

= Ratatoskr =

In Norse mythology , Ratatoskr (Old Norse , generally considered to mean " drill @-@ tooth " or " bore @-@ tooth ") is a squirrel who runs up and down the world tree Yggdrasil to carry messages between the Veðrfölnir , perched atop Yggdrasil , and the wyrm Níðhöggr , who dwells beneath one of the three roots of the tree . Ratatoskr is attested 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 .

= = Etymology = =

The name Ratatoskr contains two elements : rata- and -toskr . The element toskr is generally held to mean " tusk " . Guðbrandur Vigfússon theorized that the rati- element means " the traveller " . He says that the name of the legendary drill Rati may feature the same term . According to Vigfússon , Ratatoskr means " tusk the traveller " or " the climber tusk . "

Sophus Bugge theorized that the name Ratatoskr is a loanword from Old English meaning " Rat @-@ tooth . " Bugge 's basis hinges on the fact that the -toskr element of the compound does not appear anywhere else in Old Norse . Bugge proposed that the -toskr element is a reformation of the Old English word tʰosc (Old Frisian tusk) and , in turn , that the element Rata- represents Old English ræt (" rat ") .

According to Albert Sturtevant , " [as] far as the element Rata- is concerned , Bugge 's hypothesis has no valid foundation in view of the fact that the [Old Norse] word Rata (gen. form of Rati *) is used in Háv [amál] (106 , 1) to signify the instrument which Odin employed for boring his way through the rocks in quest of the poet 's mead [...] " and that " Rati * must then be considered a native [Old Norse] word meaning " The Borer , Gnawer " [...] " .

Sturtevant says that Bugge 's theory regarding the element -toskr may appear to be supported by the fact that the word does not appear elsewhere in Old Norse . Sturtevant , however , disagrees . Sturtevant says that the Old Norse proper name Tunne (derived from Proto @-@ Norse * Tunþ?) refers to " a person who is characterized as having some peculiar sort of tooth " and theorizes a Proto @-@ Germanic form of -toskr . Sturtevant concludes that " the fact that the [Old Norse] word occurs only in the name Rata @-@ toskr is no valid evidence against this assumption , for there are many [Old Norse] hapax legomena of native origin , as is attested by the equivalents in the Mod [ern] Scandinavian dialects . " Modern scholars have accepted this etymology , listing the name Ratatoskr as meaning " drill @-@ tooth " (Jesse Byock , Andy Orchard , Rudolf Simek) or " bore @-@ tooth " (John Lindow) .

= = Attestations = =

In the Poetic Edda poem Grímnismál , the god Odin (disguised as Grímnir) says that Ratatoskr runs up and down Yggdrasil bringing messages between the eagle perched atop it and Níðhöggr below it :

Ratatoskr is described in the Prose Edda 's Gylfaginning 's chapter 16 , in which High states that An eagle sits at the top of the ash , and it has knowledge of many things . Between its eyes sits the hawk called Vedrfölnir [...] . The squirrel called Ratatosk [...] runs up and down the ash . He tells slanderous gossip , provoking the eagle and Nidhogg .

= = Theories = =

According to Rudolf Simek , " the squirrel probably only represents an embellishing detail to the mythological picture of the world @-@ ash in Grímnismál " . Hilda Ellis Davidson , describing the world tree , states the squirrel is said to gnaw at it ? furthering a continual destruction and re @-@ growth cycle , and posits the tree symbolizes ever @-@ changing existence . John Lindow points out that Yggdrasil is described as rotting on one side and as being chewed on by four harts and

Níðhöggr , and that , according to the account in Gylfaginning , it also bears verbal hostility in the fauna it supports . Lindow adds that " in the sagas , a person who helps stir up or keep feuds alive by ferrying words of malice between the participants is seldom one of high status , which may explain the assignment of this role in the mythology to a relatively insignificant animal " .

Richard W. Thorington Jr. and Katie Ferrell theorize that " the role of Ratatosk probably derived from the habit of European tree squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*) to give a scolding alarm call in response to danger . It takes little imagination for you to think that the squirrel is saying nasty things about you . "