

= Ask and Embla =

In Norse mythology , Ask and Embla (from Old Norse Askr ok Embla) ? male and female respectively ? were the first two humans , created by the gods . The pair are attested in both 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 both sources , three gods , one of whom is Odin , find Ask and Embla and bestow upon them various corporeal and spiritual gifts . A number of theories have been proposed to explain the two figures , and there are occasional references to them in popular culture .

= = Etymology = =

Old Norse askr literally means " ash tree " but the etymology of embla is uncertain , and two possibilities of the meaning of embla are generally proposed . The first meaning , " elm tree " , is problematic , and is reached by deriving * Elm @-@ la from * Almil?n and subsequently to almr (" elm ") . The second suggestion is " vine " , which is reached through * Ambil? , which may be related to the Greek term ámpelos , itself meaning " vine , liana " . The latter etymology has resulted in a number of theories .

According to Benjamin Thorpe " Grimm says the word embla , emla , signifies a busy woman , from amr , ambr , aml , ambl , assiduous labour ; the same relation as Meshia and Meshiane , the ancient Persian names of the first man and woman , who were also formed from trees . "

= = Attestations = =

In stanza 17 of the Poetic Edda poem Völuspá , the völva reciting the Poem states that H?nir , Lóðurr and Odin once found Ask and Embla on Land . The Völva says that the two were capable of very little , lacking in ørlög and says that they were given three gifts by the three Gods :

The meaning of these gifts has been a matter of scholarly disagreement and translations therefore vary .

According to chapter 9 of the Prose Edda book Gylfaginning , the three brothers Vili , Vé , and Odin , are the creators of the first man and woman . The brothers were once walking along a beach and found two trees there . They took the wood and from it created the first human beings ; Ask and Embla . One of the three gave them the breath of life , the second gave them movement and intelligence , and the third gave them shape , speech , hearing and sight . Further , the three gods gave them clothing and names . Ask and Embla go on to become the progenitors of all humanity and were given a home within the walls of Midgard .

= = Theories = =

= = = Indo @-@ European origins = = =

A Proto @-@ Indo @-@ European basis has been theorized for the duo based on the etymology of embla meaning " vine . " In Indo @-@ European societies , an analogy is derived from the drilling of fire and sexual intercourse . Vines were used as a flammable wood , where they were placed beneath a drill made of harder wood , resulting in fire . Further evidence of ritual making of fire in Scandinavia has been theorized from a depiction on a stone plate on a Bronze Age grave in Kivik , Scania , Sweden .

Jaan Puhvel comments that " ancient myths teem with trite ' first couples ' of the type of Adam and his by @-@ product Eve . In Indo @-@ European tradition , these range from the Vedic Yama and Yam? and the Iranian Ma?ya and Ma?y?nag to the Icelandic Askr and Embla , with trees or rocks as preferred raw material , and dragon 's teeth or other bony substance occasionally thrown in for good measure " .

In his study of the comparative evidence for an origin of mankind from trees in Indo @-@ European society , Anders Hultgård observes that " myths of the origin of mankind from trees or wood seem to be particularly connected with ancient Europe and Indo @-@ Europe and Indo @-@ European @-@ speaking peoples of Asia Minor and Iran . By contrast the cultures of the Near East show almost exclusively the type of anthropogonic stories that derive man 's origin from clay , earth or blood by means of a divine creation act " .

= = = Other potential Germanic analogues = = =

Two wooden figures ? the Braak Bog Figures ? of " more than human height " were unearthed from a peat bog at Braak in Schleswig , Germany . The figures depict a nude male and a nude female . Hilda Ellis Davidson comments that these figures may represent a " Lord and Lady " of the Vanir , a group of Norse gods , and that " another memory of [these wooden deities] may survive in the tradition of the creation of Ask and Embla , the man and woman who founded the human race , created by the gods from trees on the seashore " .

A figure named Æsc (Old English " ash tree ") appears as the son of Hengest in the Anglo @-@ Saxon genealogy for the kings of Kent . This has resulted in an amount of theories that the figures may have had an earlier basis in pre @-@ Norse Germanic mythology .

Connections have been proposed between Ask and Embla and the Vandal kings Assi and Ambri , attested in Paul the Deacon 's 7th century AD work *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* . There , the two ask the god Godan (Odin) for victory . The name Ambri , like Embla , likely derives from * Ambil? .

= = = Catalog of dwarfs = = =

A preceding stanza to the account of the creation of Ask and Embla in *Völuspá* provides a catalog of dwarfs , and stanza 10 has been considered as describing the creation of human forms from the earth . This may potentially mean that dwarfs formed humans , and that the three gods gave them life . Carolynne Larrington theorizes that humans are metaphorically designated as trees in Old Norse works (examples include " trees of jewellery " for women and " trees of battle " for men) due to the origin of humankind stemming from trees ; Ask and Embla .

= = Modern influence = =

Ask and Embla have been the subject of a number of references and artistic depictions . A sculpture depicting the two stands in the southern Swedish city of Sölvesborg , created in 1948 by Stig Blomberg . Ask and Embla are depicted on two of the sixteen wooden panels found on the Oslo City Hall in Oslo , Norway , by Dagfin Werenskiöld . In 2003 , Faroese artist Anker Eli Petersen included a depiction of the couple in his series of Faroe Islands stamps . In A.S. Byatt 's novel *Possession* , one of the characters is a poet who writes a series of verses about Ask and Embla .