

# The Role of Tyr

## by Mark Puryear

Usually, when I begin writing an essay, I like to get right to it, laying the groundwork for whatever theory or idea I am presenting right away. This time, however, I would like to begin with a vow to everyone that will ever come into contact with any of the works of The Norroena Society. It is our promise to you that we will always work diligently to present the best possible means of rebuilding our ancient faith. We will carefully sift through all of our available resources with a fine-toothed comb and present our findings using the most logical means we can devise. We will try to avoid conjecture or weak arguments as much as possible, and will question every theory, every idea presented in second-hand sources. We may not always be right, and there will always be an opportunity to debate our findings, but we will do our best to give you the highest standard possible in our research. It is our commitment to you to develop a complete and conclusive ideological foundation for the practice of the Asatru/Odinist faith. This commitment is based solely upon a desire to serve our folk in the best way we can. Whatever we offer, in our books, magazines, website, etc. we are going to back up with sound evidence and logical conclusions. At any point in time we will be prepared to answer question or debate any of the material presented. We are not trying to become any sort of "authority" on the Asatru/Odinist religion, but rather to become a service our people can rely on for any of their religious needs. This is our ultimate goal.

I write this because there will be times when we may have to challenge the status quo in our field of research. This might even put us at odds with other Asatru/Odinist groups. Although I certainly hope this does not happen, I can assure you that it will not stop us from doing what we feel is right. The fact is, people tend to cling to traditions they feel are established, especially when they had some part to play in their establishment. There is nothing wrong with this, it's just human nature. However, the revival of our ancient religion is still relatively new, so we have to expect a period of fluctuation, where ideas will come and go, which will require an open mind from everyone involved.

Now to the topic at hand. Recently, we have come upon some evidence that has challenged what seems to be an established "fact" among our scholars. It has been said for years the Ryr, our god of war and of soldiers, is also god of the Thing and justice, as well as the original "sky father" until Odin usurped his position. The only evidence linking Tyr to the role of "sky father" is the conclusion that he is identical to Zeus of the Greeks and Jupiter of the Romans as "Father Dyuas" (Dyuas Pater). In consideration of this idea I refer the reader to the first part of [this essay by Viktor Rydberg](#). I would now like to elaborate on this:

The idea that Tyr was the original sky-father seems to have originated with Jacob Grimm. The flaw in his reasoning is that it is solely based upon etymological conclusions, which do not coincide with any other evidence known to us. Early runic monuments mention the name Odin, which are contemporary with Tacitus' Germania, where he mentioned that ☐Mercury☐ (consistently identified with Odin) was the chief god among the

Teutons. There simply isn't any proof that points to a major change of religion in Northern Europe between the time of Indo-European unity (before they branches off to become the Teutons, Greeks, Slavs, Mediterraneans and East Indians) and the coming of Christianity. Without any such evidence we cannot rely on an etymological hypothesis as proof that such a change occurred, especially if we can give a better explanation for the subject of the hypothesis.

It is most likely that Tiwaz, or Tiva was once a name of Odin that was also given to his son., This would not be the only time we have seen such a transference. Fjorgyn is a name of Frigga, which she inherited from her father of the same name (see Lok. 26, Gylf. 10, and Skaldsk. 18). Frigga also has the epithet Hlin, which is given to one of her maidservants. When Heimdall blessed our folk with his presence and took part in the union between the noble couple, he gave Jarl "his own name" (Rigs. 34), thus Jarl became "Rig-Jarl" (str. 44). Freya has the name Gefn, which is identical to Gefjon, who may be one of Freya's sisters. From this we can see that the idea of deities sharing names, especially among close relations, is not unheard of.

One of the favored ideas related to Tyr as sky-father is the connection between him and the Irminsul, because it looks like his run, Tiwaz. Because the run-poems relate the kenning "leavings of the wolf" to this rune we know that this designates the son, Tyr, rather than the father, Odin-Tiva. However, arguments have been presented which have made a good case for the Irminsul being a representation of Yggdrasil, with its branches in the sky and its three roots in the Underworld (see James Hjuka-Coulter's Germanic Heathenry). If this is the case then it would explain how Tyr could have come to be associated with this ancient icon. The very word, Yggdrasil, means "The Stead of Ygg", Ygg being one of Odin's names. This reminds us of Odin's self-sacrifice when he hung, metaphorically "riding" the tree for nine nights (\*Hav. 140). In effect, Odin has a very strong connection to the symbol of Yggdrasil, and, if Hjuka-Coulter's theory is correct, he would therefore have a connection to the Irminsul. If Tyr was special enough to have inherited one of the names of his father, it would only seem natural that he could also be represented by the symbol that bears their common name. That is, of course, if the Tyr rune is identical to the Irminsul, which is conjectural.

If you really have any doubt about this, and still think Tyr is the original sky-father and was once the highest god of our pantheon, just consult the lore. Odin is the creator of Midgard and of humans, teacher of runes, the one who grants wishes and gives success in all endeavors. Could there really be a higher duty than these? You can't "usurp" the role of creator-god, you either created the earth and our folk or you didn't. If we had to accept that Tyr once held all of these positions then Odin, who many have named our faith thereafter, would be a fraud and a liar and Tyr a defeated weakling subservient to the god that stole his position. I doubt anyone would want to place either of these descriptions on our god of nobility and our god of war.

Tyr is the god of war, period. We know this from the Prose Edda, mainly. As Snorri attests (Gylf. 25), the story of his hand lost as a pledge so Fenris could be bound is a

testament to his bravery, and that is it. All sorts of guesswork has been used to give him several other duties among the gods based on this story alone, but the passages in Gylfaginning simply relate to us the divine image of what military generals should aspire to: cleverness and bravery.

I began my investigation into Tyr's role among the gods wondering how it was that he became known as the god of the Thing, or of justice. Since it was likely that this was an idea established by members of the Asatru/Odinist community, I began asking questions. In response to this I received a lot of ideas based upon symbolism and conjecture, which I do not believe should be the primary basis for anything.

There is only one piece of hard evidence I have seen that could possibly link Tyr to the Thing. This is an inscription from the 3rd century C.E. on a votive altar set up by Frisian legionaries stationed at Housesteads on Hadrian's wall (North England). The inscription mentions a god by the name of "Mars Thingus" (Deo Marti Thingso). Of course, Mars is typically identified with Tyr, but I believe there is reason to suspect that, in this instance, another deity is intended.

It may be possible that "Mars Thingus" is a Latin translation of a poetic kenning used by our ancestors to denote the actual god of the Thing. If this was such a translation, then "Mars thingus" could not have been Tyr, according to the rules of Nordic poetry. In Skaldskaparmál's epilogue Snorri states that when "we speak of Odin or Thor or Tyr or one of the Aesir of Alfarr, in such a way that with each of those I mention, I add a term for the attribute of another As or make mention of one or other of his deeds" Then the latter becomes the one referred to, and not the one that was named; for instance, when we speak of Victory-Tyr or Hanged-Tyr or Cargo-Tyr, these are expressions for Odin similarly if one speaks of Chariot-Tyr (Thor). So, if I wanted to present such a kenning for Freya I could call her Brisingamen-Sif, or for Bragi I could call him Skald-Thor. In the same sense, if I used the kenning Thing-Tyr or "The Tyr of the Thing", this would represent a deity who is not Tyr.

The fact that this inscription was written by Frisian legionaries furthers the possibility of this. There is a deity known among the Frisians who is particularly devoted to law and justice, by the name of Fosite, known among the Scandinavians as Forseti. Alcuin's work "The Life of Saint Willibrord" mentions the god Fosite among the Frisians. A legal position known as Foerspreka "mediator" seems to have been related to this name. There is no Roman equivalent to such a deity, so it is probable that the Latin writers used a kenning to designate him.

Besides the possibility that the inscription can be refuted, there is evidence from Teutonic sources which contradicts the idea that Tyr was god of the Thing. To fully understand this evidence we must first consider exactly what the institution of the Thing was to our ancestors. Although it became a system of parliamentary government, it actually began as a court, a place where disputes were settled, among other things. The idea was that conflicts were ended and peace was restored it became a system of parliamentary government, it actually began as a court, a place where disputes were settled, among

other things. The idea was that conflicts were ended and peace was restored by the Thing, even if a dispute had to end in battle. The holmgang, or "island-going", was a form of single-combat that may or may not have ended with the death of the defeated. No matter who won, the case was then settled, with the victor having his way in the proceedings. This use of battle to settle some disputes has been used as a justification for Tyr being considered the god of the Thing. But Tyr is the god of war, not of duels. If we were going to label a god as a representative of duels, it would have to be Thor. After all, in the myths Tyr is never known to actively participate in or represent duels, whereas Thor engages in them time and time again, making up the bulk of his adventures. Whenever a foe is to be vanquished by single-combat, it is Thor who the gods call on, never Tyr.

If the Thing is where disputes are settled and peace is restored to the community then Tyr is an unlikely candidate for this. Snorri tells us that "he is not considered a promoter of settlements between people", another translation of this same line states that "he is not considered a peacemaker among people" (Gylfaginning 25). This formally excuses him as representative of justice or of the Thing.

So, if Tyr does not represent the Thing, who does? When considering the idea of justice from a Teutonic perspective the foremost ideal seems to be balance, which must be among the attributes displayed the god who represents this institution. There must be a balance between boldness and compassion, honor and kindness, and nobility and fairness. No other deity better exemplifies this ideal than Balder. It may seem romantic to have the valiant god of war representing the Thing, but consider the possibility of being a defendant in a criminal case brought against you. Would this be a time when you would want to pray to a god of war, or a god of compassion?

That idea that Balder, and after him his son Forseti, are gods of justice and of the Thing is supported directly by the Eddas. In Gylfaginning Balder is called Liknsamastr - "most conciliatory" or "most merciful". This title has also been translated as "The Most Influential Peacemaker", in stark contrast to Tyr, who is "not known as a peacemaker among people". It is possible, therefore, that Balder was considered to be one of the Ljonar- "Peacemakers" as described in the Prose Edda (for evidence of this, see Viktor Rydberg, *Investigations Into Germanic Mythology* vol. I ch. 112). The term Ljonar, representing "those men whose business it is to settle disputes" (Skaldsk. 65), must have been judges of some sort at the Thing, in the same way we call some judges "justice of the peace". Balder's son, Forseti, is said in Grimnismal 15 to "settle all disputes", thus he is the representative of the Ljonar, which we must compare to the Foerspreka mentioned above.

As the god who "settles all disputes", Forseti owns the hall where the Thing is held in Asgard, known as Glitnir. It has been supposed that this was originally Balder's home, given to Forseti as an inheritance, and that Balder's hall, Breidablik is in the Underworld, where he teaches Lif and Lifthrasir for the upcoming reneal (see Rydberg, UGM II ch. 42 and pages 187 [#57] and 211 [#153] of part 2, Reaves' translation). Here is what is said in The Prose Edda:

□Forseti is the name of the son of Balder and Nanna Nepsdottir. He has a hall in heaven called Glitnir, and whoever comes to him with difficult legal disputes, they all leave with their differences settled. It is the best place of judgement among gods and men. Thus it says here (Grimnismal 15): There is a hall called Glitnir, it is held up by golden pillars and likewise roofed with silver. There Forseti dwells most days and settles all disputes.□

Here we have direct evidence from the Eddas that Balder and Forseti are gods of the Thing and of justice. Tyr is specifically stated to not be involved in matters concerning settlements, whereas Forseti □settles all suits□; that is, all suits, including those that must be resolved through combat. This evidence is clear and direct, without any sort of conjecture or imagination needed to see it.