***TYR****God of War*

Tyr, Tiu, or Ziu is the son of Odin, and according to some accounts, his mother is Frigga, Queen of the Gods. He is the god of martial honor, God of defense and victory, bravest of the Gods and one of the twelve principal deities of Asgard. Although he appears to have no special dwelling there, he is always welcome to Vingolf or Valhalla, and occupies one of the twelve thrones in the great council hall of Glads-heim.

*“The hall Glads-heim, which is built of gold;
Where are in circle ranged twelve golden chairs,
And in the midst one higher, Odin’s throne.”
              -BALDER DEAD (Matthew Amold*)

Tyr is regarded also as the God of courage and of war, and therefore frequently invoked by the various nations of the North, who cried to him as well as to Odin to obtain victory. That he ranked next to Odin and Thor is proved by his name, Tiu, having been given to one of the days of the week, Tiu’s day, which in modern English has become Tuesday. Under the name of Ziu, Tyr was the principal divinity of the Suabians, who originally called their capital, the modern Augsburg, Ziusburg. This people, venerating the God as they did, were wont to worship him under the emblem of a sword, his distinctive attribute, and in his honor held great sword dances, where various figures were carried out.

Sometimes the participants forming two long lines, crossed their swords, point upwards, and challenged the boldest among their number to take a flying leap over them. At other times the warriors joined their sword points closely together in the shape of a rose or wheel, and when this figure was complete invited their chief to stand on the navel thus formed of flat, shining steel blades, and then they bore him upon it through the camp in triumph. The sword point was further considered so sacred that it became customary to register oaths upon it.

*“. . . Come hither, gentlemen,
And lay your hands again upon my sword;
Never to speak of this that you have heard,
Swear by my sword.”
              -HAMLET (Shakespeare)*

A distinctive feature of the worship of this God among the Franks and some other Northern nations was that the priests called Druids or Godi offered up human sacrifices upon his altars. These sacrifices were made upon rude stone altars called dolmens, which can still be seen in Northern Europe. As Tyr was considered the patron god of the sword, it was deemed indispensable to engrave the sign or rune representing him upon the blade of every sword — an observance which the Edda enjoined upon all those who were desirous of obtaining victory.

*“Sig-runes thou must know,
If victory (sigr) thou wilt have,
And on thy sword’s hilt rist them;
Some on the chapes,
Some on the guard,
And twice name the name of Tyr.”
             -LAY OF SIGDRIFA (Thorpe’s tr.)*

Tyr, whose name was synonymous with bravery and wisdom, was also considered by the ancient Northern people to have the white-armed Valkyries, Odin’s attendants, at his beck and call, and to designate the warriors whom they had best transfer to Valhalla to aid the gods on the last day.

*“The god Tyr sent
Gondul and Skogul
To choose a king
Of the race of Ingve,
To dwell with Odin
In roomy Valhal.”
              -NORSE MYTHOLOGY (R. B. Anderson)*

**The Story of Fenris**

Loki, the arch deceiver, went to Jötunheim and secretly married the hideous giantess Angur-boda (anguish boding), who bore him three monstrous children — the wolf Fenris, Hel, the party-colored goddess of death, and Jörmungandr, a terrible serpent. He kept the existence of these monsters secret as long as he could; but they speedily grew so large that they could no longer remain confined in the cave where they had come to light. Odin, from the top of his throne Hlidskialf, soon became aware of their existence, and also of the frightful rapidity with which they increased in size. Fearing lest the monsters, when they had gained a little more strength, should invade Asgard and destroy the Gods, Allfather determined to get rid of them, and, striding off to Jötunheim, flung Hel down into the depths of Niflheim, where he told her she could reign over the dismal worlds of the dead. He threw Jörmungandr into the sea, where he stretched himself and grew until he encircled all the earth and could bite his own tail.

*“Into mid-ocean’s dark depths hurled,
Grown with each day to giant size,
The serpent soon inclosed the world,
With tail in mouth, in circle-wise;
Held harmless still
By Odin’s will.”
             -VALHALLA (J. C. Jones)*

None too well pleased that the serpent should have attained such fearful dimensions in his new element, Odin resolved to lead Fenris to Asgard, where he hoped, by kindly treatment, to make him gentle and tractable. But the Gods one and all shrank back in dismay when they saw the wolf, and none dared approach to give him food except Tyr, whom nothing ever daunted. Seeing that Fenris daily increased in size, strength, voracity, and fierceness, the Gods assembled in council to deliberate how they might best dispose of him. They unanimously decided that it would desecrate their peace-steads to slay him, and resolved to bind him fast so that he could work them no harm.

With that purpose in view, they ordered a strong chain named Læding, and, going out into the yard with it, playfully proposed to Fenris to bind it about him, to see whether his vaunted strength could burst it asunder. Confident in his ability to release himself, Fenris patiently allowed them to bind him fast, but when all stood aside, he shook and stretched himself and easily broke the chain to pieces.

Concealing their chagrin, the Gods praised his strength, but soon left him to order a much stronger fetter, Droma, which, after some persuasion, the wolf allowed them to fasten around him also. A short, sharp struggle sufficed, however, to burst this bond too; so it has become proverbial in the North to use the figurative expressions, “to get loose out of Lading,” and “to dash out of Drama,” whenever great difficulties have to be surmounted.

*“Twice did the Æsir strive to bind,
Twice did they fetters powerless find;
Iron or brass of no avail,
Naught, save through magic, could prevail.”
              -VALHALLA (J. C. Jones)*

The Gods, perceiving now that ordinary bonds, however strong, would never prevail against the Fenris wolf’s great strength, bade Skirnir, Frey’s servant, go down to Svartalfheim and bid the dwarfs fashion a bond which nothing could sever.

By magic arts the dark elves manufactured a slender silken rope out of such impalpable materials as the sound of a cat’s footsteps, a woman’s beard, the roots of a mountain, the longings of the bear, the voice of fishes, and the spittle of birds, and when it was finished they gave it to Skirnir, assuring him that no strength would avail to break it, and that the more it was strained the stronger it would become.

“Gleipnir, at last,
By Dark Elves cast,
In Svart-alf-heim, with strong spells wrought,
To Odin was by Skirnir brought:
As soft as silk, as light as air,
Yet still of magic power most rare.”
*-VALHALLA (J. C. Jones)*

Armed with this bond, called Gleipnir, the Gods went with Fenris to the Island of Lyngvi, in the middle of Lake Amsvartnir, and again proposed to test his strength. But although Fenris had grown still stronger, he mistrusted the bond which looked so slight. He therefore refused to allow himself to be bound, unless one of the Æsir would consent to put his hand in his mouth, and leave it there, as a pledge of good faith, and that no magic arts were to be used against him.

The Gods heard this condition with dismay, and all drew back except Tyr, who, seeing that the others would not venture to comply with this request, boldly stepped forward and thrust his hand between the monster’s jaws. The Gods now fastened Gleipnir around Fenris’s neck and paws, shouting and laughing with glee when they saw that his utmost efforts to free himself were fruitless. Tyr, however, could not share their joy, for the wolf, finding himself captive, snapped his teeth together for rage, biting off the god’s hand at the wrist, which since then has been known as the wolf’s joint.

*LOKI:*

*“Be silent, Tyr!
Thou couldst never settle
A strife ‘twixt two;
Of thy right hand also
I must mention make,
Which Fenris from thee took.*

*TYR:*

*I of a hand am wanting
But thou of honest fame;
Sad is the lack of either.
Nor is the wolf at ease
He in bonds must bide
Until the gods’ destruction.”
              -SÆMUND’S EDDA (Thorpe’s tr.)*

Deprived of his right hand, Tyr was now forced to use the maimed arm for his shield, and to wield his sword with his left hand; but such was his dexterity that he slew just as many enemies as before.

The Gods, in spite of all the wolf’s struggles, now drew the end of the fetter Gelgia through the rock Gioll, and fastened it to the boulder Thviti, which was sunk deep in the ground. Opening wide his fearful jaws, Fenris uttered such terrible howls that the Gods, to silence him, thrust a sword into his mouth, the hilt resting upon his lower jaw and the point against his palate. The blood then began to pour out in such streams that it formed a great river, called Von. The wolf was condemned to remain thus chained fast until the last day, when his bonds would burst and he would find himself free to avenge his wrongs.

*“The wolf Fenrir,
Freed from the chain,
Shall range the earth.”
              -DEATH-SONG OF HÂKON (W. Taylor’s tr.)*

While some mythologists see in this myth an emblem of crime restrained and made innocuous by the power of the law, others see the underground fire, which kept within bounds can injure no one, but which unfettered fills the world with destruction and woe. Just as Odin’s second eye is said to rest in Mimir’s well, so Tyr’s second hand (sword) is found in Fenris’s jaws, as he has no more use for two weapons than the sky for two suns.

**Historical Tyr**

Tyr was identical with the Saxon god Saxnot (from sax, a sword), and with Er, Heru, or Cheru, the chief divinity of the Cheruski, who also considered him God of the sun, and deemed his shining sword blade an emblem of its rays.

*“This very sword a ray of light
Snatched from the Sun!”
              -VALHALLA (J. C. Jones)*

According to an ancient legend, Cheru’s sword, which had been fashioned by the dwarfs, sons of Ivald — the same who had also made Odin’s spear — was held very sacred by his people, to whose care he had intrusted it, declaring that those who possessed it were sure to have the victory over their foes. But although carefully guarded in the temple, where it was hung so that it reflected the first beams of the morning sun, it suddenly and mysteriously disappeared one night. A Vala, druidess, or prophetess, consulted by the priests, revealed that the Norns had decreed that whoever wielded it would conquer the world and come to his death by it; but in spite of all entreaties she refused to tell who had taken it or where it might be found. Some time after this occurrence a tall and dignified stranger came to Cologne, where Vitellius, the Roman prefect, was feasting, called him away from his beloved dainties, gave him the sword, telling him it would bring him glory and renown, and hailed him as emperor. This cry was taken up by the assembled legions, and Vitellius, without making any personal effort to secure the honor, found himself elected Emperor of Rome.

The new ruler, however, was so absorbed in indulging his taste for food and drink that he paid but little heed to the divine weapon. One day while leisurely making his way towards Rome he carelessly left it hanging in the antechamber to his apartments. A German soldier seized this opportunity to substitute in its stead his own rusty blade. The besotted emperor went on, and was so busily engaged in feasting that he did not notice the exchange. When he arrived at Rome, he learned that the Eastern legions had named Vespasian emperor, and that he was even then on his way home to claim the throne.

Searching for the sacred weapon to defend his rights, Vitellius now discovered the theft, and, overcome by superstitious fears, did not even attempt to fight. He crawled away into a dark corner of his palace, whence he was ignominiously dragged by the enraged populace to the foot of the Capitoline Hill. There the prophecy was duly fulfilled, for the German soldier, who had joined the opposite faction, coming along at that moment, cut off Vitellius’ head with the sacred sword.

The German soldier now changed from one legion to another, and traveled over many lands; but wherever he and his sword were found, victory was assured. After winning great honor and distinction, this man, having grown old, retired from active service to the banks of the Danube, where he secretly buried his treasured weapon, building his hut over its resting place to guard it as long as he lived. But although implored, when he lay on his deathbed, to reveal where he had hidden it, he persistently refused to do so, saying that it would be found by the man who was destined to conquer the world, but that he would not be able to escape the curse. Years passed by. Wave after wave the tide of barbarian invasion swept over that part of the country, and last of all came the terrible Huns under the leadership of Attila, the “Scourge of God.” As he passed along the river, he saw a peasant mournfully examining his cow’s foot, which had been wounded by some sharp instrument hidden in the long grass, and when search was made the point of a buried sword was found sticking out of the soil.

Attila, seeing the beautiful workmanship and the fine state of preservation of this weapon, immediately exclaimed that it was Cheru’s sword, and brandishing it above his head announced that he was about to conquer the world. Battle after battle was fought by the Huns, who, according to the Saga, were everywhere victorious, until Attila, weary of warfare, settled down in Hungary, taking to wife the beautiful Burgundian princess Ildico, whose father he had slain. This princess, resenting the murder of her kin and wishing to avenge it, took advantage of the king’s state of intoxication upon his wedding night to secure possession of the divine sword, with which she slew him in his bed, once more fulfilling the prophecy uttered so many years before.

The magic sword again disappeared for a long time, only to be unearthed once more and wielded by the Duke of Alva, Charles V’s general, who shortly after won the victory of Mühlberg (1547). Since then nothing more has been heard of the sword of the god Cheru, in whose honor the Franks were wont to celebrate yearly martial games; but it is said that when the heathen Gods were, through vicious persecution, renounced in favor of Christianity, the priests transferred many of their attributes to the saints, and that this sword became the property of the Archangel St. Michael.

Tyr’s worship is commemorated in sundry places (such as Tübingen, in Germany), which bear more or less modified forms of his name. It has also been given to the aconite, a plant known in Northern countries as “Tyr’s helm.”