

Thor

For other uses, see Thor (disambiguation).

In Norse mythology, **Thor** (/θɔːr/; from Old Norse **Þórr**) is a hammer-wielding god associated with thunder, lightning, storms, oak trees, strength, the protection of mankind, and also hallowing and fertility. The cognate deity in wider Germanic mythology and paganism was known in Old English as **Punor** and in Old High German as **Donar** (runic **þonar** ᚦᚢᚨᚱ), stemming from a Common Germanic ***Punraz** (meaning “thunder”).

Ultimately stemming from Proto-Indo-European religion, Thor is a prominently mentioned god throughout the recorded history of the Germanic peoples, from the Roman occupation of regions of Germania, to the tribal expansions of the Migration Period, to his high popularity during the Viking Age, when, in the face of the process of the Christianization of Scandinavia, emblems of his hammer, Mjölnir, were worn in defiance and Norse pagan personal names containing the name of the god bear witness to his popularity. Into the modern period, Thor continued to be acknowledged in rural folklore throughout Germanic regions. Thor is frequently referred to in place names, the day of the week Thursday (“Thor’s day” from Old English *Thunresdæg*, ‘Thunor’s day’) bears his name, and names stemming from the pagan period containing his own continue to be used today.

In Norse mythology, largely recorded in Iceland from traditional material stemming from Scandinavia, numerous tales and information about Thor are provided. In these sources, Thor bears at least fourteen names, is the husband of the golden-haired goddess Sif, is the lover of the jötunn Járnsaxa, and is generally described as fierce-eyed, red-haired and red-bearded.^[1] With Sif, Thor fathered the goddess (and possible valkyrie) Þrúðr; with Járnsaxa, he fathered Magni; with a mother whose name is not recorded, he fathered Móði, and he is the stepfather of the god Ullr. The same sources list Thor as the son of the god Odin and the personified earth, Fjörgyn, and by way of Odin, Thor has numerous brothers. Thor has two servants, Þjálfi and Röskva, rides in a cart or chariot pulled by two goats, Tanngrisnir and Tanngnjóstr (that he eats and resurrects), and is ascribed three dwellings (Bilskirnir, Þrúðheimr, and Þrúðvangr). Thor wields the mountain-crushing hammer, Mjölnir, wears the belt Megingjörð and the iron gloves Járngreipr, and owns the staff Gríðarvölr. Thor’s exploits, including his relentless slaughter of his foes and fierce battles with the monstrous serpent Jörmungandr—and their foretold mutual deaths during the events of Ragnarök—are recorded

throughout sources for Norse mythology.

Thor has inspired numerous works of art and references to Thor appear in modern popular culture. Like other Germanic deities, veneration of Thor is revived in the modern period in Heathenry.

1 Name

Old Norse *Þórr*, Old English *þunor*, Old High German *Donar*, Old Saxon *thunar*, and Old Frisian *thuner* are cognates within the Germanic language branch, descending from the Proto-Germanic masculine noun **þunraz* ‘thunder’.^[2]

The name of the god is the origin of the weekday name *Thursday*. By employing a practice known as *interpretatio germanica* during the Roman Empire period, the Germanic peoples adopted the Roman weekly calendar, and replaced the names of Roman gods with their own. Latin *dies Iovis* (‘day of Jupiter’) was converted into Proto-Germanic **Ponares dagaz* (“Thor’s day”), from which stems modern English “Thursday” and all other Germanic weekday cognates.^[3]

Beginning in the Viking Age, personal names containing the theonym *Þórr* are recorded with great frequency. Prior to the Viking Age, no examples are recorded. *Þórr*-based names may have flourished during the Viking Age as a defiant response to attempts at Christianization, similar to the wide scale Viking Age practice of wearing Thor’s hammer pendants.^[4]

2 Attestations

2.1 Roman era

The earliest records of the Germanic peoples were recorded by the Romans, and in these works Thor 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 either the Roman god Jupiter (also known as *Jove*) or the Greco-Roman god Hercules. The first clear example of this occurs in the Roman historian Tacitus’s late first-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 re-



The Teutoburg Forest in northwestern Germany

gard 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".^[5] In this instance, Tacitus refers to the god Odin as "Mercury", Thor as "Hercules", and the god Týr as "Mars", and the identity of the Isis of the Suebi has been debated. In Thor's case, the identification with the god Hercules is likely at least in part due to similarities between Thor's hammer and Hercules' club.^[6] In his *Annals*, Tacitus again refers to the veneration of "Hercules" by the Germanic peoples; he records a wood beyond the river Weser (in what is now northwestern Germany) as dedicated to him.^[7]

In Germanic areas occupied by the Roman Empire, coins and votive objects dating from the 2nd and 3rd century AD have been found with Latin inscriptions referring to "Hercules", and so in reality, with varying levels of likelihood, refer to Thor by way of *interpretatio romana*.^[8]

2.2 Post-Roman Era

"Donar" redirects here. For the Dutch basketball team, see Donar (basketball club).

The first recorded instance of the name of the god ap-



Boniface bears his crucifix after felling Thor's Oak in Bonifacius (1905) by Emil Doepler

pears in the Migration Period, where a piece of jewelry

(a fibula), the Nordendorf fibula, dating from the 7th century AD and found in Bavaria, bears an Elder Futhark inscription that contains the name "Þonar", i.e. "Donar", the southern Germanic form of the god's name.^[9]

According to a near-contemporary account, the Christian missionary Saint Boniface felled an oak tree dedicated to "Jove" in the 8th century, the Donar Oak in the region of Hesse, Germany.^[10]

Around the second half of the 8th century, Old English mentions of a figure named *Thunor* (*Punor*) are recorded, a figure who likely refers to an Old English version of the god. In relation, *Thunor* is sometimes used in Old English texts to gloss *Jupiter*, the god may be referenced in the poem *Solomon and Saturn*, where the thunder strikes the devil with a "fiery axe", and the Old English expression *punnorad* ("thunder ride") may refer to the god's thunderous, goat-led chariot.^{[11][12]}

A 9th-century AD codex from Mainz, Germany, known as the *Old Saxon Baptismal Vow* records the name of three Old Saxon gods, UUôden (Old Saxon "Wodan"), Saxnôte, and Thunaer, by way of their renunciation as demons in a formula to be repeated by Germanic pagans formally converting to Christianity.^[13]

The Kentish royal legend, probably 11th-century, contains the story of a villainous reeve of Ecgberht of Kent called Thunor, who is swallowed up by the earth at a place from then on known as *punores hlæwe* (Old English "Thunor's mound"). Gabriel Turville-Petre saw this as an invented origin for the placename demonstrating loss of memory that Thunor had been a god's name.^[14]



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

2.3 Viking Age

In the 11th century, chronicler Adam of Bremen records in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* that a statue of Thor, who Adam describes as "mightiest", sits in the Temple at Uppsala in the center of a triple throne (flanked by Woden and "Fricco") located in Gamla Uppsala, Sweden. Adam details that "Thor, they reckon, rules the sky; he governs thunder and lightning, winds and storms, fine weather and fertility" and that "Thor, with his mace, looks like Jupiter". Adam details that the people of Uppsala had appointed priests to each of the gods, and

that the priests were to offer up sacrifices. In Thor's case, he continues, these sacrifices were done when plague or famine threatened.^[15] Earlier in the same work, Adam relays that in 1030 an English preacher, Wulfred, was lynched by assembled Germanic pagans for "profaning" a representation of Thor.^[16]

Two objects with runic inscriptions invoking Thor date from the 11th century, one from England and one from Sweden. The first, the *Canterbury Charm* from Canterbury, England, calls upon Thor to heal a wound by banishing a thurs.^[17] The second, the *Kvinneby amulet*, invokes protection by both Thor and his hammer.^[18]

2.4 Post-Viking Age

In the 12th century, more than a century after Norway was "officially" Christianized, Thor was still being invoked by the population, as evidenced by a stick bearing a runic message found among the *Bryggen inscriptions* in 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.^[19] Also around the 12th century, iconography of the Christianizing 11th-century king *Olaf II of Norway* (Saint Olaf) absorbed elements of the native Thor; Olaf II had become a familiarly red-bearded, hammer-wielding figure.^[20]

2.4.1 Poetic Edda

In the *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the 13th century from traditional source material reaching into the pagan period, Thor appears (or is mentioned) in the poems *Völuspá*, *Grímnismál*, *Skírnismál*, *Hárbarðsljóð*, *Hymiskviða*, *Lokasenna*, *Þrymskviða*, *Alvíssmál*, and *Hyndluljóð*.^[21]



The foretold death of Thor as depicted by Lorenz Frølich (1895)

In the poem *Völuspá*, a dead *völva* recounts the history of the universe and foretells the future to the disguised god Odin, including the death of Thor. Thor, she foretells,



Thor and the Midgard Serpent (by Emil Doepler, 1905)

will do battle with the *great serpent* during the immense mythical war waged at *Ragnarök*, and there he will slay the monstrous snake, yet after he will only be able to take nine steps before succumbing to the venom of the beast:

Afterwards, says the *völva*, the sky will turn black before fire engulfs the world, the stars will disappear, flames will dance before the sky, steam will rise, the world will be covered in water and then it will be raised again, green and fertile (see *Prose Edda* section below for the survival of the sons of Thor, who return after these events with Thor's hammer).^[24]



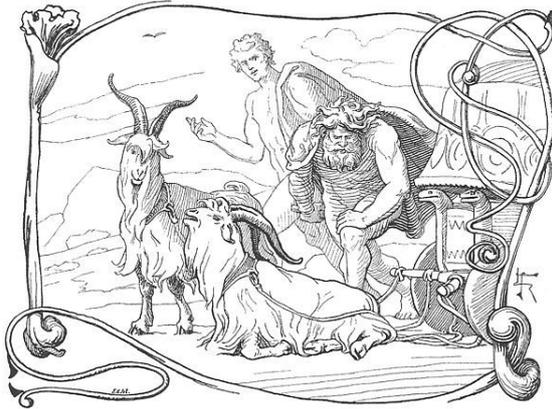
Thor wades through a river while the *Æsir* ride across the bridge *Bifröst*, by Frølich (1895)

In the poem *Grímnismál*, the god Odin, in disguise as *Grímnir*, and tortured, starved and thirsty, imparts in the young *Agnar* cosmological lore, including that Thor resides in *Þrúðheimr*, and that, every day, Thor wades through the rivers *Körmt* and *Örmt*, and the two *Kerlaugar*. There, *Grímnir* says, Thor sits as judge at the immense cosmological world tree, *Yggdrasil*.^[25]

In *Skírnismál*, the god Freyr's messenger, *Skírnir*, threatens the fair *Gerðr*, who Freyr is smitten with, with numerous threats and curses, including that Thor, Freyr, and Odin will be angry with her, and that she risks their "potent wrath".^[26]

Thor is the main character of *Hárbarðsljóð*, where, after

traveling “from the east”, he comes to an inlet where he encounters a ferryman who gives his name as *Hárbarðr* (Odin, again in disguise), and attempts to hail a ride from him. The ferryman, shouting from the inlet, is immediately rude and obnoxious to Thor and refuses to ferry him. At first, Thor holds his tongue, but *Hárbarðr* only becomes more aggressive, and the poem soon becomes a *flyting* match between Thor and *Hárbarðr*, all the while revealing lore about the two, including Thor’s killing of several *jötnar* in “the east” and berzerk women on *Hlesey* (now the Danish island of *Læsø*). In the end, Thor ends up walking instead.^[27]



Týr looks on as Thor discovers that one of his goats is lame, by Frølich (1895)

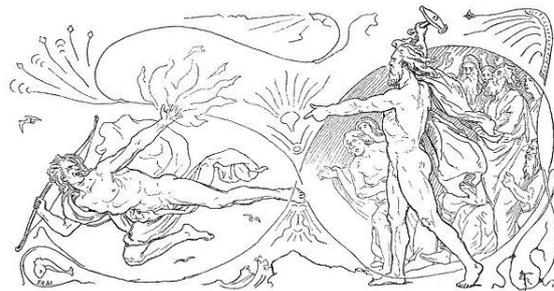
Thor is again the main character in the poem *Hymiskviða*, where, after the gods have been hunting and have eaten their prey, they have an urge to drink. They “sh[ake] the twigs” and interpret what they say. The gods decide that they would find suitable cauldrons at *Ægir*’s home. Thor arrives at *Ægir*’s home and finds him to be cheerful, looks into his eyes, and tells him that he must prepare feasts for the gods. Annoyed, *Ægir* tells Thor that the gods must first bring to him a suitable cauldron to brew ale in. The gods search but find no such cauldron anywhere. However, Týr tells Thor that he may have a solution; east of *Élivágar* lives *Hymir*, and he owns such a deep kettle.^[28]

So, after Thor secures his goats at *Egil*’s home, Thor and Týr go to *Hymir*’s hall in search of a cauldron large enough to brew ale for them all. They arrive, and Týr sees his nine-hundred-headed grandmother and his gold-clad mother, the latter of which welcomes them with a horn. After *Hymir*—who is not happy to see Thor—comes in from the cold outdoors, Týr’s mother helps them find a properly strong cauldron. Thor eats a big meal of two oxen (all the rest eat but one), and then goes to sleep. In the morning, he awakes and informs *Hymir* that he wants to go fishing the following evening, and that he will catch plenty of food, but that he needs bait. *Hymir* tells him to go get some bait from his pasture, which he expects should not be a problem for Thor. Thor goes out, finds *Hymir*’s best ox, and rips its head off.^[29]

After a lacuna in the manuscript of the poem, *Hymiskviða*

abruptly picks up again with Thor and *Hymir* in a boat, out at sea. *Hymir* catches a few whales at once, and Thor baits his line with the head of the ox. Thor casts his line and the monstrous serpent *Jörmungandr* bites. Thor pulls the serpent on board, and violently slams him in the head with his hammer. *Jörmungandr* shrieks, and a noisy commotion is heard from underwater before another lacuna appears in the manuscript.^[30]

After the second lacuna, *Hymir* is sitting in the boat, unhappy and totally silent, as they row back to shore. On shore, *Hymir* suggests that Thor should help him carry a whale back to his farm. Thor picks both the boat and the whales up, and carries it all back to *Hymir*’s farm. After Thor successfully smashes a crystal goblet by throwing it at *Hymir*’s head on Týr’s mother’s suggestion, Thor and Týr are given the cauldron. Týr cannot lift it, but Thor manages to roll it, and so with it they leave. Some distance from *Hymir*’s home, an army of many-headed beings led by *Hymir* attacks the two, but are killed by the hammer of Thor. Although one of his goats is lame in the leg, the two manage to bring the cauldron back, have plenty of ale, and so, from then on, return to *Ægir*’s for more every winter.^[31]



Thor raises his hammer as Loki leaves Ægir’s hall, by Frølich (1895)

In the poem *Lokasenna*, the half-god *Loki* angrily flyts with the gods in the sea entity *Ægir*’s hall. Thor does not attend the event, however, as he is away in the east for unspecified purposes. Towards the end of the poem, the flyting turns to *Sif*, Thor’s wife, whom *Loki* then claims to have slept with. The god *Freyr*’s servant *Beyla* interjects, and says that, since all of the mountains are shaking, she thinks that Thor is on his way home. *Beyla* adds that Thor will bring peace to the quarrel, to which *Loki* responds with insults.^[32]

Thor arrives and tells *Loki* to be silent, and threatens to rip *Loki*’s head from his body with his hammer. *Loki* asks Thor why he is so angry, and comments that Thor will not be so daring to fight “the wolf” (*Fenrir*) when it eats *Odin* (a reference to the foretold events of *Ragnarök*). Thor again tells him to be silent, and threatens to throw him into the sky, where he will never be seen again. *Loki* says that Thor should not brag of his time in the east, as he once crouched in fear in the thumb of a glove (a story involving deception by the magic of *Útgarda-Loki*, re-

counted in the *Prose Edda* book *Gylfaginning*)—which, he comments, “was hardly like Thor”. Thor again tells him to be silent, threatening to break every bone in Loki’s body. Loki responds that he intends to live a while yet, and again insults Thor with references to his encounter with Útgarda-Loki. Thor responds with a fourth call to be silent, and threatens to send Loki to *Hel*. At Thor’s final threat, Loki gives in, commenting that only for Thor will he leave the hall, for “I know alone that you do strike”, and the poem continues.^[33]



Ah, what a lovely maid it is! (1902) by Elmer Boyd Smith: Thor is unhappily dressed by the goddess Freyja and her attendants as herself

In the comedic poem *Þrymskviða*, Thor again plays a central role. In the poem, Thor wakes and finds that his powerful hammer, *Mjöllnir*, is missing. Thor turns to Loki, and tells him that nobody knows that the hammer has been stolen. The two go to the dwelling of the goddess *Freyja*, and so that he may attempt to find *Mjöllnir*, Thor asks her if he may borrow her feather cloak. Freyja agrees, and says she would lend it to Thor even if it were made of silver or gold, and Loki flies off, the feather cloak whistling.^[34]

In *Jötunheimr*, the jötnunn *Þrymr* sits on a barrow, plaiting golden collars for his female dogs, and trimming the manes of his horses. *Þrymr* sees Loki, and asks what could be amiss among the *Æsir* and the elves; why is

Loki alone in *Jötunheimr*? Loki responds that he has bad news for both the elves and the *Æsir*—that Thor’s hammer, *Mjöllnir*, is gone. *Þrymr* says that he has hidden *Mjöllnir* eight leagues beneath the earth, from which it will be retrieved, but only if *Freyja* is brought to him as his wife. Loki flies off, the feather cloak whistling, away from *Jötunheimr* and back to the court of the gods.^[35]

Thor asks Loki if his efforts were successful, and that Loki should tell him while he is still in the air as “tales often escape a sitting man, and the man lying down often barks out lies.” Loki states that it was indeed an effort, and also a success, for he has discovered that *Þrymr* has the hammer, but that it cannot be retrieved unless *Freyja* is brought to *Þrymr* as his wife. The two return to *Freyja* and tell her to put on a bridal head dress, as they will drive her to *Jötunheimr*. *Freyja*, indignant and angry, goes into a rage, causing all of the halls of the *Æsir* to tremble in her anger, and her necklace, the famed *Brísingamen*, falls from her. *Freyja* pointedly refuses.^[36]

As a result, the gods and goddesses meet and hold a thing to discuss and debate the matter. At the thing, the god *Heimdallr* puts forth the suggestion that, in place of *Freyja*, Thor should be dressed as the bride, complete with jewels, women’s clothing down to his knees, a bridal head-dress, and the necklace *Brísingamen*. Thor rejects the idea, yet Loki interjects that this will be the only way to get back *Mjöllnir*. Loki points out that, without *Mjöllnir*, the jötnar will be able to invade and settle in *Asgard*. The gods dress Thor as a bride, and Loki states that he will go with Thor as his maid, and that the two shall drive to *Jötunheimr* together.^[37]

After riding together in Thor’s goat-driven chariot, the two, disguised, arrive in *Jötunheimr*. *Þrymr* commands the jötnar in his hall to spread straw on the benches, for *Freyja* has arrived to be his wife. *Þrymr* recounts his treasured animals and objects, stating that *Freyja* was all that he was missing in his wealth.^[38]

Early in the evening, the disguised Loki and Thor meet with *Þrymr* and the assembled jötnar. Thor eats and drinks ferociously, consuming entire animals and three casks of mead. *Þrymr* finds the behaviour at odds with his impression of *Freyja*, and Loki, sitting before *Þrymr* and appearing as a “very shrewd maid”, makes the excuse that “*Freyja*’s” behaviour is due to her having not consumed anything for eight entire days before arriving due to her eagerness to arrive. *Þrymr* then lifts “*Freyja*’s” veil and wants to kiss “her”. Terrifying eyes stare back at him, seemingly burning with fire. Loki says that this is because “*Freyja*” has not slept for eight nights in her eagerness.^[38]

The “wretched sister” of the jötnar appears, asks for a bridal gift from “*Freyja*”, and the jötnar bring out *Mjöllnir* to “sanctify the bride”, to lay it on her lap, and marry the two by “the hand” of the goddess *Vár*. Thor laughs internally when he sees the hammer, takes hold of it, strikes *Þrymr*, beats all of the jötnar, kills their “older sister”, and

so gets his hammer back.^[39]



Sun Shines in the Hall (1908) by W.G. Collingwood: Thor clasps his daughter's hand and chuckles at the "all-wise" dwarf, whom he has outwitted

In the poem *Alvíssmál*, Thor tricks a dwarf, *Alvíss*, to his doom upon finding that he seeks to wed his daughter (unnamed, possibly *Þrúðr*). As the poem starts, Thor meets a dwarf who talks about getting married. Thor finds the dwarf repulsive and, apparently, realizes that the bride is his daughter. Thor comments that the wedding agreement was made among the gods while Thor was gone, and that the dwarf must seek his consent. To do so, Thor says, *Alvíss* must tell him what he wants to know about all of the worlds that the dwarf has visited. In a long question and answer session, *Alvíss* does exactly that; he describes natural features as they are known in the languages of various races of beings in the world, and gives an amount of cosmological lore.^[40]

However, the question and answer session turns out to be a ploy by Thor, as, although Thor comments that he has truly never seen anyone with more wisdom in their breast, Thor has managed to delay the dwarf enough for the Sun to turn him to stone; "day dawns on you now, dwarf, now sun shines on the hall".^[41]

In the poem *Hyndluljóð*, Freyja offers to the jötunn woman *Hyndla* to *blót* (sacrifice) to Thor so that she may be protected, and comments that Thor does not care much for jötunn women.^[42]

2.4.2 Prose Edda, Heimskringla, and sagas

In the prologue to his *Prose Edda*, Snorri Sturluson euhemerises Thor as a prince of Troy, and the son of king Memnon by Troana, a daughter of Priam. Thor, also known as *Tror*, is said to have married the prophetess Sibyl (identified with *Sif*). Thor is further said here to have been raised in Thrace by a chieftain named Lorikus, whom he later slew to assume the title of "King of Thrace", to have had hair "fairer than gold", and to have been strong enough to lift ten bearskins.

The name of the *aesir* is explained as "men from Asia," *Asgard* being the "Asian city" (i.e., Troy). Alternatively, Troy is in *Tyrkland* (Turkey, i.e., Asia Minor), and *Asialand* is *Scythia*, where Thor founded a new city named *Asgard*. Odin is a remote descendant of Thor, removed by twelve generations, who led an expedition across Germany, Denmark and Sweden to Norway.

In the *Prose Edda*, Thor is mentioned in all four books; *Prologue*, *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál*, and *Háttatal*.

In *Heimskringla*, composed in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, Thor or statues of Thor are mentioned in *Ynglinga saga*, *Hákonar saga góða*, *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, and *Ólafs saga helga*. In *Ynglinga saga* chapter 5, a heavily euhemerized account of the gods is provided, where Thor is described as having been a *gothi*—a pagan priest—who was given by Odin (who himself is explained away as having been an exceedingly powerful magic-wielding chieftain from the east) a dwelling in the mythical location of *Þrúðvangr*, in what is now Sweden. The saga narrative adds that numerous names—at the time of the narrative, popularly in use—were derived from *Thor*.^[43]

2.5 Modern folklore

Tales about Thor, or influenced by native traditions regarding Thor, continued into the modern period, particularly in Scandinavia. Writing in the 19th century, scholar Jacob Grimm records various phrases surviving into Germanic languages that refer to the god, such as the Norwegian *Thorsvarme* ("Thor's warmth") for lightning and the Swedish *godgubben åfar* ("The good old (fellow) is taking a ride") as well as the word *tordön* ("Thor's rumble" or "Thor's thunder") when it thunders. Grimm comments that, at times, Scandinavians often "no longer liked to utter the god's real name, or they wished to extol his fatherly goodness [...]"^[44]

Thor remained pictured as a red-bearded figure, as evidenced by the Danish rhyme that yet referred to him as *Thor med sit lange skæg* ("Thor with the long beard") and the North-Frisian curse *diis ruadhüret donner regii!* ("let red-haired thunder see to that!")^[44]

A Scandinavian folk belief that lightning frightens away trolls and jöttnar appears in numerous Scandinavian folktales, and may be a late reflection of Thor's role in fighting such beings. In connection, the lack of trolls and ettins in modern Scandinavia is explained as a result of the "accuracy and efficiency of the lightning strokes".^[45]

3 Archaeological record

3.1 Runestone invocations and image stones

On four (or possibly five) runestones, an invocation to Thor appears that reads “May Thor hallow (these runes/this monument)!” The invocation appears thrice in Denmark (DR 110, DR 209, and DR 220), and a single time in Västergötland (Vg 150), Sweden. A fifth appearance may possibly occur on a runestone found in Södermanland, Sweden (Sö 140), but the reading is contested. Pictorial representations of Thor’s hammer also appear on a total of five runestones found in Denmark and in the Swedish counties of Västergötland and Södermanland.^[46]

Three stones depict Thor fishing for the serpent Jörmungandr; the Hørdum stone in Thy, Denmark, the Altuna Runestone in Altuna, Sweden, one of the Ardre image stones (stone VII) from Gotland, Sweden, and the Gosforth Cross in Gosforth, England.

- The Sönder Kirkeby Runestone (DR 220), a runestone from Denmark bearing the “May Thor hallow these runes!” inscription
- A runestone from Södermanland, Sweden bearing a depiction of Thor’s hammer
- The Altuna stone from Sweden, one of four stones depicting Thor’s fishing trip
- The Gosforth depiction, one of four stones depicting Thor’s fishing trip
- Runes \times þur : uiki \times on the Velanda Runestone, Sweden, meaning “may Þórr hallow.”

3.2 Hammer pendants and Eyrarland Statue

Main article: [Mjölnir](#)

Pendants in a distinctive shape representing the hammer of Thor (known in Norse sources as Mjölnir) have frequently been unearthed in Viking Age Scandinavian burials. The hammers were worn as a symbol of Norse pagan faith and as a symbol of opposition to Christianization; a response to crosses worn by Christians. Casting moulds have been found for the production of both Thor’s hammers and Christian crucifixes, and at least one example of a combined crucifix and hammer has been discovered.^[47] The Eyrarland Statue, a copper alloy figure found near Akureyri, Iceland dating from around the 11th century, may depict Thor seated and gripping his hammer.^[48]

- Drawing of a silver-gilted Thor’s hammer found in Scania, Sweden

- Drawing of a 4.6 cm gold-plated silver Mjölnir pendant found at Bredsättra on Öland, Sweden
- Drawing of a silver Thor’s hammer amulet found in Fitjar, Hordaland, Norway
- Drawing of Thor’s hammer amulet from Mandemark, Møn, Denmark

3.3 Swastikas

Further information: [Swastika \(Germanic Iron Age\)](#)

The swastika symbol has been identified as representing



Detail of swastika on the 9th century Snoldelev Stone

the hammer or lightning of Thor.^[49] Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson (1965) comments on the usage of the swastika as a symbol of Thor:

The protective sign of the hammer was worn by women, as we know from the fact that it has been found in women’s graves. It seems to have been used by the warrior also, in the form of the swastika. [...] Primarily it appears to have had connections with light and fire, and to have been linked with the sun-wheel. It may have been on account of Thor’s association with lightning that this sign was used as an alternative to the hammer, for it is found on memorial stones in Scandinavia besides inscriptions to Thor. When we find it on the pommel of a warrior’s sword and on his sword-belt, the assumption is that the warrior was placing himself under the Thunder God’s protection.^[50]

Swastikas appear on various Germanic objects stretching from the Migration Period to the Viking Age, such

as the 3rd century Værløse Fibula (DR EM85;123) from Zealand, Denmark; the Gothic spearhead from Brest-Litovsk, Belarus; numerous Migration Period bracteates; cremation urns from early Anglo-Saxon England; the 8th century Sæbø sword from Sogn, Norway; and the 9th century Snoldelev Stone (DR 248) from Ramsø, Denmark.

4 Eponymy and toponymy



A city limit sign marking *Thorsager* (“Thor’s Acre”), Denmark



Sign for the village of *Thursley* in Surrey, England

Numerous place names in Scandinavia contain the Old Norse name *Þórr*. The identification of these place names as pointing to religious significance is complicated by the aforementioned common usage of *Þórr* as a personal name element. Cultic significance may only be assured in place names containing the elements *-vé* (signifying the location of a *vé*, a type of pagan Germanic shrine), *-hof* (a structure used for religious purposes, see heathen hofs), and *-lundr* (a holy grove). The place name *Þórrslundr* is recorded with particular frequency in Denmark (and has direct cognates in Norse settlements in Ireland, such as

Coill Tomair), whereas *Þórshof* appears particularly often in southern Norway.^[4] *Torsö* (*Thor’s Island*) appears on the Swedish westcoast. Thor also appears in many placenames in Uppland.

In English placenames, Old English *Thunor* (in contrast with the Old Norse form of the name, later introduced to the Danelaw) left comparatively few traces. Examples include *Thundersley*, from **Thunores hlæw* and *Thurstable* (Old English “Thunor’s pillar”).^[4] F. M. Stenton noted that such placenames were apparently restricted to Saxon and Jutish territory and not found in Anglian areas.^{[11][51]}

In what is now Germany, locations named after Thor are sparsely recorded, but an amount of locations called *Donnersberg* (German “Donner’s mountain”) may derive their name from the deity *Donner*, the southern Germanic form of the god’s name.^[4]

In as late as the 19th century in Iceland, a specific breed of fox was known as *holtapórr* (“Thor of the holt”), likely due to the red coat of the breed.^[52] In Sweden in the 19th century, smooth, wedge-shaped stones found in the earth were called *Thorwiggas* (“Thor’s wedges”), according to a folk belief that they were once hurled at a troll by the god Thor. (Compare *Thunderstones*.) Similarly, meteorites may be considered memorials to Thor in folk tradition due to their sheer weight. On the Swedish island of Gotland, a species of beetle (*scarabæus stercorarius*) was named after the god; the *Thorbagge*. When the beetle is found turned upside down and one flips it over, Thor’s favor may be gained. In other regions of Sweden the name of the beetle appears to have been demonized with Christianization, where the insect came to be known as *Thordedjefvul* or *Thordyfvel* (both meaning “Thor-devil”).^[53]

5 Origin, theories, and interpretations

Thor closely resembles other Indo-European deities associated with the thunder: the Celtic *Taranis*,^{[54][55]} the Baltic *Perkūnas*, the Slavic *Perun*,^[56] and particularly the Hindu *Indra*, whose red hair and thunderbolt weapon the *vajra* are obvious parallels. Scholars have compared *Indra*’s slaying of *Vritra* with Thor’s battle with *Jörmungandr*.^[55] Although in the past it was suggested that Thor was an indigenous sky god or a Viking Age import into Scandinavia, these Indo-European parallels make him generally accepted today as ultimately derived from a Proto-Indo-European deity.^{[55][57][58][59]}

In Georges Dumézil’s trifunctional hypothesis of Indo-European religion, Thor represents the second function, that of strength. Dumézil notes that as a result of displacements, he does not lead armies; most of the functions of *Indra* have been in effect taken over by *Odin*.^[60] Many scholars have noted the association of Thor with

fertility, particularly in later folklore and in the reflex of him represented by the Sami *Hora galles* (“Good-man Thor”). For Dumézil, this is the preservation by peasants of only the side-effect of the god’s atmospheric battles: the fertilizing rain.^[61] Others have emphasized Thor’s close connection to humanity, in all its concerns.^[62] Scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson summarizes:

The cult of Thor was linked up with men’s habitation and possessions, and with well-being of the family and community. This included the fruitfulness of the fields, and Thor, although pictured primarily as a storm god in the myths, was also concerned with the fertility and preservation of the seasonal round. In our own times, little stone axes from the distant past have been used as fertility symbols and placed by the farmer in the holes made by the drill to receive the first seed of spring. Thor’s marriage with Sif of the golden hair, about which we hear little in the myths, seems to be a memory of the ancient symbol of divine marriage between sky god and earth goddess, when he comes to earth in the thunderstorm and the storm brings the rain which makes the fields fertile. In this way Thor, as well as Odin, may be seen to continue the cult of the sky god which was known in the Bronze Age.^[63]

6 Modern influence



An early 20th century Danish bicycle head badge depicting Thor

In modern times, Thor continues to be referenced in popular culture. Starting with F. J. Klopstock’s 1776 ode to Thor, *Wir und Sie*, Thor has been the subject of various poems, including Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger’s 1807 epic poem *Thors reise til Jotunheim* and, by the same author, three more poems (*Hammeren hentes*, *Thors fiskeri*,

and *Thor besøger Hymir*) collected in his 1819 *Nordens Guder*; *Thors Trunk* (1859) by Wilhelm Hertz; the 1820 satirical poem *Mythologierne eller Gudatvisten* by J. M. Stiernstolpe; *Nordens Mythologie eller Sinnbilled-Sprog* (1832) by N. F. S. Grundtvig; the poem *Harmen* by Thor Thorild; *Der Mythos von Thor* (1836) by Ludwig Uhland; *Der Hammer Thors* (1915) by W. Schulte v. Brühl; Hans Friedrich Blunck’s *Herr Dinnar und die Bauern* (published in *Märchen und Sagen*, 1937); and *Die Heimholung des Hammers* (1977) by H. C. Artmann.^[64] He also features in two works by Rudyard Kipling: *Letters of Travel: 1892-1913* and “Cold Iron” in *Rewards and Fairies*.

Artists have depicted Thor in painting and sculpture, including Henry Fuseli’s 1780 painting *Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent*; H. E. Freund’s 1821–1822 statue *Thor*; B. E. Fogelberg’s 1844 marble statue *Thor*; M. E. Winge’s 1880 charcoal drawing *Thors Kampf mit den Riesen*; K. Ehrenberg’s 1883 drawing *Odin, Thor und Magni*; several illustrations by E. Doepler published in Wilhelm Ranisch’s 1901 *Walhall (Thor; Thor und die Midgardschlange; Thor den Hrungnir bekämpfend; Thor bei dem Riesen Prym als Braut verkleidet; Thor bei Hymir; Thor bei Skrymir; Thor den Fluß Wimur durchwatend)*; J. C. Dollman’s 1909 drawings *Thor and the Mountain and Sif and Thor*; G. Poppe’s painting *Thor*; E. Pottner’s 1914 drawing *Thors Schatten*; H. Natter’s marble statue *Thor*; and U. Brember’s 1977 illustrations to *Die Heimholung des Hammers* by H. C. Artmann.^[64]

Swedish chemist Jöns Jacob Berzelius (1779–1848) discovered a chemical element that he named after Thor – thorium.^[65]

In 1962, American comic book writer Stan Lee and his brother Larry Lieber, together with Jack Kirby, created the Marvel Comics superhero Thor, which they based on the god of the same name.^[66] Portrayed by Australian actor Chris Hemsworth, this character stars in the Marvel Studios films *Thor* (2011), *The Avengers* (2012), *Thor: The Dark World* (2013) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) and the upcoming *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017).

First described in 2013, Thor’s hero shrew (*Scutisorex thori*) is a species of shrew native to the Democratic Republic of Congo. It and its sister species, the hero shrew (*Scutisorex somereni*), are the only mammal species known to have interlocking vertebrae.^[67] The team named the shrew after Thor due to the god’s association with strength.^[67]

Swedish melodic death metal band Amon Amarth’s 2008 studio album *Twilight of the Thunder God* is based around Thor’s slaying of the serpent Jormungandr.

Thor appears in Rick Riordan’s 2015 fantasy novel *The Sword of Summer*.

In Greenland a peninsula was named Thorland and a fjord Thor Fjord and in Canada a mountain, Mount Thor in Baffin Island. There is also a Mount Thor in Alaska and another Mount Thor in Antarctica, as well as Thor (vol-

cano), on Jupiter's moon Io.

7 See also

- List of Germanic deities

8 Notes

- [1] On the red beard and the use of “Redbeard” as an epithet for Thor, see H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, 1964, repr. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990, ISBN 0-14-013627-4, p. 85, citing the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* in *Flateyjarbók, Saga of Erik the Red*, and *Flóamanna saga*. The Prologue to the *Prose Edda* says ambiguously that “His hair is more beautiful than gold.”
- [2] Orel (2003:429).
- [3] Simek (2007:333).
- [4] Simek (2007:321).
- [5] Birley (1999:42).
- [6] Birley (1999:107).
- [7] Birley (1999:42 and 106—107).
- [8] Simek (2007:140—142).
- [9] Simek (2007:235—236).
- [10] Simek (2007:238) and Robinson (1916:63).
- [11] Turville-Petre (1964:99)
- [12] See North (1998:238—241) for *þunnorad* and tales regarding Thunor, see Encyclopædia Britannica (1910:608) regarding usage of *Thunor* as an Old English gloss for *Jupiter* and *Tiw* employed as a gloss for *Mars*.
- [13] Simek (2007:276).
- [14] Turville-Petre (1964:99—100); variant texts in mss. Stowe 944, Cotton Caligula A. xiv, London, Lambeth Palace 427.
- [15] Orchard (1997:168—169).
- [16] North (1998:236).
- [17] McLeod, Mees (2006:120).
- [18] McLeod, Mees (2006:28).
- [19] McLeod, Mees (2006:30).
- [20] Dumézil (1973:125).
- [21] Larrington (1999:320).
- [22] Thorpe (1907:7).
- [23] Bellows (1923:23).
- [24] Larrington (1999:11—12).
- [25] Larrington (1999:57).
- [26] Larrington (1999:66).
- [27] Larrington (1999:69-75).
- [28] Larrington (1999:78—79).
- [29] Larrington (1999:79—80).
- [30] Larrington (1999:81).
- [31] Larrington (1999:82—83).
- [32] Larrington (1999:84 and 94).
- [33] Larrington (1999:94—95).
- [34] Larrington (1999:97).
- [35] Larrington (1999:97—98).
- [36] Larrington (1999:98).
- [37] Larrington (1999:99).
- [38] Larrington (1999:100).
- [39] Larrington (1999:101).
- [40] Larrington (1999:109—113). For Þrúðr hypothesis, see Orchard (1997:164—165).
- [41] Larrington (1999:113).
- [42] Larrington (1999:254).
- [43] Hollander (2007:10—11).
- [44] Grimm (1882:166—177).
- [45] See Lindow (1978:89), but noted as early as Thorpe (1851:154) who states, “The dread entertained by the Trolls for thunder dates from the time of paganism, Thor, the god of thunder, being the deadly foe of their race.”
- [46] Sawyer (2003:128).
- [47] Simek (2007:219) and Orchard (1997:114).
- [48] Orchard (1997:161).
- [49] The symbol was identified as such since 19th century scholarship; examples include Worsaae (1882:169) and Greg (1884:6).
- [50] Davidson (1965:12—13).
- [51] Stenton, Frank (1941). “The Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies: Anglo-Saxon Heathenism”. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, XXIII, 1–24, pp. 17– ; (1971). *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford History of England 2, 1943, 3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, ISBN 9780198217169, pp. 99–100.
- [52] Grimm (1882:177).
- [53] Thorpe (1851:51—54).
- [54] De Vries (1957:111).
- [55] Simek (2007:322).

- [56] Turville-Petre (1964:96–97).
- [57] Dumézil (1973:17).
- [58] De Vries (1957:151–53)
- [59] Turville-Petre (1964:103–05)
- [60] Dumézil. *Heur et malheur du guerrier*. 2nd ed. Flammarion, 1985, p. 168 (French)
- [61] Dumézil (1973:71–72).
- [62] De Vries (1957:152–53)
- [63] Davidson (1975:72).
- [64] Simek (2007:323).
- [65] Morris (1992:2212).
- [66] Reynolds (1994:54).
- [67] Johnson (2013).

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Knottnerus, Pinethicket, I dream of horses, 1m2s3xy, GeorgeAhrens, Tom.Reding, Carkui, Nikdanjor, Fumitol, Kibi78704, Nfmskills, Jauhienij, Cnwilliams, Abc518, Double sharp, ToBeBot, Jac100, D. O'Keefe, Dinamik-bot, Vrenator, Fgdfgssfghrr6rg7g756, Aoidh, Brianann MacAmhlaidh, WikiTome, Thor all over, Sideways713, Böri, DARTH SIDIOUS 2, Difufu Wu, RHPMaryMagdalene, TjBot, Salvio giuliano, Everclear93, EmausBot, Goldenbrook, John of Reading, WikitanvirBot, Ajraddatz, Happyj001, Fandraltastic, Sahsnos, RenameUser01302013, Sxoa, Mychele Trempetich, Hariamu, Slightsmile, Tommy2010, TuHan-Bot, Wikipelli, K6ka, ArchangelIdiotis, Thor Tao Hansen, John Cline, DontTestMyPowah, Susfele, Jandals3, Josve05a, Duperman01, Wikiguyantho, Laxbro101, Sonez1113, Wayne Slam, Tiganusi, Tolly4bolly, Kevjonesin, Drboy174, Morgankevinj, Kivapet, Donner60, TomorrowWeDie, Usb10, HandsomeFella, AgentSniff, Eclectic Angel, Cgt, ClueBot NG, Inkowik, MelbourneStar, Kelly Swanson, LogX, Fireandice69, Scamscam123, Iritakamas, Fogolize,

STFX1046190, Tronzy, Coboy123, Wipedmaybe1, Costesseyboy, Ninja of Tao, Woodliefd, Widr, Keithsapp, Malankeymalchick, Pluma, Helpful Pixie Bot, Icearmy2000, Philip.coster, Calidum, Calabe1992, Gutterdup, Youtbe22, Doob3033, BG19bot, Neptune's Trident, Farmallh, Pikipix, Jay8g, Xxlol, TCN7JM, XXMattBXX, Hamzah1928, Wiki13, Shelley Day, Loopsnahoop, Raffber, Dr.Toonhattan, Future-Trillionaire, Jorgev96, Aranea Mortem, Robert Thyder, Cubanboy321, JoelTP9, Snow Blizzard, Epicurus B., Mynameistrent123, Tommorris20, Larryh6, StevinSimon, Gaberholom00, Larryh5, Yo mama 1234567890987654321, Freedom234, Chip123456, KeyshawnSamuel, Tiger443, Jakebarrington, Pratyya Ghosh, Mdann52, Codeh, Khazar2, Ben pow, Ducknish, TribeVoice, Dexbot, FoCuSandLeArN, Lachie=thor, Mogism, Hedbangr141, Anderson, Livedvoice9, Joe"Sucks"Johnson, Lugia2453, Kosena, Frosty, Zjec, Princeofpersia410, Triplebotline, Qwertyuiopasdfghjkl, JustAMuggle, Cadillac000, Thorlover2301, Dsqared144, Lovederpy, MikeGank2101, Nitpicking polish, Jamescmahon0, Bbuy6, Eyesnore, Apranam2, Everymorning, Et2brute, Liketotaly, EvergreenFir, DavidLeighEllis, Sammarine09, Alantisdell, Solidsnake97, Ugog Nizdast, PokeZelda64, NottNott, Ginsuloft, Killerjohnsson, TCMemoire, Deforge50410, Roso567, Gangnam300, ThormodMorrisson, Thatmarvelguy22, Lycanthropy21, Jamieparton, Melcous, Dbsseven, Cole Brunner, Swedishdub, Erik the red1998, Willysikora24, Anjfrac, Aeros1971, Arunkumar.kila, Raccoonraider74, Steven0314, Amanda.Movsessian, Ayushmanjena, RCGbear, IronPanther, Mr. Lunt, Spoderman.sweg, Grabo60, MRD2014, Religiouswog, User asdf, Crystallizedcarbon, 2dank4um8, Njf24, Maymichael2, Kinafer, Lokifgdhg, Swagmeister1, Guarddog07, Kilos Blackfield, Rigin22, Screwyoudad123, Npamusic, Megahacker95, Bobbydawg, Craftwerker, Malebanana, Thortheman, Usuckguys22, Johnstevenson796, KasparBot, WX-78, People in the, Minimoblo8, Samhankthedankspank, Dbroayy41, Cutepuppy11, Swagalicious Puncake, CAPTAIN RAJU, LE Elgin, Apokolips Lord, Svamen, Agnostos Theos, Zaphodsheads, Mynamaisjeff, Thodinson Thor Odinson, Fitindia, Craigjonesy69, JudgeRM, Trailminer, That one ninja, PleasantCheese, Earbones, Negaitvenas, Gadgwaef, Ernesthor, FaunaInBlack, PikachuKicksAss, Theatreonice and Anonymous: 1208

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