

= Barnstokkr =

In Norse mythology , Barnstokkr (Old Norse , literally " child @-@ trunk ") is a tree that stands in the center of King Völsung 's hall . Barnstokkr is attested in chapters 2 and 3 of the Völsunga saga , written in the 13th century from earlier tradition , partially based on events from the 5th century and the 6th century , where , during a banquet , a one @-@ eyed stranger appears and thrusts a sword into the tree which only Sigmund is able to pull free . Scholarly theories have been put forth about the implications of Barnstokkr and its relation to other trees in Germanic paganism .

= = Völsunga saga = =

Barnstokkr is introduced in chapter 2 of Völsunga saga where King Völsung is described as having " had an excellent palace built in this fashion : a huge tree stood with its trunk in the hall and its branches , with fair blossoms , stretched out through the roof . They called the tree Barnstokk [r] " .

In chapter 3 , King Völsung is holding a marriage feast for his daughter Signy and King Siggeir at King Völsung 's hall . At the hall , large fires are kindled in long hearths running the length of the hall , while in the middle of the hall stands the great tree Barnstokkr . That evening , while those attending the feast are sitting by the flaming hearths , they are visited by a one @-@ eyed , very tall man whom they do not recognize . The stranger is wearing a hooded , mottled cape , linen breeches tied around his legs , and is barefooted . Sword in hand , the man walks towards Barnstokkr and his hood hangs low over his head , gray with age . The man brandishes the sword and thrusts it into the trunk of the tree , and the blade sinks to its hilt . Words of welcome fail the crowd .

The tall stranger says that he who draws the sword from the trunk shall receive it as a gift , and he who is able to pull free the sword shall never carry a better sword than it . The old man leaves the hall , and nobody knows who he was , or where he went . Everyone stands , trying their hand at pulling free the sword from the trunk of Barnstokkr . The noblest attempt to pull free the sword first followed by those ranked after them . Sigmund , son of King Völsung , takes his turn , and ? as if the sword had lay loose for him ? he draws it from the trunk . The saga then continues .

= = Theories = =

Hilda Ellis Davidson draws links to the sword placed in Barnstokkr to marriage oaths performed with a sword in pre @-@ Christian Germanic societies , noting a potential connection between the carrying of the sword by a young man before the bride at a wedding as a phallic symbol , indicating an association with fertility . Davidson cites records of wedding ceremonies and games in rural districts in Sweden involving trees or " stocks " as late as the 17th century , and cites a custom in Norway " surviving into recent times " for " the bridegroom to plunge his sword into the roof beam , to test the ' luck ' of the marriage by the depth of the scar he made " .

Davidson points out a potential connection between the descriptor apaldr (Old Norse " apple tree ") and the birth of King Völsung , which is described earlier in the Völsunga saga as having occurred after Völsung 's father Rerir sits atop a burial mound and prays for a son , after which the goddess Frigg has an apple sent to Rerir . Rerir shares the apple with his wife , resulting in his wife 's long pregnancy . Davidson states that this mound is presumably the family burial mound , and proposes a link between the tree , fruit , mound , and the birth of a child .

Davidson opines that Siggeir 's anger at his inability to gain the sword that Odin has plunged into Barnstokkr at first sight appears excessive , and states that there may be an underlying reason for Siggeir 's passionate desire for the sword . Davidson notes that the gift of the sword was made at a wedding feast , and states that Barnstokkr likely represents the ' guardian tree ' , " such as those that used to stand beside many a house in Sweden and Denmark , and which was associated with the ' luck ' of the family " , and that the ' guardian tree ' also had a connection with the birth of children . Davidson cites Jan de Vries in that the name barnstokkr " used in this story was the name given to the trunk of such a tree because it used to be invoked and even clasped by the women of the family at the time of childbirth . "

Providing examples of historical structures built around trees , or with ' guardian trees ' around or in the structure in Germanic areas , Davidson states that the " ' luck ' of a family must largely depend on the successful bearing and rearing of sons , and there is a general belief that when a guardian tree is destroyed , the family will die out . " In connection with this , Davidson theorizes that at the bridal feast , it should have been Siggeir , the bridegroom , who drew the sword from the tree , " and that its possession would symbolize the ' luck ' which would come to him with his bride , and the successful continuation of his own line in the sons to be born of the marriage " . The sword having been refused to him , Davidson theorizes that this may well have been intended as a deadly insult , and that this lends a tragic air to the scene in the hall .

Jesse Byock (1990) states that the name Barnstokkr may not conceivably be the original name of the tree , and instead that it is possible that it may have originally been bran (d) stokkr , the first part of the compound potentially having been brandr , (meaning brand or firebrand) , a word sometimes synonymous with " hearth " , and pointing to a potential connection to the fire burning within the hall . Byock notes that the tree is called an eik (Old Norse " oak ") , which has an unclear meaning as the Icelanders often employed the word as a general word for " tree " , and the tree is also referred to as apaldr , which is also a general term used to refer to trees . Byock theorizes that the latter reference to an apple tree may imply a further symbolic meaning pointing to the apple tree of the goddess Iðunn , and that the Barnstokkr may be further identified with the world tree Yggdrasil .

Andy Orchard (1997) states that the role and placement of Barnstokkr as a " mighty tree , supporting and sprouting through the roof of Völsung 's hall " has clear parallels in Norse mythology with the world tree Yggdrasil , particularly in relation to Yggdrasil 's position to the hall of Valhalla . Orchard further points out parallels between Sigurd 's ability to solely remove the sword from the trunk and King Arthur 's drawing of the sword Excalibur .

= = Modern influence = =

In Richard Wagner 's Der Ring des Nibelungen opera cycle , the tree appears as Barnstock , when the hero Siegmund , with a great tug , pulls from it a sword that he names Nothung . The tree however is in the house of Hunding , who takes the place of Siggeir as husband of Sieglinde and enemy of Siegmund . Barnstokkr has been theorized as English author and philologist J. R. R. Tolkien 's immediate source for a scene in his 1954 work The Lord of the Rings depicting the fictional character of Frodo Baggins and his acceptance of the weapon Sting after it has been thrust " deep into a wooden beam " . Some of the structures described in Tolkien 's Lord of the Rings have been described as " recalling " the position and placement of Barnstokkr in Völsunga saga , which Tolkien was well familiar with .