

= Ragnarök =

In Norse mythology , Ragnarök is a series of future events , including a great battle , foretold to ultimately result in the death of a number of major figures ( including the gods Odin , Thor , Týr , Freyr , Heimdallr , and Loki ) , the occurrence of various natural disasters , and the subsequent submersion of the world in water . Afterward , the world will resurface anew and fertile , the surviving and returning gods will meet , and the world will be repopulated by two human survivors . Ragnarök is an important event in the Norse canon , and has been the subject of scholarly discourse and theory .

The event is attested primarily in the Poetic Edda , compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources , and the Prose Edda , written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson . In the Prose Edda , and in a single poem in the Poetic Edda , the event is referred to as Ragnarök or Ragnarøkkr ( Old Norse " Fate of the Gods " and " Twilight of the Gods " respectively ) , a usage popularised by 19th @-@ century composer Richard Wagner with the title of the last of his *Der Ring des Nibelungen* operas , *Götterdämmerung* ( 1876 ) .

= = Etymology = =

The Old Norse compound ragnarok has a long history of interpretation . Its first element , ragna , is unproblematic , being the genitive plural of regin ( n. pl . ) " the ruling powers , gods " . The second element is more difficult , as it occurs in two variants , -rök and -røkkr . Zoega 's *Old Icelandic Dictionary* treats the two forms as two separate compounds , glossing ragnarök as " the doom or destruction of the gods " and ragnarøkkr as " the twilight of the gods " ( 1910 ) .

The plural noun rök , has several meanings , such as " development , origin , cause , relation , fate . " The word ragnarök as a whole is then usually interpreted as the " final destiny of the gods . "

The singular form ragnarök ( k ) r is found in stanza 39 of the Poetic Edda poem Lokasenna , and in the Prose Edda . The noun rök ( k ) r means " twilight " ( from a verb rökkva " to grow dark " ) , suggesting a translation " twilight of the gods " . This reading was widely considered a result of folk etymology , or a learned reinterpretation , of the original term due to the merger of / ? / and / ø / in Old Icelandic after ca . 1200 ( nevertheless giving rise to the concept of *Götterdämmerung* " Twilight of the Gods " in the German reception of Norse mythology ) . Nevertheless , Haraldur Bernharðsson in a 2007 paper suggested that the singular form -røkr " twilight " ( from a Proto @-@ Germanic \* rekwa ) might have been the original reading . Haraldur Bernharðsson argues instead that the words ragnarök and ragnarøkkr are closely related , etymologically and semantically , and suggests a meaning of " renewal of the divine powers . "

Other terms used to refer to the events surrounding Ragnarök in the Poetic Edda include aldar rök ( aldar means age , " end of an age " ) from stanza 39 of *Vafþrúðnismál* , tíva rök from stanzas 38 and 42 of *Vafþrúðnismál* , þá er regin deyja ( " when the gods die " ) from *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 47 , unz um rjúfask regin ( " when the gods will be destroyed " ) from *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 52 , Lokasenna stanza 41 , and *Sigrdrífumál* stanza 19 , aldar rof ( " destruction of the age " ) from *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* stanza 41 , regin þrjóta ( " end of the gods " ) from *Hyndluljóð* stanza 42 , and , in the Prose Edda , þá er Muspellz @-@ synir herja ( " when the sons of Muspell move into battle " ) can be found in chapters 18 and 36 of *Gylfaginning* .

= = Attestations = =

= = Poetic Edda = = =

The Poetic Edda contains various references to Ragnarök :

= = = Völuspá = = =

In the Poetic Edda poem Völuspá , references to Ragnarök begin from stanza 40 until 58 , with the rest of the poem describing the aftermath . In the poem , a völva recites information to Odin . In stanza 41 , the völva says :

The völva then describes three roosters crowing : In stanza 42 , the jötunn herdsman Eggthér sits on a mound and cheerfully plays his harp while the crimson rooster Fjalar ( Old Norse " hider , deceiver " ) crows in the forest Gálgvíðr . The golden rooster Gullinkambi crows to the Æsir in Valhalla , and the third , unnamed soot @-@ red rooster crows in the halls of the underworld location of Hel in stanza 43 .

After these stanzas , the völva further relates that the hound Garmr produces deep howls in front of the cave of Gnipahellir . Garmr 's bindings break and he runs free . The völva describes the state of humanity :

The " sons of Mím " are described as being " at play " , though this reference is not further explained in surviving sources . Heimdall raises the Gjallarhorn into the air and blows deeply into it , and Odin converses with Mím 's head . The world tree Yggdrasil shudders and groans . The jötunn Hrym comes from the east , his shield before him . The Midgard serpent Jörmungandr furiously writhes , causing waves to crash . " The eagle shrieks , pale @-@ beaked he tears the corpse , " and the ship Naglfar breaks free thanks to the waves made by Jormungandr and sets sail from the east . The fire jötnar inhabitants of Muspelheim come forth .

The völva continues that Jötunheimr , the land of the jötnar , is aroar , and that the Æsir are in council . The dwarfs groan by their stone doors . Surtr advances from the south , his sword brighter than the sun . Rocky cliffs open and the jötnar women sink .

The gods then do battle with the invaders : Odin is swallowed whole and alive fighting the wolf Fenrir , causing his wife Frigg her second great sorrow ( the first being the death of her son , the god Baldr ) . Odin 's son Víðarr avenges his father by rending Fenrir 's jaws apart and stabbing it in the heart with his spear , thus killing the wolf . The serpent Jörmungandr opens its gaping maw , yawning widely in the air , and is met in combat by Thor . Thor , also a son of Odin and described here as protector of the earth , furiously fights the serpent , defeating it , but Thor is only able to take nine steps afterward before collapsing . The god Freyr fights Surtr and loses . After this , people flee their homes , and the sun becomes black while the earth sinks into the sea , the stars vanish , steam rises , and flames touch the heavens .

The völva sees the earth reappearing from the water , and an eagle over a waterfall hunting fish on a mountain . The surviving Æsir meet together at the field of Iðavöllr . They discuss Jörmungandr , great events of the past , and the runic alphabet . In stanza 61 , in the grass , they find the golden game pieces that the gods are described as having once happily enjoyed playing games with long ago ( attested earlier in the same poem ) . The reemerged fields grow without needing to be sown . The gods Höðr and Baldr return from Hel and live happily together .

The völva says that the god H?nir chooses wooden slips for divination , and that the sons of two brothers will widely inhabit the windy world . She sees a hall thatched with gold in Gimlé , where nobility will live and spend their lives pleasurably . Stanzas 65 , found in the Hauksbók version of the poem , refers to a " powerful , mighty one " that " rules over everything " and who will arrive from above at the court of the gods ( Old Norse regindómr ) , which has been interpreted as a Christian addition to the poem . In stanza 66 , the völva ends her account with a description of the dragon Níðhöggr , corpses in his jaws , flying through the air . The völva then " sinks down . " It is unclear if stanza 66 indicates that the völva is referring to the present time or if this is an element of the post @-@ Ragnarök world .

= = = Vafþrúðnismál = = =

The Vanir god Njörðr is mentioned in relation to Ragnarök in stanza 39 of the poem Vafþrúðnismál . In the poem , Odin , disguised as Gagnráðr faces off with the wise jötunn Vafþrúðnir in a battle of wits . Vafþrúðnismál references Njörðr 's status as a hostage during the earlier Æsir ? Vanir War , and that he will " come back home among the wise Vanir " at " the doom of men . "

In stanza 44 , Odin poses the question to Vafþrúðnir as to who of mankind will survive the " famous

" Fimbulwinter ( " Mighty Winter " ) . Vafþrúðnir responds in stanza 45 that those survivors will be Líf and Lífþrasir , and that they will hide in the forest of Hoddmímis holt , that they will consume the morning dew , and will produce generations of offspring . In stanza 46 , Odin asks what sun will come into the sky after Fenrir has consumed the sun that exists . Vafþrúðnir responds that Sól will bear a daughter before Fenrir assails her , and that after Ragnarök this daughter will continue her mother 's path .

In stanza 51 , Vafþrúðnir states that , after Surtr 's flames have been sated , Odin 's sons Víðarr and Váli will live in the temples of the gods , and that Thor 's sons Móði and Magni will possess the hammer Mjólnir . In stanza 52 , the disguised Odin asks the jötunn about Odin 's own fate . Vafþrúðnir responds that " the wolf " will consume Odin , and that Víðarr will avenge him by sundering its cold jaws in battle . Odin ends the duel with one final question : what did Odin say to his son before preparing his funeral pyre ? With this , Vafþrúðnir realizes that he is dealing with none other than Odin , whom he refers to as " the wisest of beings , " adding that Odin alone could know this . Odin 's message has been interpreted as a promise of resurrection to Baldr after Ragnarök .

= = = = Helgakviða Hundingsbana II = = = =

Ragnarök is briefly referenced in stanza 40 of the poem Helgakviða Hundingsbana II . Here , the valkyrie Sigrún 's unnamed maid is passing the deceased hero Helgi Hundingsbane 's burial mound . Helgi is there with a retinue of men , surprising the maid . The maid asks if she is witnessing a delusion since she sees dead men riding , or if Ragnarök has occurred . In stanza 41 , Helgi responds that it is neither .

= = = Prose Edda = = =

Snorri Sturluson 's Prose Edda quotes heavily from Völuspá and elaborates extensively in prose on the information there , though some of this information conflicts with that provided in Völuspá .

= = = = Gylfaginning chapters 26 and 34 = = = =

In the Prose Edda book Gylfaginning , various references are made to Ragnarök . Ragnarök is first mentioned in chapter 26 , where the throned figure of High , king of the hall , tells Gangleri ( King Gylfi in disguise ) some basic information about the goddess Iðunn , including that her apples will keep the gods young until Ragnarök .

In chapter 34 , High describes the binding of the wolf Fenrir by the gods , causing the god Týr to lose his right hand , and that Fenrir remains there until Ragnarök . Gangleri asks High why , since the gods could only expect destruction from Fenrir , they did not simply kill Fenrir once he was bound . High responds that " the gods hold their sacred places and sanctuaries in such respect that they chose not to defile them with the wolf 's blood , even though the prophecies foretold that he would be the death of Odin . "

As a consequence of his role in the death of the god Baldr , Loki ( described as father of Fenrir ) is bound on top of three stones with the internal organs of his son Narfi ( which are turned into iron ) in three places . There , venom drops onto his face periodically from a snake placed by the jötunn Skaði , and when his wife Sigyn empties the bucket she is using to collect the dripping venom , the pain he experiences causes convulsions , resulting in earthquakes . Loki is further described as being bound this way until the onset of Ragnarök .

= = = = Gylfaginning chapter 51 = = = =

Chapter 51 provides a detailed account of Ragnarök interspersed with various quotes from Völuspá , while chapters 52 and 53 describe the aftermath of these events . In Chapter 51 , High states the first sign of Ragnarök will be Fimbulwinter , during which time three winters will arrive without a summer , and the sun will be useless . High details that , prior to these winters , three earlier winters

will have occurred , marked with great battles throughout the world . During this time , greed will cause brothers to kill brothers , and fathers and sons will suffer from the collapse of kinship bonds . High then quotes stanza 45 of Völuspá . Next , High describes that the wolf will first swallow the sun , and then his brother the moon , and mankind will consider the occurrence as a great disaster resulting in much ruin . The stars will disappear . The earth and mountains will shake so violently that the trees will come loose from the soil , the mountains will topple , and all restraints will break , causing Fenrir to break free from his bonds .

High relates that the great serpent Jörmungandr , also described as a child of Loki in the same source , will breach land as the sea violently swells onto it . The ship Naglfar , described in the Prose Edda as being made from the human nails of the dead , is released from its mooring , and sets sail on the surging sea , steered by a jötunn named Hrym . At the same time , Fenrir , eyes and nostrils spraying flames , charges forward with his mouth wide open , his upper jaw reaching to the heavens , his lower jaw touching the earth . At Fenrir 's side , Jörmungandr sprays venom throughout the air and the sea .

During all of this , the sky splits into two . From the split , the " sons of Muspell " ride forth . Surtr rides first , surrounded by flames , his sword brighter than the sun . High says that " Muspell 's sons " will ride across Bifröst , described in Gylfaginning as a rainbow bridge , and that the bridge will then break . The sons of Muspell ( and their shining battle troop ) advance to the field of Vígríðr , described as an expanse that reaches " a hundred leagues in each direction , " where Fenrir , Jörmungandr , Loki ( followed by " Hel 's own " ) , and Hrym ( accompanied by all frost jötnar ) join them . While this occurs , Heimdallr stands and blows the Gjallarhorn with all his might . The gods awaken at the sound , and they meet . Odin rides to Mímisbrunnr in search of counsel from Mímir . Yggdrasil shakes , and everything , everywhere fears .

High relates that the Æsir and the Einherjar dress for war and head to the field . Odin , wearing a gold helmet and an intricate coat of mail , carries his spear Gungnir and rides before them . Odin advances against Fenrir , while Thor moves at his side , though Thor is unable to assist Odin because he has engaged Jörmungandr in combat . According to High , Freyr fiercely fights with Surtr , but Freyr falls because he lacks the sword he once gave to his messenger , Skírnir . The hound Garmr ( described here as the " worst of monsters " ) breaks free from his bonds in front of Gnipahellir , and fights the god Týr , resulting in both of their deaths .

Thor kills Jörmungandr , yet is poisoned by the serpent , and manages to walk nine steps before falling to the earth dead . Fenrir swallows Odin , though immediately afterward his son Víðarr kicks his foot into Fenrir 's lower jaw , grips Fenrir 's upper jaw , and rips apart Fenrir 's mouth , killing Fenrir . Loki fights Heimdallr , and the two kill one another . Surtr covers the earth in fire , causing the entire world to burn . High quotes stanzas 46 to 47 of Völuspá , and additionally stanza 18 of Vafþrúðnismál ( the latter relating information about the battlefield Vígríðr ) .

= = = = Gylfaginning chapters 52 and 53 = = = =

At the beginning of chapter 52 , Gangleri asks " what will be after heaven and earth and the whole world are burned ? All the gods will be dead , together with the Einherjar and the whole of mankind . Didn 't you say earlier that each person will live in some world throughout all ages ? "

The figure of Third , seated on the highest throne in the hall , responds that there will be many good places to live , but also many bad ones . Third states that the best place to be is Gimlé in the heavens , where a place exists called Okolnir that houses a hall called Brimir ? where one can find plenty to drink . Third describes a hall made of red gold located in Niðafjöll called Sindri , where " good and virtuous men will live . " Third further relates an unnamed hall in Náströnd , the beaches of the dead , that he describes as a large repugnant hall facing north that is built from the spines of snakes , and resembles " a house with walls woven from branches ; " the heads of the snakes face the inside of the house and spew so much venom that rivers of it flow throughout the hall , in which oath breakers and murderers must wade . Third here quotes Völuspá stanzas 38 to 39 , with the insertion of original prose stating that the worst place of all to be is in Hvergelmir , followed by a quote from Völuspá to highlight that the dragon Níðhöggr harasses the corpses of the dead there .

Chapter 53 begins with Gangleri asking if any of the gods will survive , and if there will be anything left of the earth or the sky . High responds that the earth will appear once more from the sea , beautiful and green , where self @-@ sown crops grow . The field Iðavöllr exists where Asgard once was , and , there , untouched by Surtr 's flames , Víðarr and Váli reside . Now possessing their father 's hammer Mjölñir , Thor 's sons Móði and Magni will meet them there , and , coming from Hel , Baldr and Höðr also arrive . Together , they all sit and recount memories , later finding the gold game pieces the Æsir once owned . Völuspá stanza 51 is then quoted .

High reveals that two humans , Líf and Lífþrasir , will have also survived the destruction by hiding in the wood Hoddmímis holt . These two survivors consume the morning dew for sustenance , and from their descendants the world will be repopulated . Vafþrúðnismál stanza 45 is then quoted . The personified sun , Sól , will have a daughter at least as beautiful as she , and this daughter will follow the same path as her mother . Vafþrúðnismál stanza 47 is quoted , and so ends the foretelling of Ragnarök in Gylfaginning .

= = Archaeological record = =

Various objects have been identified as depicting events from Ragnarök .

= = = Thorwald 's Cross = = =

Thorwald 's Cross , a partially surviving runestone 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 , while a large bird sits at his shoulder . Rundata dates it to 940 , while Pluskowski dates it to the 11th century . This depiction has been interpreted as Odin , with a raven or eagle at his shoulder , being consumed by Fenrir at Ragnarök . On the other side of the stone is a depiction of a large cross and another image parallel to the Odin figure that has been described as Christ triumphing over Satan . These combined elements have led to the cross as being described as " syncretic art " ; a mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs .

= = = Gosforth Cross = = =

The Gosforth Cross ( 920 ? 950 ) , in Cumbria , England , is a standing cross of a typical Anglo @-@ Saxon form , carved on all sides of the long shaft , which is nearly square in section . Apart from panels of ornament , the scenes include a Christian crucifixion , and possibly another scene in Hell , but the other scenes are generally interpreted as narrative incidents from the Ragnarök story , even by a scholar as cautious of such interpretations as David M. Wilson . The Ragnarök battle itself may be depicted on the north side . The cross features various figures depicted in Borre style , including a man with a spear facing a monstrous head , one of whose feet is thrust into the beast 's forked tongue and on its lower jaw , while the other is placed against its upper jaw , a scene interpreted as Víðarr fighting Fenrir .

= = = Ledberg stone = = =

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 . Below the beast and the man is a depiction of a legless , helmeted man , with his arms in a prostrate position . 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 , " and " an interesting magic formula which is known from all over the ancient Norse world . "

= = = Skarpåker stone = = =

On the early 11th century Skarpåker Stone , from Södermanland , Sweden , a father grieving his dead son used the same verse form , fornyrðislag , as in the Poetic Edda in the following engraving :

Jansson ( 1987 ) notes that at the time of the inscription , everyone who read the lines would have thought of Ragnarök and the allusion that the father found fitting as an expression of his grief .

= = Theories and interpretations = =

= = = Cyclic time and Hoddmímis holt = = =

Rudolf Simek theorizes that the survival of Líf and Lífþrasir at the end Ragnarök is " a case of reduplication of the anthropogeny , understandable from the cyclic nature of the Eddic eschatology " . Simek says that Hoddmímis holt " should not be understood literally as a wood or even a forest in which the two keep themselves hidden , but rather as an alternative name for the world @-@ tree Yggdrasill . Thus , the creation of mankind from tree trunks ( Askr , Embla ) is repeated after the Ragnarök as well " . Simek says that in Germanic regions , the concept of mankind originating from trees is ancient , and additionally points out legendary parallels in a Bavarian legend of a shepherd who lives inside a tree , whose descendants repopulate the land after life there has been wiped out by plague ( citing a retelling by F. R. Schröder ) . In addition , Simek points to an Old Norse parallel in the figure of Órvar @-@ Oddr , " who is rejuvenated after living as a tree @-@ man ( Órvar @-@ Odds saga 24 ? 27 ) " .

= = = Muspille , Heliand , and Christianity = = =

Theories have been proposed about the relation between Ragnarök and the 9th century Old High German epic poem Muspilli about the Christian Last Judgment , where the word Muspille appears , and the 9th century Old Saxon epic poem Heliand about the life of Christ , where various other forms of the word appear . In both sources , the word is used to signify the end of the world through fire . Old Norse forms of the term also appear throughout accounts of Ragnarök , where the world is also consumed in flames , and , though various theories exist about the meaning and origins of the term , its etymology has not been solved .

= = = Proto @-@ Indo @-@ European basis = = =

Parallels have been pointed out between the Ragnarök of Norse religion and the beliefs of other related Indo @-@ European peoples . Subsequently , theories have been put forth that Ragnarök represents a later evolution of a Proto @-@ Indo @-@ European belief along with other cultures descending from the Proto @-@ Indo @-@ Europeans . These parallels include comparisons of a cosmic winter motif between the Norse Fimbulwinter , the Iranian Bundahishn and Yima . Víðarr 's stride has been compared to the Vedic god Vishnu in that both have a " cosmic stride " with a special shoe used to tear apart a beastly wolf . Larger patterns have also been drawn between " final battle " events in Indo @-@ European cultures , including the occurrence of a blind or semi @-@ blind figure in " final battle " themes , and figures appearing suddenly with surprising skills .

= = = Volcanic eruptions = = =

Hilda Ellis Davidson theorizes that the events in Völuspá occurring after the death of the gods ( the sun turning black , steam rising , flames touching the heavens , etc . ) may be inspired by the volcanic eruptions on Iceland . Records of eruptions on Iceland bear strong similarities to the sequence of events described in Völuspá , especially the eruption at Laki that occurred in 1783 . Bertha Phillpotts theorizes that the figure of Surtr was inspired by Icelandic eruptions , and that he was a volcano demon . Surtr 's name occurs in some Icelandic place names , among them the lava

tube caves Surtshellir , a number of dark caverns in the volcanic central region of Iceland .

= = = Bergbúa þáttur = = =

Parallels have been pointed out between a poem spoken by a jötunn found in the 13th century þáttur Bergbúa þáttur ( " the tale of the mountain dweller " ) . In the tale , Thórd and his servant get lost while traveling to church in winter , and so take shelter for the night within a cave . Inside the cave they hear noises , witness a pair of immense burning eyes , and then the being with burning eyes recites a poem of 12 stanzas . The poem the being recites contains references to Norse mythology ( including a mention of Thor ) and also prophecies ( including that " mountains will tumble , the earth will move , men will be scoured by hot water and burned by fire " ) . Surtr 's fire receives a mention in stanza 10 . John Lindow says that the poem may describe " a mix of the destruction of the race of giants and of humans , as in Ragnarök " but that " many of the predictions of disruption on earth could also fit the volcanic activity that is so common in Iceland . "

= = Modern influence = =

In late 2013 and early 2014 , it was widely reported in English @-@ language media outlets that Ragnarök would occur on February 22 , 2014 . Apparently patterned after the 2012 phenomenon , the claim was at times attributed to a " Viking Calendar " . No such calendar is known to have existed , and the source was a " prediction " made to media outlets by the Jorvik Viking Centre in York , England , and intended to draw attention to an event that the institution was to hold on that date . The Jorvik Viking Centre was criticized for intentionally or unintentionally misleading the public ; however , in an article on the incident , Joseph S. Hopkins perceives the media response as an example of a broad revival of interest in the Viking Age and ancient Germanic topics .