

## THOR'S 'OTHER' TOOLS

*Thor is most associated with his ownership of Mjollnir, the mighty hammer. Less familiar are the gifts he received from Grið; his belt Megingjörð, his staff Gríðarvölr, and his gloves Járngreipr. This workshop will outline instances from early medieval prose and skaldic literature where these tools are mentioned, discuss instances of how belts, staves, and gloves were used by ur-Heathens in religious and sorcerous rites, as well as offer speculation on the possible symbolic and theological meaning of these tools. If there is time, there will be a description of the application of these symbols in an esoteric rite that took place at the Hail and Horn Gathering 2016.*

### **Myth: Thor versus Geiroð**

- Griðr is referenced in the poem *Pórsdrápa* and in Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál*.
- Loki borrows Freya's falcon-skinned cloak; "payment"
- Bored of the Gods; travels to Jotenheim
- Lands on the roof of Geirod's hall; servant sent to catch him; taunts; sorcery to freeze.
- Gierod notices not a regular bird, red and green eyes; throttles to get name
- Locks in box with "thistle, mistle, kistle" charm
- Nine months in the box; soiled, thirst; vainly waiting for the gods to save him; still gives no name
- Another nine months in the box; bitter gods care little about him; gives name
- Oath: Let you go, if you bring Thor here with no hammer
- Loki convinces Thor to attend a cousin's wedding with him, at Geirod's farm
- At edge of Jotunheim, need to ford a stream; rushing flood, turns to menstrual blood; two jotunn maidens squatting upstream; Loki clings to Thor's back, barely survive due to catching on to a rowan tree
- Thor remarks could have used his hammer, too late now
- Pass through the Iron Wood; visit Grið
- Drinking wort-strong ale; Loki passes out
- Grið warns Thor of danger; slayer of Hrungnir in for some trouble from his kinsman Geirod
- Grið give Thor gifts, in exchange for his "thunder"; first, the gloves, Járngreipr, to hold the heat and fire; then rise up the iron staff, Gríðarvölr, to travel the Nine Worlds; then be enveloped by the belt, Megingjörð, and be bound a grip of might.
- Loki notices something in the gaze between the two; Thor looks rather confident wrapped in his new belt

- Met by a servant at Geirod's; shows them to a goat shed; Thor insulted, but naps since Grið kept him up all night
- Loki slips away
- Chair starts rising; confusion, spinning; grips his iron staff for stability and thrusts it, climbing for stability; opens his eyes again, two troll maiden are crushed beneath the chair
- Thor enters Geirod's hall; confront one another; Geirod grips molten iron from the forge, hurls it at Thor; catches it in the Iron Gloves, and flings it back at the startled Geirod; passes through hall pillars, then down the open mouth of the surprised Geirod; everything explodes in a shower of lightening
- Thor returns alone to Asgard

### Tools of Sorcery

- Stereotype; Thor is not about sorcery; Men do not do sorcery ... but ...
- ... Belt, Staff and Gloves are key ritual tools of an Old Norse sorcerer!
- From Eiríks saga rauða we have the detailed description of Þorbjörg lítilvölva's ('little prophetess') costume, including a staff and charm belt with charms.

"In the district there lived a woman named Thorbjorg, a seeress who was called "little prophetess", who spent the winter visiting one farm after another where she had been invited. When she arrived, she was wearing a black mantle with a strap, which was adorned with precious stones right down to the hem. About her neck she wore a string of glass beads and on her head a hood of black lambskin lined with white catskin. She bore a staff with a knob at the top, adorned with brass set with stones on top. About her, she had a linked charm belt with a large purse. In it she kept the charms which she needed for her predictions. She wore calfskin boots lined with fur with long, sturdy laces and large pewter knobs on the ends. On her hands she wore gloves of catskin, white and lined with fur."

### Belt

- Meginjörð ("power-belt")
- Four possibilities:
- **Power-lifting belt:**
  - Weight lifting belts are tight leather belts 4 to 6 inches or more in width.
  - Pragmatic, actually allows for heavier things to be lifted without injury.
  - No leather examples before the early 1800s.
  - Earlier period Europeans would use tightly wrapped bands of fabric if carrying heavy loads such as this. (Examples of Orkneymen doing this during the early fur trade in Canada, for instance.)
  - This type of material is not found in archeological sites because it rots, and it is not a major feature of traditional Nordic witchcraft of the Middle Ages.
- **Warrior Belts:**

- From Migration Era, warriors buried / sacrificed with thin leather belts, included metallic decorations and fittings.
- Sometimes the fittings or buckles were carved with runes, either by owner or the sacrifice, depending on context.
- Belts seem to be continuation of warrior kit of the Roman Auxiliaries. Thus, if anything are more Odinic, than related to Thor.
- Tradition in medieval hagiography of saints that absorbed part of the cult of Thor, such as Saint Olaf and Saint George, of them taking off their belts and using them like leashes to tame dragons. Which is a reminder of the taming of Jormungandr.
- **Amulet chains:**
  - Swedish (and Norwegian) archeological finds; large linked chains, with Mjollnir charms
  - Virtually, identical to items used in traditional Nordic witchcraft, called “troll-shakers”; used to keep away harmful spiritual entities
  - Use of iron, hammers, used to combat “trolls” seems plausible
  - Heathen-era ones are often corroded; but, lengths seem long than that of a belt
- **Saami belts:**
  - The Saami are the indigenous Finno-Urgic people of the Scandinavian north. They are not a Germanic people like the Norse. During the Viking Age they were usually called “Finns” by their ethnocentric southern neighbours; their ethnicity and religious practice was associated by the Norse with sorcery, backwardness, trolls, weakness, chaos, effeminacy, dark forces, and the like. However, there was much trade, interaction, and marriage between the two peoples. This seems to have resulted in Saami practices influencing Norse spirituality, particularly in the areas of sorcery (such as seiðr), and Norse practices influencing Saami communal worship of gods (such as the god-poles of Horagalles). Thus, people interested in reconstructing Norse sorcery or Saami religious practice sometimes look to the sources in the other historic culture for ethnographic analogies, and try to tease away the cultural influences on the practice of the receiving culture.
  - The Saami still wear wide belts, often of reindeer leather, that include many fittings to hang items. The *noaide*, or Saami sorcerer / shaman, hangs magical and pragmatic tools from this belt, such as: fire-striker, gloves, magical brass rings, drum, drum beater, etc.
  - Due to the extensive borrowing of the Old Norse of Saami sorcerous techniques, it seems most likely that this type of thick belt was mental model for Thor’s belt of strength amongst his devotees.
  - They also happen to be about the width of a power-lifting belt, and often include appliqué metal decorations like the Warrior belts of the Migration Era.

**My belt:** Combines aspects of a Saami belt, beefed up to make it possible to use as a power-lifting belt. It includes a period belt buckle, the form of which is very similar to Viking Era fire strikers, and echoes the motif of the Thor’s hammer.

**My troll-shaker:** Modelled on an example from Swedish National Museum of Antiquities, from the Heathen period, which had Mjollnir charms. This one increased in size as per my body size, compared to original. Similar ones often had rings. The end of the example was corroded, so rings made on this one. Thus, can link up into a belt / bandolier; also, note the nine worlds (including the Midgard ring).

### Iron Gloves

- Járngreipr (“iron grippers”)
- During Old Norse times “glofar” were more like mittens; not usually 5 fingers
- More speculation; how can you make them iron and use them?
- No plate mail gauntlets in Heathen period; just a metaphor?
- Chain mailing was done in period; bordering Finno-Urgic sorcerers routinely attach iron charms to their sacred clothing.
- But, in myth Thor needs the iron on his palms. Thus, had mine chain mailed.
- UPG thought:
  - Nets feature in a few places in Old Norse lore. One is explicitly tied to Thor, when Kvasir sees the ash pattern of a net in the fire then a net is used to drag the river for the Loki-salmon, but it is the grip of Thor's hands that actually are the "iron net" that capture the Son of Laufney. So this speculation adds weight to the idea of using chainmail gloves.
- **My gloves:** Split leather gloves, lined with fleece, palms with chain mail, Mjollnir's up and down on the backs of the hands.

### Staff

- Gríðarvölr (Gríðr "greed" or "greed, vehemence, violence, impetuosity"; sometimes place-of-peace / völr "battle-stick" or weapon)
- In other Indo-European religions, the Thunder God, or similar figure, wields a club or stick in place of the axe or hammer.
  - Hercules, syncretized with Donnar, amongst continental Germans.
  - Vedic Indra.
  - Celtic peoples have, the Dagda
    - “And the god associated with a giant wheel and a club in Old Irish myth is the Dagda (literally the ‘good god’), a figure clearly associated both with war and fertility, and a divinity who can use his club both to fight and to revive (much as Thor uses his hammer in Gylfaginning to resurrect his goats) (Mees)”.
- Different types of “staffs of sorcery” in ancient Heathen religion.
  - Archeological finds and textual sources indicate that they were probably used for different purposes by different classes of people.
- **Völva Staff:**
  - Most familiar to people are the short iron staffs of female seiðr practising völvu, reminiscent of a stylized distaff.

- May have been known as “*yondr*” or a 'divining rod'.
- It has been theorized that these spiritual tools were sacralised in their production through carbonization of the metal with the bones from blót offerings.
- Symbolic connections with this type of object are more with women, weaving, song, or animals as products; possibly used more for the purpose of reading or impacting fate, often for groups or communities, as well as speaking to the dead.
- **Wooden Staves:**
  - Another type are the purpose-cut gambantein, which were likely thinner saplings or other types of freshly cut wood. (This is the type used by Freyr’s servant Skrinir when he uses sorcery to bend the will of Gerðr.)
  - “*gandr*” can mean both a ‘magic stave’ and an animal spirit that assists a sorcerer; while “*gambanteinn*” means a ‘power twig; glory tine.’
  - The choice of wood would likely have been symbolically important, but it appears that the most important part of transforming them into a magical object was the carving of runes upon them.
  - Symbolic connections with this type of object are more with men, wood, animals as conveyances and runes; possibly used more for the purpose of forcing changes to the behaviour of individuals.
- **Traveller’s / Farm Staff:**
  - These were practical tool and a poor person’s weapon, as well as a possible magical tool.
  - This type of staff was likely of cured wood with some type of iron furniture, sometimes an iron ring. Possibly, of a *klaprestokk* herding /goad tool type. Used in traditional Nordic witchcraft. Also, used to move goats and steer wagons, which is symbolically congruent.
  - If it was a staff for Thor, the selection of the wood for the staff may have been both pragmatically and symbolically important. (Symbolically, birch was used by Finno-Urgic people as a representation of the World-Tree, oak is associated with Thor in more southern and western Germanic cultural areas, while rowan is associated with him in more northern and eastern regions. Pragmatically, so that it was local, tough, and long enough.)
  - Symbolic connections with this type of object are more wood, iron and possibly how the staff was manipulated; possibly used more for the purpose of forcing changes in the environment, particularly the weather.
- **God-stakes:**
  - Called “*stafgarðr*,” wooden stake at the center of a sacred enclosure; like a temporary god-pole.
  - Many scholars view it as an axis mundi; iron nails (*reginnaglar*) often driven into the top of the stakes; said to represent the Pole Star, the point around which the heavens revolve.

- Seen amongst the Saami and the cult of Hordagalles; in some Old Norse temples the idol of Thor also had such a nail in it; some scholars think that the reginnagli symbolizes the whetstone impacted in Thor's forehead after his combat with the giant Hrungnir.
- **Steinrøðr:**
  - In Landnámabók there is an account of the male use of a staff in sorcery.
  - “Steinrøðr the Powerful is the son a settler and has cured people from attacks of evil creatures. Once he comes unawares on the witch Geirhildr, who changes herself into a leather bag full of water. Steinrøðr is a smith and has an iron staff with him, which he uses to beat the disguised Geirhildr. An anonymous verse describes their encounter, and it includes the line ‘the troll’s ribs are swollen.’” (from Lindow)
- **Loðmundr:**
  - There is ...“A quite remarkable tale of a magic staff is embedded in the Landnámabók. Loðmundr the Old, famed for his magical prowess and now blind, finds his land being flooded through the witchcraft of a neighbor. Loðmundr plants his staff in the ground, grips it with both hands, bites the iron ring at the tip, and forces the waters to retreat. One is left with the impression that the staff completes a circuit between the immanent magic stored in Loðmundr and the earth. The staff appears to operate on the one hand as a probe seeking the source of the watery intrusion and as a conduit injecting magic power to drive back the flood. The symbolism of biting the iron ring is obscure: perhaps to improve the contact between the human reservoir of magic and the staff, or perhaps the symbolism is of a horse and bridle, with Loðmundr "riding" the staff. It may be significant that iron, because of its meteoric origin, was the 'holy metal.’” (from Fisher)
- Thor’s staff in the myth: control over natural phenomena; not a representation of Thor himself; not inscribed with runes or symbols; used by a male.
- What type? ...
- **Danish Male Grave:**
  - Circa 800 CE; similar to volva staff, but much larger; also, included a mjollnir charm
  - Of a height where a person just over 5 feet high could bit the ring.
  - Only example I know of with a disk in the bale.
  - One of few ever found in a male grave
- Therefore, best possibility is a large volva staff with the characteristics of a traveller’s staff.
- **My Staff:** Modelled after this grave find, but to my body dimensions, with fewer bale spindles, since the 9 fold cosmology is already represented in the form.