

= Hel (being) =

In Norse mythology , Hel is a being who presides over a realm of the same name , where she receives a portion of the dead . Hel 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 . In addition , she is mentioned in poems recorded in Heimskringla and Egils saga that date from the 9th and 10th centuries , respectively . An episode in the Latin work Gesta Danorum , written in the 12th century by Saxo Grammaticus , is generally considered to refer to Hel , and Hel may appear on various Migration Period bracteates .

In the Poetic Edda , Prose Edda , and Heimskringla , Hel is referred to as a daughter of Loki , and to " go to Hel " is to die . In the Prose Edda book Gylfaginning , Hel is described as having been appointed by the god Odin as ruler of a realm of the same name , located in Niflheim . In the same source , her appearance is described as half blue and half flesh @-@ coloured and further as having a gloomy , downcast appearance . The Prose Edda details that Hel rules over vast mansions with many servants in her underworld realm and plays a key role in the attempted resurrection of the god Baldr .

Scholarly theories have been proposed about Hel 's potential connections to figures appearing in the 11th @-@ century Old English Gospel of Nicodemus and Old Norse Bartholomeus saga postola , that she may have been considered a goddess with potential Indo @-@ European parallels in Bhavani , Kali , and Mahakali or that Hel may have become a being only as a late personification of the location of the same name .

= = Attestations = =

= = = Poetic Edda = = =

The Poetic Edda , compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources , features various poems that mention Hel . In the Poetic Edda poem Völuspá , Hel 's realm is referred to as the " Halls of Hel . " In stanza 31 of Grímnismál , Hel is listed as living beneath one of three roots growing from the world tree Yggdrasil . In Fáfnismál , the hero Sigurd stands before the mortally wounded body of the dragon Fáfnir , and states that Fáfnir lies in pieces , where " Hel can take " him . In Atlamál , the phrases " Hel has half of us " and " sent off to Hel " are used in reference to death , though it could be a reference to the location and not the being , if not both . In stanza 4 of Baldrs draumar , Odin rides towards the " high hall of Hel . "

Hel may also be alluded to in Hamðismál . Death is periphrased as " joy of the troll @-@ woman " (or " ogress ") and ostensibly it is Hel being referred to as the troll @-@ woman or the ogre (flagð) , although it may otherwise be some unspecified dís . The Poetic Edda also mentions that travelers to Hel must pass by her guardian hound Garmr .

= = = Prose Edda = = =

Hel is referenced in the Prose Edda , written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson . In chapter 34 of the book Gylfaginning , Hel is listed by High as one of the three children of Loki and Angrboða ; the wolf Fenrir , the serpent Jörmungandr , and Hel . High continues that , once the gods found that these three children are being brought up in the land of Jötunheimr , and when the gods " traced prophecies that from these siblings great mischief and disaster would arise for them " then the gods expected a lot of trouble from the three children , partially due to the nature of the mother of the children , yet worse so due to the nature of their father .

High says that Odin sent the gods to gather the children and bring them to him . Upon their arrival , Odin threw Jörmungandr into " that deep sea that lies round all lands , " Odin threw Hel into Niflheim , and bestowed upon her authority over nine worlds , in that she must " administer board and lodging to those sent to her , and that is those who die of sickness or old age . " High details that in this

realm Hel has " great Mansions " with extremely high walls and immense gates , a hall called Éljúðnir , a dish called " Hunger , " a knife called " Famine , " the servant Ganglati (Old Norse " lazy walker ") , the serving @-@ maid Ganglöt (also " lazy walker ") , the entrance threshold " Stumbling @-@ block , " the bed " Sick @-@ bed , " and the curtains " Gleaming @-@ bale . " High describes Hel as " half black and half flesh @-@ coloured , " adding that this makes her easily recognizable , and furthermore that Hel is " rather downcast and fierce @-@ looking . "

In chapter 49 , High describes the events surrounding the death of the god Baldr . The goddess Frigg asks who among the Æsir will earn " all her love and favour " by riding to Hel , the location , to try to find Baldr , and offer Hel herself a ransom . The god Hermóðr volunteers and sets off upon the eight @-@ legged horse Sleipnir to Hel . Hermóðr arrives in Hel 's hall , finds his brother Baldr there , and stays the night . The next morning , Hermóðr begs Hel to allow Baldr to ride home with him , and tells her about the great weeping the Æsir have done upon Baldr 's death . Hel says the love people have for Baldr that Hermóðr has claimed must be tested , stating :

" If all things in the world , alive or dead , weep for him , then he will be allowed to return to the Æsir . If anyone speaks against him or refuses to cry , then he will remain with Hel . "

Later in the chapter , after the female jötunn Þökk refuses to weep for the dead Baldr , she responds in verse , ending with " let Hel hold what she has . " In chapter 51 , High describes the events of Ragnarök , and details that when Loki arrives at the field Vígríðr " all of Hel 's people " will arrive with him .

In chapter 5 of the Prose Edda book Skáldskaparmál , Hel is mentioned in a kenning for Baldr (" Hel 's companion ") . In chapter 16 , " Hel 's [...] relative or father " is given as a kenning for Loki . In chapter 50 , Hel is referenced (" to join the company of the quite monstrous wolf 's sister ") in the skaldic poem Ragnarsdrápa .

= = = Heimskringla = = =

In the Heimskringla book Ynglinga saga , written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson , Hel is referred to , though never by name . In chapter 17 , the king Dyggvi dies of sickness . A poem from the 9th century Ynglingatal that forms the basis of Ynglinga saga is then quoted that describes Hel 's taking of Dyggvi :

I doubt not
but Dyggvi 's corpse
Hel does hold
to whore with him ;
for Ulf 's sib
a scion of kings
by right should
caress in death :
to love lured
Loki 's sister
Yngvi 's heir
o 'er all Sweden .

In chapter 45 , a section from Ynglingatal is given which refers to Hel as " howes ' -warder " (meaning " guardian of the graves ") and as taking King Halfdan Hvitbeinn from life . In chapter 46 , King Eystein Halfdansson dies by being knocked overboard by a sail yard . A section from Ynglingatal follows , describing that Eystein " fared to " Hel (referred to as " Býleistr 's @-@ brother 's @-@ daughter ") . In chapter 47 , the deceased Eystein 's son King Halfdan dies of an illness , and the excerpt provided in the chapter describes his fate thereafter , a portion of which references Hel :

Loki 's child
from life summoned
to her thing
the third liege @-@ lord ,

when Halfdan
of Holtar farm
left the life
allotted to him .

In a stanza from Ynglingatal recorded in chapter 72 of the Heimskringla book Saga of Harald Sigurdsson , " given to Hel " is again used as a phrase to referring to death .

= = = Egils saga = = =

The Icelanders ' saga Egils saga contains the poem Sonatorrek . The saga attributes the poem to 10th century skald Egill Skallagrímsson , and writes that it was composed by Egill after the death of his son Gunnar . The final stanza of the poem contains a mention of Hel , though not by name :

Now my course is tough :
Death , close sister
of Odin 's enemy
stands on the ness :
with resolution
and without remorse
I will gladly
await my own .

= = = Gesta Danorum = = =

In the account of Baldr 's death in Saxo Grammaticus ' early 13th century work Gesta Danorum , the dying Baldr has a dream visitation from Proserpina (here translated as " the goddess of death ") :

The following night the goddess of death appeared to him in a dream standing at his side , and declared that in three days time she would clasp him in her arms . It was no idle vision , for after three days the acute pain of his injury brought his end .

Scholars have assumed that Saxo used Proserpina as a goddess equivalent to the Norse Hel .

= = Archaeological record = =

It has been suggested that several Migration Period imitation medallions and bracteates feature depictions of Hel . In particular the bracteates IK 14 and IK 124 depict a rider traveling down a slope and coming upon a female being holding a scepter or a staff . The downward slope may indicate that the rider is traveling towards the realm of the dead and the woman with the scepter may be a female ruler of that realm , corresponding to Hel .

Some B @-@ class bracteates showing three godly figures have been interpreted as depicting Baldr 's death , the best known of these is the Fakse bracteate . Two of the figures are understood to be Baldr and Odin while both Loki and Hel have been proposed as candidates for the third figure . If it is Hel she is presumably greeting the dying Baldr as he comes to her realm .

= = Theories = =

= = = Seo Hell = = =

The Old English Gospel of Nicodemus , preserved in two manuscripts from the 11th century , contains a female figure referred to as Seo hell who engages in flyting with Satan and tells him to leave her dwelling (Old English ut of mynre onwununge) . Regarding Seo Hell in the Old English Gospel of Nicodemus , Michael Bell states that " her vivid personification in a dramatically excellent scene suggests that her gender is more than grammatical , and invites comparison with the Old

Norse underworld goddess Hel and the Frau Holle of German folklore , to say nothing of underworld goddesses in other cultures " yet adds that " the possibility that these genders are merely grammatical is strengthened by the fact that an Old Norse version of Nicodemus , possibly translated under English influence , personifies Hell in the neuter (Old Norse þat helviti) . "

= = = Bartholomeus saga postola = = =

The Old Norse Bartholomeus saga postola , an account of the life of Saint Bartholomew dating from the 13th century , mentions a " Queen Hel . " In the story , a devil is hiding within a pagan idol , and bound by Bartholomew 's spiritual powers to acknowledge himself and confess , the devil refers to Jesus as the one which " made war on Hel our queen " (Old Norse heriaði a Hel drottning vara) . " Queen Hel " is not mentioned elsewhere in the saga .

Michael Bell says that while Hel " might at first appear to be identical with the well @-@ known pagan goddess of the Norse underworld " as described in chapter 34 of Gylfaginning , " in the combined light of the Old English and Old Norse versions of Nicodemus she casts quite a different a shadow , " and that in Bartholomeus saga postola " she is clearly the queen of the Christian , not pagan , underworld . "

= = = Origins and development = = =

Jacob Grimm theorized that Hel (whom he refers to here as Halja , the theorized Proto @-@ Germanic form of the term) is essentially an " image of a greedy , unrestoring , female deity " and that " the higher we are allowed to penetrate into our antiquities , the less hellish and more godlike may Halja appear . Of this we have a particularly strong guarantee in her affinity to the Indian Bhavani , who travels about and bathes like Nerthus and Holda , but is likewise called Kali or Mahakali , the great black goddess . In the underworld she is supposed to sit in judgment on souls . This office , the similar name and the black hue [...] make her exceedingly like Halja . And Halja is one of the oldest and commonest conceptions of our heathenism . "

Grimm theorizes that the Helhest , a three legged @-@ horse that roams the countryside " as a harbinger of plague and pestilence " in Danish folklore , was originally the steed of the goddess Hel , and that on this steed Hel roamed the land " picking up the dead that were her due . " In addition , Grimm says that a wagon was once ascribed to Hel , with which Hel made journeys . Grimm says that Hel is an example of a " half @-@ goddess ; " " one who cannot be shown to be either wife or daughter of a god , and who stands in a dependent relation to higher divinities " and that " half @-@ goddesses " stand higher than " half @-@ gods " in Germanic mythology .

Hilda Ellis Davidson (1948) states that Hel " as a goddess " in surviving sources seems to belong to a genre of literary personification , that the word hel is generally " used simply to signify death or the grave , " and that the word often appears as the equivalent to the English ' death , ' which Davidson states " naturally lends itself to personification by poets . " Davidson explains that " whether this personification has originally been based on a belief in a goddess of death called Hel is another question , " but that she does not believe that the surviving sources give any reason to believe so . Davidson adds that , on the other hand , various other examples of " certain supernatural women " connected with death are to be found in sources for Norse mythology , that they " seem to have been closely connected with the world of death , and were pictured as welcoming dead warriors , " and that the depiction of Hel " as a goddess " in Gylfaginning " might well owe something to these . "

In a later work (1998) , Davidson states that the description of Hel found in chapter 33 of Gylfaginning " hardly suggests a goddess . " Davidson adds that " yet this is not the impression given in the account of Hermod 's ride to Hel later in Gylfaginning (49) " and points out that here Hel " [speaks] with authority as ruler of the underworld " and that from her realm " gifts are sent back to Frigg and Fulla by Balder 's wife Nanna as from a friendly kingdom . " Davidson posits that Snorri may have " earlier turned the goddess of death into an allegorical figure , just as he made Hel , the underworld of shades , a place ' where wicked men go , ' like the Christian Hell (Gylfaginning 3

) . " Davidson continues that :

" On the other hand , a goddess of death who represents the horrors of slaughter and decay is something well known elsewhere ; the figure of Kali in India is an outstanding example . Like Snorri 's Hel , she is terrifying to in appearance , black or dark in colour , usually naked , adorned with severed heads or arms or the corpses of children , her lips smeared with blood . She haunts the battlefield or cremation ground and squats on corpses . Yet for all this she is ' the recipient of ardent devotion from countless devotees who approach her as their mother ' [...] .

Davidson further compares to early attestations of the Irish goddesses Badb (Davidson points to the description of Badb from The Destruction of Da Choca 's Hostel where Badb is wearing a dusky mantle , has a large mouth , is dark in color , and has gray hair falling over her shoulders , or , alternatively , " as a red figure on the edge of the ford , washing the chariot of a king doomed to die ") and The Morrígan . Davidson concludes that , in these examples , " here we have the fierce destructive side of death , with a strong emphasis on its physical horrors , so perhaps we should not assume that the gruesome figure of Hel is wholly Snorri 's literary invention . "

John Lindow states that most details about Hel , as a figure , are not found outside of Snorri 's writing in Gylfaginning , and says that when older skaldic poetry " says that people are ' in ' rather than ' with ' Hel , we are clearly dealing with a place rather than a person , and this is assumed to be the older conception , " that the noun and place Hel likely originally simply meant " grave , " and that " the personification came later . " Rudolf Simek theorizes that the figure of Hel is " probably a very late personification of the underworld Hel , " and says that " the first scriptures using the goddess Hel are found at the end of the 10th and in the 11th centuries . " Simek states that the allegorical description of Hel 's house in Gylfaginning " clearly stands in the Christian tradition , " and that " on the whole nothing speaks in favour of there being a belief in Hel in pre @-@ Christian times . " However , Simek also cites Hel as possibly appearing as one of three figures appearing together on Migration Period B @-@ bracteates .

= = Modern influences = =

In the Fate of the Norns table @-@ top role @-@ playing @-@ game , Hel is a major character in the afterlife meta @-@ plot .

Hel appears in the MOBA Smite (video game) as a mage .

In the webcomic The Order of the Stick , Hel is an antagonist who seeks to destroy the world as part of an elaborate plot to become more powerful than the rest of her pantheon .