

THE NORSE MYTH OF CREATION

It began with a void, like many other primal myths of creation.

Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void ... which faced toward the northern quarter, became filled with heaviness, and masses of ice and rime, and from within, drizzling rain and gusts; but the southern part of the Yawning Void was lighted by those sparks and glowing masses which flew out of Múspellheim

In the northern part of Ginnungagap lay the intense cold of Niflheim, and in the southern part lay the equally intense heat of Muspelheim. The cosmogonic process began when the effulgence of the two met in the middle of Ginnungagap.

It was a bridge between two non-voids, Muspelheim and Niflheim. Muspelheim was in the far south. It was a fiery realm, tumultuous and torrid, that sent tongues of light into the distant corners of the then-world. In the northernmost regions was Niflheim. From its icy stronghold flowed twelve frigid rivers, merging in Ginnungagap. The heat and flame from Muspelheim and the waters of Niflheim wove an ethereal web of mist in the Yawning Gap, a cradle that was to bear the first life of the world.

It was giants, not gods that were wrought from the dripping ice of Ginnugagap. Ymir arose from the haze, copiously evil. He stretched his form across Ginnugagap, and from the sweat of his armpits he bore a son and a daughter. Then one of Ymir's legs bred with the other to create another son. All were part of the growing family of frost ogres.



Ymir sucks at the udder of Auðumbla as she licks Búri out of the ice in a painting by Nicolai Abildgaard, 1790

The ice in the Yawning Gap continued to be warmed by Muspelheim's proximity, and rivulets of water began to form the cow giant, Auohumla, the true ancestor of the Norse gods. Auohumla fed the frost giants with her milk, and found sustenance in the ever-present masses of ice. With her tongue, she moulded the ice and formed Bor. His union with one of the daughters of the frost ogres yielded the Norse gods Oðinn, Ve, and Villi. In anger at Ymir's evil ways, the three gods battled the giant and defeated him. A flood of blood destroyed almost all of the giants. The ones who survived became the constant enemies of the gods. The world was created from the pieces of the vanquished giant—the sky was moulded from his skull, the seas from his blood, and the earth from his body.

In this world of the Norse gods, a great tree, Yggdrasil, sustained the earth. There was also a holy well upon whose rim sat the three Norns, or fates—Urda, who had dominion over the past, Verdandi, who ruled the present, and Skuld, the sovereign of the future. These three goddesses controlled the fate of men. Nordic legend hails them as disruptors of peace—the catalysts for Scandinavian religion and ritual.

After the establishment of the earth, Oðinn, with his wise and luminary eye, created the first man and woman out of the trunks of trees. Man was created from an ash tree and was named Ask.

Woman was formed from an elm and was bestowed the name Embla. Both were given boons from Ve and Villi—the gift of sight, hearing, and intelligence. They dwelled in Midgard, the fortress of mankind, made secure from the evil giants by a wall crafted of Ymir's great eyebrows. Thus was the beginning of the race of men according to Icelandic lore.