

= Sleipnir =

In Norse mythology , Sleipnir ( Old Norse " slippery " or " the slipper " ) is an eight @-@ legged horse . Sleipnir 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 both sources , Sleipnir is Odin 's steed , is the child of Loki and Svaðilfari , is described as the best of all horses , and is sometimes ridden to the location of Hel . The Prose Edda contains extended information regarding the circumstances of Sleipnir 's birth , and details that he is grey in color .

Additionally , Sleipnir is mentioned in a riddle found in the 13th century legendary saga Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks , in the 13th century legendary saga Völsunga saga as the ancestor of the horse Grani , and book I of Gesta Danorum , written in the 12th century by Saxo Grammaticus , contains an episode considered by many scholars to involve Sleipnir . Sleipnir is generally accepted as depicted on two 8th century Gotlandic image stones ; the Tjängvide image stone and the Ardre VIII image stone .

Scholarly theories have been proposed regarding Sleipnir 's potential connection to shamanic practices among the Norse pagans . In modern times , Sleipnir appears in Icelandic folklore as the creator of Ásbyrgi , in works of art , literature , software , and in the names of ships .

= = Attestations = =

= = = Poetic Edda = = =

In the Poetic Edda , Sleipnir appears or is mentioned in the poems Grímnismál , Sigrdrífumál , Baldrs draumar , and Hyndluljóð . In Grímnismál , Grimnir ( Odin in disguise and not yet having revealed his identity ) tells the boy Agnar in verse that Sleipnir is the best of horses ( " Odin is the best of the Æsir , Sleipnir of horses " ) . In Sigrdrífumál , the valkyrie Sigrdrífa tells the hero Sigurðr that runes should be cut " on Sleipnir 's teeth and on the sledge 's strap @-@ bands . " In Baldrs draumar , after the Æsir convene about the god Baldr 's bad dreams , Odin places a saddle on Sleipnir and the two ride to the location of Hel . The Völuspá hin skamma section of Hyndluljóð says that Loki produced " the wolf " with Angrboða , produced Sleipnir with Svaðilfari , and thirdly " one monster that was thought the most baleful , who was descended from Býleistr 's brother . "

= = = Prose Edda = = =

In the Prose Edda book Gylfaginning , Sleipnir is first mentioned in chapter 15 where the enthroned figure of High says that every day the Æsir ride across the bridge Bifröst , and provides a list of the Æsir 's horses . The list begins with Sleipnir : " best is Sleipnir , he is Odin 's , he has eight legs . " In chapter 41 , High quotes the Grímnismál stanza that mentions Sleipnir .

In chapter 42 , Sleipnir 's origins are described . Gangleri ( described earlier in the book as King Gylfi in disguise ) asks High who the horse Sleipnir belongs to and what there is to tell about it . High expresses surprise in Gangleri 's lack of knowledge about Sleipnir and its origin . High tells a story set " right at the beginning of the gods ' settlement , when the gods established Midgard and built Val @-@ Hall " about an unnamed builder who has offered to build a fortification for the gods in three seasons that will keep out invaders in exchange for the goddess Freyja , the sun , and the moon . After some debate , the gods agree to this , but place a number of restrictions on the builder , including that he must complete the work within three seasons with the help of no man . The builder makes a single request ; that he may have help from his stallion Svaðilfari , and due to Loki 's influence , this is allowed . The stallion Svaðilfari performs twice the deeds of strength as the builder , and hauls enormous rocks to the surprise of the gods . The builder , with Svaðilfari , makes fast progress on the wall , and three days before the deadline of summer , the builder was nearly at the entrance to the fortification . The gods convene , and figured out who was responsible , resulting in a unanimous agreement that , along with most trouble , Loki was to blame .

The gods declare that Loki would deserve a horrible death if he could not find a scheme that would cause the builder to forfeit his payment , and threatened to attack him . Loki , afraid , swore oaths that he would devise a scheme to cause the builder to forfeit the payment , whatever it would cost himself . That night , the builder drove out to fetch stone with his stallion Svaðilfari , and out from a wood ran a mare . The mare neighed at Svaðilfari , and " realizing what kind of horse it was , " Svaðilfari became frantic , neighed , tore apart his tackle , and ran towards the mare . The mare ran to the wood , Svaðilfari followed , and the builder chased after . The two horses ran around all night , causing the building work to be held up for the night , and the previous momentum of building work that the builder had been able to maintain was not continued .

When the Æsir realize that the builder is a hrimthurs , they disregard their previous oaths with the builder , and call for Thor . Thor arrives , and kills the builder by smashing the builder 's skull into shards with the hammer Mjöllnir . However , Loki had " such dealings " with Svaðilfari that " somewhat later " Loki gave birth to a grey foal with eight legs ; the horse Sleipnir , " the best horse among gods and men . "

In chapter 49 , High describes the death of the god Baldr . Hermóðr agrees to ride to Hel to offer a ransom for Baldr 's return , and so " then Odin 's horse Sleipnir was fetched and led forward . " Hermóðr mounts Sleipnir and rides away . Hermóðr rides for nine nights in deep , dark valleys where Hermóðr can see nothing . The two arrive at the river Gjöll and then continue to Gjöll bridge , encountering a maiden guarding the bridge named Móðguðr . Some dialogue occurs between Hermóðr and Móðguðr , including that Móðguðr notes that recently there had ridden five battalions of dead men across the bridge that made less sound than he . Sleipnir and Hermóðr continue " downwards and northwards " on the road to Hel , until the two arrive at Hel 's gates . Hermóðr dismounts from Sleipnir , tightens Sleipnir 's girth , mounts him , and spurs Sleipnir on . Sleipnir " jumped so hard and over the gate that it came nowhere near . " Hermóðr rides up to the hall , and dismounts from Sleipnir . After Hermóðr 's pleas to Hel to return Baldr are accepted under a condition , Hermóðr and Baldr retrace their path backward and return to Asgard .

In chapter 16 of the book Skáldskaparmál , a kenning given for Loki is " relative of Sleipnir . " In chapter 17 , a story is provided in which Odin rides Sleipnir into the land of Jötunheimr and arrives at the residence of the jötnunn Hrungrnir . Hrungrnir asks " what sort of person this was " wearing a golden helmet , " riding sky and sea , " and says that the stranger " has a marvellously good horse . " Odin wagers his head that no horse as good could be found in all of Jötunheimr . Hrungrnir admitted that it was a fine horse , yet states that he owns a much longer @-@ paced horse ; Gullfaxi . Incensed , Hrungrnir leaps atop Gullfaxi , intending to attack Odin for Odin 's boasting . Odin gallops hard ahead of Hrungrnir , and , in his , fury , Hrungrnir finds himself having rushed into the gates of Asgard . In chapter 58 , Sleipnir is mentioned among a list of horses in Þorgrímspula : " Hrafn and Sleipnir , splendid horses [ ... ] " . In addition , Sleipnir occurs twice in kennings for " ship " ( once appearing in chapter 25 in a work by the skald Refr , and " sea @-@ Sleipnir " appearing in chapter 49 in Húsdrápa , a work by the 10th century skald Úlfr Uggason ) .

= = = Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks = = =

In Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks , the poem Heiðreks gátur contains a riddle that mentions Sleipnir and Odin :

36 . Gestumblindi said :

" Who are the twain  
that on ten feet run ?  
three eyes they have ,  
but only one tail .

Alright guess now  
this riddle , Heithrek ! "

Heithrek said :

" Good is thy riddle , Gestumblindi ,  
and guessed it is :

that is Odin riding on Sleipnir . "

= = = Völsunga saga = = =

In chapter 13 of Völsunga saga , the hero Sigurðr is on his way to a wood and he meets a long @-@ bearded old man he had never seen before . Sigurd tells the old man that he is going to choose a horse , and asks the old man to come with him to help him decide . The old man says that they should drive the horses down to the river Busiltjörn . The two drive the horses down into the deeps of Busiltjörn , and all of the horses swim back to land but a large , young , and handsome grey horse that no one had ever mounted . The grey @-@ bearded old man says that the horse is from " Sleipnir 's kin " and that " he must be raised carefully , because he will become better than any other horse . " The old man vanishes . Sigurd names the horse Grani , and the narrative adds that the old man was none other than ( the god ) Odin .

= = = Gesta Danorum = = =

Sleipnir is generally considered as appearing in a sequence of events described in book I of Gesta Danorum . In book I , the young Hadingus encounters " a certain man of great age who had lost an eye " who allies him with Liserus . Hadingus and Liserus set out to wage war on Lokerus , ruler of Kurland . Meeting defeat , the old man takes Hadingus with him onto his horse as they flee to the old man 's house , and the two drink an invigorating draught . The old man sings a prophecy , and takes Hadingus back to where he found him on his horse . During the ride back , Hadingus trembles beneath the old man 's mantle , and peers out of its holes . Hadingus realizes that he is flying through the air : " and he saw that before the steps of the horse lay the sea ; but was told not to steal a glimpse of the forbidden thing , and therefore turned his amazed eyes from the dread spectacle of the roads that he journeyed . " Additionally , in book II , Biarco mentions Odin and Sleipnir : " If I may look on the awful husband of Frigg , howsoever he be covered in his white shield , and guide his tall steed , he shall in no way go safe out of Leire ; it is lawful to lay low in war the war @-@ waging god . "

= = Archaeological record = =

Two of the 8th century picture stones from the island of Gotland , Sweden depict eight @-@ legged horses , which are thought by most scholars to depict Sleipnir : the Tjängvide image stone and the Ardre VIII image stone . Both stones feature a rider sitting atop an eight @-@ legged horse , which some scholars view as Odin . Above the rider on the Tjängvide image stone is a horizontal figure holding a spear , which may be a valkyrie , and a female figure greets the rider with a cup . The scene has been interpreted as a rider arriving at the world of the dead . The mid @-@ 7th century Eggja stone bearing the Odinic name haras ( Old Norse ' army god ' ) may be interpreted as depicting Sleipnir .

= = Theories = =

John Lindow theorizes that Sleipnir 's " connection to the world of the dead grants a special poignancy to one of the kennings in which Sleipnir turns up as a horse word , " referring to the skald Úlfr Uggason 's usage of " sea @-@ Sleipnir " in his Húsdrápa , which describes the funeral of Baldr . Lindow continues that " his use of Sleipnir in the kenning may show that Sleipnir 's role in the failed recovery of Baldr was known at that time and place in Iceland ; it certainly indicates that Sleipnir was an active participant in the mythology of the last decades of paganism . " Lindow adds that the eight legs of Sleipnir " have been interpreted as an indication of great speed or as being connected in some unclear way with cult activity . "

Hilda Ellis Davidson says that " the eight @-@ legged horse of Odin is the typical steed of the shaman " and that in the shaman 's journeys to the heavens or the underworld , a shaman " is

usually represented as riding on some bird or animal . " Davidson says that while the creature may vary , the horse is fairly common " in the lands where horses are in general use , and Sleipnir 's ability to bear the god through the air is typical of the shaman 's steed " and cites an example from a study of shamanism by Mircea Eliade of an eight @-@ legged foal from a story of a Buryat shaman . Davidson says that while attempts have been made to connect Sleipnir with hobby horses and steeds with more than four feet that appear in carnivals and processions , but that " a more fruitful resemblance seems to be on the bier on which a dead man is carried in the funeral procession by four bearers ; borne along thus , he may be described as riding on a steed with eight legs . " As an example , Davidson cites a funeral dirge from the Gondi people in India as recorded by Verrier Elwin , stating that " it contains references to Bagri Maro , the horse with eight legs , and it is clear from the song that it is the dead man 's bier . " Davidson says that the song is sung when a distinguished Muria dies , and provides a verse :

What horse is this ?

It is the horse of Bagri Maro .

What should we say of its legs ?

This horse has eight legs .

What should we say of its heads ?

This horse has four heads . . . .

Catch the bridle and mount the horse .

Davidson adds that the representation of Odin 's steed as eight @-@ legged could arise naturally out of such an image , and that " this is in accordance with the picture of Sleipnir as a horse that could bear its rider to the land of the dead . "

Ulla Loumand cites Sleipnir and the flying horse Hófvarpnir as " prime examples " of horses in Norse mythology as being able to " mediate between earth and sky , between Ásgarðr , Miðgarðr and Útgarðr and between the world of mortal men and the underworld . "

The Encyclopedia of Indo @-@ European Culture theorizes that Sleipnir 's eight legs may be the remnants of horse @-@ associated divine twins found in Indo @-@ European cultures and ultimately stemming from Proto @-@ Indo @-@ European religion . The encyclopedia states that " [ ... ] Sleipnir is born with an extra set of legs , thus representing an original pair of horses . Like Freyr and Njörðr , Sleipnir is responsible for carrying the dead to the otherworld . " The encyclopedia cites parallels between the birth of Sleipnir and myths originally pointing to a Celtic goddess who gave birth to the Divine horse twins . These elements include a demand for a goddess by an unwanted suitor ( the hrímthurs demanding the goddess Freyja ) and the seduction of builders .

= = Modern influence = =

According to Icelandic folklore , the horseshoe shaped canyon Ásbyrgi located in Jökulsárgljúfur National Park , northern Iceland was formed by Sleipnir 's hoof . Sleipnir is depicted with Odin on Dagfin Werenskjöld 's wooden relief " Odin på Sleipnir " ( 1945 ? 1950 ) on the exterior of the Oslo City Hall in Oslo , Norway . Sleipnir has been and remains a popular name for ships in Northern Europe , and Rudyard Kipling 's short story entitled " Sleipnir , late Thurinda " ( 1888 ) features a horse named " Sleipnir " . A statue of Sleipnir ( 1998 ) stands in Wednesbury , England , a town which takes its name from the Anglo @-@ Saxon version of Odin , Woden .