

= Gefjon =

In Norse mythology , Gefjon or Gefjun ( with the alternate spelling Gefion ) is a goddess associated with ploughing , the Danish island of Zealand , the legendary Swedish king Gylfi , the legendary Danish king Skjöldr , foreknowledge , and virginity . Gefjon is attested in the Poetic Edda , compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources ; the Prose Edda and Heimskringla , written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson ; in the works of skalds ; and appears as a gloss for various Greco-Roman goddesses in some Old Norse translations of Latin works .

The Prose Edda and Heimskringla both report that Gefjon plowed away what is now lake Mälaren , Sweden , and with this land formed the island of Zealand , Denmark . In addition , the Prose Edda describes that not only is Gefjon a virgin herself , but that all who die a virgin become her attendants . Heimskringla records that Gefjon married the legendary Danish king Skjöldr and that the two dwelled in Lejre , Denmark .

Scholars have proposed theories about the etymology the name of the goddess , connections to fertility and ploughing practices , the implications of the references made to her as a virgin , five potential mentions of the goddess in the Old English poem Beowulf , and potential connections between Gefjon and Grendel 's Mother and / or the goddesses Freyja and Frigg .

= = Etymology = =

The etymology of the name Gefjon has been a matter of dispute . In modern scholarship , the element Gef- in Gefjon is generally theorized as related to the element Gef- in the name Gefn . The name Gefn is one of the numerous names for the goddess Freyja , and likely means " she who gives ( prosperity or happiness ) . " The connection between the two names has resulted in etymological results of Gefjun meaning " the giving one . " The names Gefjun and Gefn are both related to the Matron groups the Alagabiae or Ollogabiae .

Albert Murey Sturtevant notes that " the only other feminine personal name which contains the suffix -un is Njörðun , recorded only in the þulur [ ... ] , and among the kvenna heiti ókend . Whatever the stem syllable Njör- represents ( perhaps \* ner- as in \* Nerþuz > Njörðr ) , the addition of the n- and un suffixes seems to furnish an exact parallel to Gefn : Gefjun ( cf . Njörðun : Njörðun ) . "

A Finnish word for " bride 's outfit , trousseau " may derive from Gefjon 's name .

= = Attestations = =

= = = Poetic Edda = = =

In the Poetic Edda , Gefjon appears solely in three stanzas of the poem Lokasenna , where an exchange occurs between Gefjun and Loki at a dinner feast , and the god Odin comes to Gefjon 's defense . After an exchange occurs between Loki and the goddess Þökk , Gefjon questions why Loki wants to bring negativity into the hall with the assembled gods :

The last two lines of the stanza above differ greatly by translation . Henry Adams Bellows comments that the manuscript text for these two lines is " puzzling " and that as a result they have been " freely amended . " In the stanza that follows , Loki responds to Gefjon , commenting that a youthful male once gave her a necklace , and that with this youth Gefjon slept :

Odin interjects ; stating that Loki must be quite insane to incur the wrath of Gefjon , for she knows the destinies of mankind just as well as Odin himself :

= = = Prose Edda = = =

The Prose Edda book Gylfaginning begins with a prose account stating that King Gylfi was once the ruler of " what is now called Sweden , " and that he was said to have given " a certain vagrant

woman , as reward for his entertainment , one plough @-@ land in his kingdom , as much as four oxen could plow up in a day and night . " This woman was " of the race of the Æsir " and her name was Gefjun . Gefjun took four oxen from Jötunheimr in the north . These oxen were her sons from a jötunn ( name not provided ) . Gefjun 's plough " cut so hard and deep that it uprooted the land , and the oxen drew the land out into the sea to the west and halted in a certain sound . " Gefjun there placed the land , and bestowed upon it the name Zealand . Where the land had been taken from a lake stands . According to Snorri , the lake is now known as Lake Mälaren , located in Sweden , and the inlets in this lake parallel the headlands of Zealand ; however , since this is much more true of Lake Vänern , the myth was probably originally about Vänern , not Mälaren .

As a reference , the prose account presents a stanza from a work attributed to the 9th century skald Bragi Boddason :

Gefjun dragged from Gylfi ,  
gladly the land beyond value .  
Denmark 's increase ,  
steam rising from the swift @-@ footed bulls .  
The oxen bore eight  
moons of the forehead and four heads ,  
hauling as they went in front of  
the grassy isle 's wide fissure .

In chapter 35 of Gylfaginning , the enthroned figure of High presents a list of goddesses . High presents Gefjun fourth , and says that Gefjun is a virgin , and all who die as virgins attend her . In relation , High notes that , like Gefjun , the goddess Fulla is also a virgin . At the beginning of the Prose Edda book Skáldskaparmál , Gefjun is listed among nine goddesses who attend a banquet for Ægir on the island of Hlesey ( modern Læsø , Denmark ) . In chapter 32 , Gefjun is listed among six goddesses who attend a party held by Ægir . In chapter 75 , Gefjun is included among a list of 27 ásynjur names . In addition , Gefjun appears in a kenning for the völva Gróa ( " ale @-@ Gefjun " ) employed in the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir 's composition Haustlöng as quoted in chapter 17 of Skáldskaparmál .

= = = Heimskringla = = =

In chapter 5 of Ynglinga saga ( as collected in Heimskringla ) , an euhemerized prose account relates that Odin sent Gefjun from Odense , Funen " north over the sound to seek for land . " There , Gefjun encountered king Gylfi " and he gave her ploughland . " Gefjun went to the land of Jötunheimr , and there bore four sons to a jötunn ( whose name is not provided ) . Gefjun transformed these four sons into oxen , attached them to a plough , and drew forth the land westward of the sea , opposite to Odense . The saga adds that this land is now called Zealand , and that Gefjun married Skjöldr ( described here as " a son of Odin " ) . The two dwelled in Lejre thereafter . From where Gefjun took the land that formed Zealand , a lake was left behind call Lögrinn , and the saga posits that the bays in lake Lögrinn correspond to the nesses of Zealand . This is followed by the same stanza used in Gylfaginning above composed by the skald Bragi Boddason .

= = = Völva þáttur = = =

Gefjun is sworn by in the þáttur Völva þáttur , where the daughter of a thrall reluctantly worships a penis severed from a horse :

= = = Glosses = = =

Gefjon appears in some Old Norse translations of Latin works as a gloss on the names of goddesses from Greco @-@ Roman mythology . In several works , including Bretna sögur ( based on Geoffrey of Monmouth 's Historia Regum Britanniae ) the goddess Diana is glossed as Gefjon . In

Stjórnn , Gefjon appears as a gloss for the goddess Aphrodite . In other works , Gefjon glosses the goddesses Athena and Vesta .

= = Theories = =

= = = Ploughing , folk customs , parallels , and fertility = = =

A reoccurring theme in legend and folktale consists of a man or , more often , a woman who is challenged to gain as much land as can be traveled within a limited amount of time . This motif is attested by Livy around 1 CE , 5th century BCE Greek historian Herodotus , and in folktales from Northern Europe . In six tales from Jutland , Denmark and one from Germany a plough is used similarly as in Livy 's account , though the conditions are often met by walking or riding .

Hilda Ellis Davidson points out a tale from Iceland that features a female settler " whose husband had died on the voyage out , establishing her claim to a piece of land by driving a young hieffer round it . " Davidson notes that in Landnámabók , this is recorded as a recognized method for a woman to claim land , and the work further details that " she might not possess more than she could encircle in this way between sunrise and sunset on a spring day . " Davidson comments that " this sounds like a ritual taking over of land rather than a legal requirement , like the custom of men lighting fires when taking new land , and it is possible that the women 's custom was linked with the fertility goddess . " In addition , Davidson notes that Zealand is the most fertile region of Denmark .

Davidson further links folk customs recorded in the 19th century involving ploughs in Northern and Eastern Europe to practices involving Gefjon from the heathen period . Davidson points out that in eastern Europe , a custom is recorded in Russia where women with loosened hair and clad in white would assemble and drag a plough three times around their village during serious disease outbreaks . In Western Europe , yearly ploughing rituals occurring in England and Denmark in preparation for spring sowing which are , in eastern England , held on Plough Monday after the Christmas break . Gangs of young men dragged round a plough , while taking various names . Davidson states that " Gefjon with her giant sons transformed into oxen seems a fitting patroness of ceremonies of this kind . "

Davidson finds similar elements and parallels in non @-@ Germanic traditions , such as a folktale regarding the Lady of the Lake from Wales recorded in the 19th century . In the tale , the Lady brings forth " a herd of wondrous cattle " from the water after she consents to marrying a local farmer . Years later , he unwittingly breaks conditions that she had laid down . As a result , the Lady returns to her dwelling beneath the lake , and calls for her cattle to accompany her , calling them by name . In one version of the tale , the Lady calls forth four gray oxen who were ploughing in a field six miles away . Responding to her call , the oxen dragged the plough with them , and the gash in the land that the plough produced was said to have once been clearly visible .

A woman was recorded in 1881 as having claimed to recall that people once gathered at the lake on the first Sunday of August , waiting to see whether or not the water would boil up as an indication that the Lady and her oxen would make an appearance . Davidson notes that " here again a supernatural woman is linked both with water and ploughing land . "

Davidson states that in Germanic areas of Europe , traditions also exist of supernatural women who travel about the countryside with a plough , examples including Holde and Holle ( from the western and central regions of Germany ) and Berchte and Perchte in traditions from upper Germany , Switzerland , and Austria . Davidson explains that " they were frequently said to travel with a plough around the countryside , in a way reminiscent of the journey of the fertility goddess to bless the land in pre @-@ Christian times , and on these occasions they might be accompanied by a host of tiny children ; it was suggested that these children who died unbaptized , or human offspring replaced by changelings , but another possibility is that they were the souls of the unborn . " Davidson details that some local tales feature the plough breaking down , the supernatural woman gaining assistance from a helper , and the supernatural woman giving him wooden chips , only for the chips to later to turn to gold .

Regarding the plough and Gefjon , Davidson concludes that " the idea behind the taking of the plough round the countryside seems to be that it brought good fortune and prosperity , gifts of a benevolent goddess . Gefjon and her plough thus fit into a large framework of the cult of a goddess associated with fertility of both land and water . "

= = = Possible Gylfaginning manuscript alteration = = =

Questions have been proposed over the seemingly contradictory description of Gefjon as a virgin in Gylfaginning , yet also as attested as having sexual relations ( Lokasenna , Heimskringla ) and marrying ( Heimskringla ) . John Lindow says that the Gefjon / Gylfi story in Gylfaginning is absent in one branch of manuscripts of the work , and that " the fact that Gylfi is reintroduced directly after it in the other manuscripts , suggests that that it was not part of Snorri 's [ author of the Prose Edda and Heimskringla ] original text but may have been added by a later scribe . " Lindow says that if Snorri did not write it , the possibility exists that whoever added the story either was aware of an association made between Gefjon and the Greek goddess Diana ( as in the " glosses " section above ) " or took the view of the pagan gods as demons and therefore made a whore out of Gefjon . " However , Lindow adds that the reference to Gefjon made by Loki in Lokasenna suggest that the notion of Gefjon partaking in sexual activity may have been widespread .

= = = Beowulf = = =

Mentions of Gefjon may appear in Beowulf in five passages ( line 49 , line 362 , line 515 , line 1394 , and line 1690 ) . Scholar Frank Battaglia refers to these passages as " the Gefion passages , " and asks " Does Beowulf oppose the Earth Goddess of ancient Germanic religion ? The possibility of such an interpretation follows upon the discovery that the name Gefion , by which early Danes called their female chthonic deity , may occur in the Old English poem five times . " Battaglia further theorizes that :

The five Gefion passages seem to highlight the championing of a new order antagonistic to goddess worship . In light of what appears to be an elaborate thematic statement about patrilineage in the poem , the new order may also have entailed a change in kinship systems . Grendel and his mother may stand as types of earlier , matrilineal tribes . Further the hall which is the object of struggle between Beowulf and the first two monsters may symbolize the consolidation of new hierarchical social organization among the northern Germanic peoples .

Battaglia says that if the passages are taken to represent Gefjon , g?afon mentioned in line 49 refers directly to Gefjon 's sadness at Skjöldr 's ( described as having wed Gefjon in Heimskringla ) death , and that here " we may with some confidence conclude that in a poem about Scyld 's funeral for an Anglo @-@ Danish audience , the word g?afon could probably not have been used without invoking Gefion . "

Battaglia posits translations for line 362 ( Geofenes begang ) as " Gefion 's realm , " line 515 ( Geofon ?ðum w?ol ) as " Gefion welled up in waves , " line 1394 ( n? on Gyfenes grund , g? þær h? wille ) as " not ( even ) in the ground of Gefion , go where he will , " and line 1690 ( Gifen g?otende g?gante cyn ; ) as " Gefion gushing , the race of giants . "

Scholar Richard North theorizes that Old English geofon and Old Norse Gefjun and Freyja 's name Gefn may all descend from a common origin ; gabia a Germanic goddess connected with the sea , whose name means " giving " .

= = = Frigg and Freyja = = =

Some scholars have proposed a connection between Gefjun and the goddesses Frigg and Freyja due to perceived similarities . Britt @-@ Mari Näsström theorizes that Gefjun is simply another aspect of Freyja , and that the " white youth " that Freyja is accused of sleeping with by Loki in Gylfaginning may be the god Heimdallr .

Hilda Ellis Davidson says that " there seems ample indication that Gefjon represents one aspect of

a once powerful goddess of the north , the figure representing in Scandinavian myths as either Frigg , the wife of Odin , or Freyja , sister of fertility god Freyr . Freyja , desired by gods , giants and dwarves alike , acted as dispenser of bounty and inspirer of sexual love between men and women like the Greek Aphrodite . " In addition , Davidson says that " as Axel Olrik ( 1901 ) pointed out long ago , we know very little about Gefion , and it is possible that she can be identified with Frigg or Freyja " and not only does the Prose Edda associate her with an afterlife realm of the dead , " in Lokasenna , Loki claims that Gefion was given a jewel by a lover , traditions that would fit in very well with what we know of Freyja . "

Regarding parallels drawn between Freyja and Gefjon proposed from the exchange found in Lokasenna , Rudolf Simek says that Lokasenna is a " late composition and the reproach is too much of a stereotype to carry much weight . " Simek says that , regardless , even if Gefjon shouldn 't be identified with Freyja , Gefjon could still be considered " one of the fertility and protective goddesses because of the meaning of her name ( ' the giving one ' ) . "

= = Modern influence = =

Gefjon appears prominently as the allegorical mother of Norway , Sweden , and Denmark in the forty @-@ page Swedish Romantic poem Gefion , a Poem in Four Cantos by Eleonora Charlotta d 'Albedyhll ( 1770 ? 1835 ) . A fountain depicting Gefjun driving her oxen sons to pull her plough ( The Gefion Fountain , 1908 ) by Anders Bundgaard stands in Copenhagen , Denmark , on the island of Zealand , as in the myth . The Gefion family , a family of asteroids , and asteroid 1272 Gefion ( discovered in 1931 by Karl Wilhelm Reinmuth ) both derive their names from that of the goddess .

The highest mountain in Queen Louise Land ( Danish : Dronning Louise Land ) , NE Greenland was named after Gefjon by the 1912 ? 13 Danish Expedition to Queen Louise Land led by J.P. Koch .