leave of Brunhild (1892) by Konrad Dietz

City Hall *Odin på Sleipnir* (1945-1950) by D. Werenskiöld, and the bronze relief on the doors of the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities, *Odin* (1950) by Bror Marklund.^[70]

Works of modern literature featuring Odin include the poem *Der Wein* (1745) by F. v. Hagedom, *Hymne de Wodan* (1769) by F. G. Klopstock, *Om Odin* (1771) by P. F. Suhm, the tragedy *Odin eller Asarnes invandring* by K. G. Leopold, the epic poem *Odin eller Danrigets Stiftelse* (1803) by J. Baggesson, the poem *Maskeradenball* (1803) and *Optrin af Norners og Asers Kamp: Odin komme til Norden* (1809) by N. F. S. Grundtvig, poems in *Nordens Guder* (1819) by Adam Oehlenschläger, the four-part novel *Sviavigamal* (1833) by C. J. L. Almqvist, the poem *Prelude* (1850) by W. Wordsworth, the canzone *Germanenzug* (1864) by R. Hamerling, the poem *Zum 25. August 1870* (1870) by Richard Wagner, the ballad *Rolf Krake* (1910) by F. Schanz, the novel *Juvikingerne* (1918-1923) by O. Duun, the comedy *Der entfesselte Wotan* (1923) by E. Toller, the novel *Wotan* by K. H. Strobl, *Herrn Wodes Ausfahrt* (1937) by H. F. Blunck, the poem *An das Ich* (1938) by H. Burte, and the novel *Sage vom Reich* (1941-1942) by H. F. Blunck.^[71]

Several characters from J. R. R. Tolkien's fiction were inspired by the god Odin. The appearance of the wizard Gandalf was particularly inspired by Odin's "wanderer" guise, whereas other aspects of the god directly influenced other characters such as Saruman, Sauron, Morgoth, and Manwë.^[72]

Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* features Odin as

Mr. Wednesday, a man who employs the main character Shadow as they travel the U.S. embroiled in a clash of old gods vs. new. The novel is being adapted for television by Brian Fuller and Michael Green, with an air-date set for 2017. Ian McShane will play Mr. Wednesday.^[73]

Music inspired by or featuring the god includes the ballets *Odins Schwert* (1818) and *Orfa* (1852) by J. H. Stunz and the opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1848-1874) by Richard Wagner.^[74]

6 Notes

- [1] Orel (2003:469).
- [2] Cleasby, Vigfusson (1975:471).
- [3] Simek (2007:248).
- [4] Simek (2007:371).
- [5] Birley (1999:42 and 106-107).
- [6] Simek (2007:244).
- [7] Herbert (2007 [1994]:7).
- [8] Griffiths (2006 [2003]:183).
- [9] North (1997:88).
- [10] Pollington (2008:46).
- [11] For example, Herbert (2007 [1994]:33), Pollington (2008 [1995]:18).
- [12] Herbert (2007 [1994]:33).
- [13] Chadwick (1899:29-30).
- [14] Williamson (2011:14).
- [15] Foulke (2003 [1974]:315-316).
- [16] Foulke (2003 [1974]:316-317).
- [17] Munro (1895:31-32).
- [18] Simek (2007:276).
- [19] Griffiths (2006 [2003]:174).
- [20] Orchard (1997:168-169).
- [21] McLeod, Mees (2006:30).
- [22] Dronke (1997:11).
- [23] Thorpe (1866:5).
- [24] Bellows (1936:8).
- [25] Schach (1985:93).
- [26] Dronke (1997:42).
- [27] Dronke (1997:14).
- [28] Dronke (1997:15).

- [29] Dronke (1997:21-22).
- [30] Dronke (1997:23).
- [31] Larrington (1999 [1996]:14-38).
- [32] Thorpe (1907:44-45).
- [33] Bellows (1923:60-61).
- [34] Larrington (1999 [1996]:34).
- [35] Lindow (2001:319-322).
- [36] Thorpe (1907:180).
- [37] Larrington (1999:166–167).
- [38] Larrington (1999:167).
- [39] Faulkes (1995:33).
- [40] Hollander (1964), p. 7.
- [41] Hollander (1964), p. 7-8.
- [42] Byock (1990), p. 36.
- [43] Hollander (1936:99).
- [44] Thorpe (1851:50—51).
- [45] Thorpe (1851:51).
- [46] Thorpe (1851:199).
- [47] Hirschfeld (1889:30—31).
- [48] Simek (2007:43 and 164).
- [49] Simek (2007:164).
- [50] Simek (2007:164) and Lindow (2005:187).
- [51] Lindow (2001:277).
- [52] Simek (2007:140).
- [53] Petersen (1990:62).
- [54] Ingstad (1995:141–142).
- [55] Jensen (1990:178).
- [56] Pluskowski (2004:158).
- [57] Orchard (1997:115).
- [58] Entry Br Olsen;185A in Rundata 2.0
- [59] Jansson (1987:152)
- [60] MacLeod, Mees (2006:145).
- [61] Roskilde Museum. Odin fra Lejre and additional information. Retrieved Nov 16, 2009.
- [62] Davidson (1990:147).
- [63] de Vries (1970:2:89—90).
- [64] Polomé (1970:60).
- [65] Gimbutas and Robbins Dexter (1999:191).
- [66] Turville-Petre (1964:103).
- [67] Polomé (1970:58—59)
- [68] de Vries (1970:2:93).
- [69] de Vries (1970:2:94—97).
- [70] Simek (2007:245).
- [71] Simek (2007:244–245).
- [72] Drout (2007:473).
- [73] “Ian McShane cast in Neil Gaiman TV adaptation American Gods”.
- [74] Simek (2007:246).

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Wang, Chris the speller, Persian Poet Gal, Hibbleton, Robbstrd, Apeloverage, Droll, Barend, WeniWidiWiki, Cornflake pirate, DHN-bot-enwiki, Wilybadger, Tscabot, Can't sleep, clown will eat me, KevM, Worrydream, Konzack, Barabinni, De Kerhotonrec, TheLateDentarthurdent, Paul S, The PIPE, DMacks, Doylestrader, Henning Makhholm, Bejnar, SashatoBot, Esrever, Mukadderat, Acebrock, KrazyCaley, Attys, Dark Formal, Tembelejderha, Nathaniel.James, DHBoggs, NongBot-enwiki, DIEGO RICARDO PEREIRA, The Man in Question, A. Parrot, Werdan7, Midnightblueowl, BananaFiend, Iridescent, CzarB, Paul venter, Cbrown1023, Ewulp, Eluchil404, Tawkerbot2, Adam Keller, Cerdic, Andresm, Scohoust, AlbertSM, Macg4cubeboy, CWY2190, Orayzio, Rglong, Icp, Montanabw, Onyx omega, Lars951, Cydebot, Davebgimp, Wodandis, Goldfritha, Jeremy68, Echuta, Abby2412, Tawkerbot4, Russophile2, Sigo, Lewisskinner, NyrubiaAkiria, Krylonblue83, JamesAM, Epr123, Astreja, Barticus88, Kro666, Picus viridis, Aericanwizard, TangentCube, Trakon, Jakado-enwiki, Mentifisto, AntiVandalBot, Moogledan, Gioto, Luna Santin, QuiteUnusual, Danger, Jhsounds, Spencer, JAnDbot, Deflective, Sigurd Dragon Slayer, Owenozier, Xeno, Hut 8.5, PhilKnight, Cpoirot, MegX, Apoc100, Xact, Acroterion, Hjal, FaerieInGrey, Connormah, Pharillon, VoABot II, Mrund, T@nn, Adam keller, Kinston eagle, Faizhaider, Sarahj2107, Thorht, Singularity, HelgaD, Balloonguy, Infinitepower, Rowsdower45, Slartibartfast1992, Giggy, Berig, 28421u2232nfenfcenc, MarkB21, JoergenB, Simon Peter Hughes, ForestJay, B9 hummingbird hovering, Loki's Valentine, The Gonz, MartinBot, Vaidilute, Poeloo, Anaxial, R'n'B, Kateshortforbob, AlexiusHoratius, Nono64, EdBever, J.delanoy, Eliz81, Extransit, Ijustam, Darkspots, Holtj, Ipigott, DJB999, Hiddenhearts, Cobi, Gooch41, Sunderland06, Spsu, KylieTastic, Bonadea, Calidore Chase, Osirus, The Behnam, RJASE1, Malik Shabazz, Midasminus, VolkovBot, VIma111, Nik Sage, Triskele Jim, Tzetzes, Philip Trueman, Alvevind-enwiki, Af648, TXiKiBoT, Oshwah, Firdeloth, Sean D Martin, Interfear2, Someguy1221, Mymilkshake23, Elphion, Psyche825, Sephiroth144, Chuck02, Madhero88, Eubulides, Positive hearts, Jow253, Dark Tea, Cnilep, AlleborgoBot, EmxBot, BrettVoss, Britzingen, SieBot, Coffee, Euryalus, Jauerback, Sonyack, M.thorijan, Bentogoa, JSprung, Berserkerus, Purpleson, Oxymoron83, Purpleson0, Ptolemy Caesarion, Goustien, Xuphor, Moeng, Bro. Neal, Royhsmith, Dcattell, Hamiltondaniel, Mr. Stradivarius, Skald the Rhymer, Denisarona, Kitty83826, Atif.t2, Shapz, Martarius, ClueBot, Deanlaw, The Thing That Should Not Be, Matdrodes, Rodhullandemu, Macleannan182, Plastikspork, Autobotx1010, Omegasupreme69, Saddhiyama, Wutsje, Mild Bill Hiccup, Niceguyedc, Aikidoshi, Sergeofwoods, 09arvincent, DragonBot, JenFromKansas, Excirial, -Midorihana-, M4gnum0n, Astoman, Eeekster, Verzannt, FreakTardZtX, CoziestPigeon, Razorflame, Esimal, Knowz, BOTarate, Jetspats235, SaraCsC, Brrat01, TranchRT, Little Miss Desu, Miami33139, DumZiBoT, Death300X, Njarvie, Oskar71, XLinkBot, Dthomsen8, Ost316, Avoided, Dnrvfantj, Addbot, Some jerk on the Internet, Barsoomian, Ave Caesar, Holt, Ronhjones, Diablokrom, BabelBot, Demonsummoner, Debresser, Fovonian, Devadatta, 5 albert square, Tassedethe, Numbo3-bot, Al3xil, WikiMohderator, Gail, Jarble, Thebiggnome, Kein Einstein, Suwa, Luckas-bot, Yobot, EdwardLane, Bunnyhop11, Amirobot, Yngvadottir, Mmxx, AnakngAraw, AnomieBOT, Momoricks, Iexec1, Piano non troppo, Xufanc, KenGriffin92, Ernest, MaterialsScientist, ArthurBot, LilHelpa, Ekwas, Ched, Anonymous from the 21st century, GrouchoBot, ProtectionTaggingBot, Amqui, RibotBOT, Alexandru Stanoi, Sopusus, Wödenhelm, FrescoBot, Fulleweder, Pepper, Green0eggs, M273dc, Citation bot 1, Cyberwitchy, Pinethicket, 10metreh, 95j, Serols, Hindsight101, Kibi78704, SergeWoodzing, Nora lives, FoxBot, TobeBot, Naxter1243, Lotje, Callanec, Driftinghobo, Vrenator, Aoidh, Brianann MacAmhlaidh, Reaper Eternal, Suffusion of Yellow, Tbhotch, Böri, Guerillero, Ruger12pk, SirPatrickWallbury, EmausBot, WikitanvirBot, Max Swaney, MFabrizio14, Mychele Trempetich, Solarra, Slightsmile, Wikipellii, Dcirovic, K6ka, Charityb, Carjac20001, Suslindisambiguator, Sinfox, Obotlig, Hayden A, L Kensington, SkookumDog, NeuroticWang, Donner60, TomorrowWeDie, Dnj710, Autoerrant, AgentSniff, Spicemix, Manytexts, Eclectic Angel, Wogham, ClueBot NG, Tillander, Satellizer, Kleio, Scamscam123, Starsden, Braincricket, Chijim70, Ninja of Tao, Widr, MerlIwBot, Helpful Pixie Bot, Medo1988, Ianolivermartin, Lowercase sigmabot, BG19bot, Flax5, Fawby, Doig8099, Jordanson72, AwamerT, Mark Arsten, Trewayne08, Pish69, Writ Keeper, Woody4077, Epicurus B., Heathenguy, Bastista1, Orikrin1998, ConradMayhew, RudolfRed, GamingWithStatoke, Jpoclon12321, John from Idegon, Ekren, Death2pa\$\$ion, Dexbot, Hmainsbot1, Webclient101, Mogism, Smilerreborn, Frosty, Dizzer, Sowlos, Corinne, Dainushka, Kay Uwe Böhm 4, Kay Uwe Böhm 5, Kay Uwe Böhm 6, Vanamonde93, Nitpicking polish, Vanished user 90ijn5dfknkfj3tjasi34, DavidLeighEllis, GamersCamp, Aravindh Sri, Quenhitran, Manul, Editguy111, Jayaguru-Shishya, AB Blake, Beneficii, Tháing L.Đ.Q., SamHunny, Qwerty8396, ThormodMorrison, Kjolemartin, Anynomus12, TantalusIX, Barbarian1616, Spoderman.sweg, SarahTehCat, Maymichael2, Spiderjerky, Eteethan, ScrapIronIV, Godsy, Hmayton81, Ameyr, Onhungija, TheWikiHax0r, Prinsgezinde, KasparBot, Hulk576, MusikBot, JJMC89, Mr Potto, JanErikssonsWIKIz, Dilidor, ÆsaturuBard, MiladTheEditor, Ennvo, Moneymaker610, Vansockslayer, Satishsn, Agnostos Theos, Wintersteppe, Rena LaFae,

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