

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

ODIN

THE VIKING ALLFATHER



STEVEN S. LONG

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INTRODUCTION

Odin, often referred to by his epithet “All-Father,” is the ruler and military leader of the *Aesir*, the pantheon of the ancient Norsemen. A god of war, wisdom, and wizardry, he can see everything happening in the Nine Worlds from his throne, the Hlidskjalf. In his hall, Valhalla, he hosts the *einherjar*, the fallen warriors and heroes of mankind who will fight with the gods in Ragnarok, the final battle against the giants.

Although he is not as well-known as his mighty son Thor, the god of thunder, Odin appears frequently in Norse myths. While Thor enjoyed wide popularity as a god of the common man, kings, warriors, and poets revered Odin, thus ensuring him a prominent place in legend.



A statue of Odin in all his glory. (Ivy Close Images / Alamy)

SPELLING OLD NORSE WORDS

Rendering names and terms from Norse mythology into English sometimes poses a challenge. Old Norse uses some letters, accent marks, and diacriticals that never (or rarely) occur in English, and sources often differ as to the proper spelling of many words. For example, some writers spell “Odin” as Oðinn.

In an effort to keep this book as easy and enjoyable to read as possible, the author has chosen spellings that English readers are most likely to be comfortable with and omitted accent/diacritical marks. If you’re interested in the “real” spellings, you can find them in some of the books listed in the Bibliography.

Although Odin hasn’t experienced as much ongoing interest as Thor in the modern world, he nevertheless remains a powerful, archetypal figure – the wise, one-eyed king with ravens on his shoulders and wolves at his feet, ready to render judgment or go to war, fiercely protective of his people. In his guise as a robed wanderer with a wide-brimmed hat and a staff he has influenced, among other things, J.R.R. Tolkien’s character Gandalf.

This book examines Odin in all his aspects, from the earliest tales of Norse myth and legend to his modern day appearances in novels, comic books, and games.

The Norse Gods

While Odin stands first and foremost among the Aesir (literally “The Gods”), he’s by no means the only Norse deity. Some who appear prominently in the main sources include:

Baldur (also spelled Balder or Baldr): the god of peace, truth, and light. He’s one of Odin’s sons by Frigg. Everyone throughout the Nine Worlds loves Baldur. Loki’s vicious murder of him casts a pall over the Aesir and is the first step on the road to Ragnarok.

Frey: a god of sunlight and fertility. He, his sister Freya, and their father Njord are members of the *Vanir*, a race of deities who live in Vanaheim. These three came to live with the Aesir to seal the peace after the Aesir–Vanir war. Frey rides the shining golden boar Gullinbursti, and owns the ship *Skidbladnir* which is big enough to carry all of the Aesir but can fold down until it’s small enough to fit in Frey’s pocket. He lives in Alfheim, where he rules the elves.

Freyja (or Freyja): goddess of beauty and love. She wears the fabulous necklace Brisingamen which makes her even more beautiful, and also owns a cloak of falcon feathers that the other gods occasionally borrow if they need to fly somewhere. When she mourns for her lost husband Odur, she cries tears of pure gold.

Frigg (or Frigga): Odin’s wife. She spins the clouds on her spinning wheel.

Heimdall: the sentinel of the gods. He stands watch at the head of Bifrost, the Rainbow Bridge. He can see things 100 miles away as clearly as if he were next to them and can hear the grass growing down on Midgard. When he senses danger approaching, he blows the Gjallarhorn to alert the Aesir.

First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Osprey Publishing,
Kemp House, Chawley Park, Cumnor Hill, Oxford, OX2 9PH, UK
4301 21st. St., Suite 220, Long Island City, NY 11101, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

Osprey Publishing is part of the Osprey Group

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A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library

Print ISBN: 978 4728 0806 6
PDF e-book ISBN: 978 1 4728 0807 3
EPUB e-book ISBN: 978 1 4728 0808 0

Typeset in Garamond Pro and Myriad Pro

Originated by PDQ Media, Bungay, UK

Osprey Publishing is supporting the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, by funding the dedication of trees.

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