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From Proto-Germanic **þur(i)sa*z to Karelian Iku Turso: A Case of Mythology, Language and the Lived Environment I: Proto-Germanic **þur(i)sa*z as Noun and Theonym

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*Abstract: This article is the first in a three-part series that explores the borrowing of Proto-Germanic **þur(i)sa*z into Middle Proto-Finnic as **tur(i)sa*s, which designated a water monster and in Karelian epic parallels Þórr's fishing for the World Serpent. The article series argues that framing **þur(i)sa*z in terms of 'mythology' is anachronistic and obfuscates the word's background. This instalment provides foundations for comparison with a study of Proto-Germanic **þur(i)sa*z.*

In research, 'mythology' becomes a category in which a vocabulary of common nouns, names, and sometimes other types of words become grouped for etymological analysis. The grouping is an organic outcome of mythology as a research category, yet it tends to be forgotten that this category is a product of modernity: the category 'mythology' does not necessarily correspond to anything in the historical world of language users where such loans occurred. Exploring etymology within the frame of 'mythology' may offer valuable insights, for instance by revealing stratified religious change or alignments and contrasts with the people of other societies. In other cases, however, it may obscure more than it reveals.

The present three-part study examines a very early loan from Germanic into Finnic of a word identified with 'mythology' in both traditions. Finnic mythology, and especially its vocabulary, has received relatively little attention in discussions of the history of Germanic religions, where it tends only to be noted in passing, if at all (e.g., de Vries 1956–1957; Simek 1993; Lindow 2001). Germanic etymologies have been a topic of interest both in Finnic linguistics and in studies of Finnic mythologies and religion. However, the turn of folklore research to synchronic traditions and

variation had a consequence that engagements with etymological discussions largely ceased. Today, the perspectives available are often quite dated. The last Finnish folklorist to systematically consider, critically evaluate, and propose etymologies was Martti Haavio (e.g., 1967), who was, however, sometimes more creative than critical. Engagements with etymology from the perspective of religious studies have had more presence through the work of Veikko Anttonen (e.g., 1996), but these have tended to focus on a narrow range of concepts, such as words related to sacrality and divinity. More recent linguistic analyses have had a good grounding in historical phonology, keeping pace with the rapid developments in the field, but can be disconnected from the vernacular categories and folklore corpora. For example, Mikko Heikkilä has proposed etymologies for names of Finnic mythic agents from Germanic, identifying both with the modern category 'giant' and treating their names as transferable like human personal names rather than as proper nouns for specific, complex images. The name of a personification of the sea is thus proposed as borrowed for the name of a Finnic 'giant' that has no particular association with water (2012: 103–109), and, not having looked at the corpus, three names are analyzed as a

group, although only two ever appear together in the primary sources, while the third is only a variation (2012: 109–111). The present study is not methodologically oriented *per se*, but it engages with a number of methodological issues, including the common problem of critically considering evidence from only one language, while evidence from the other is lifted from a dictionary or other research.

This article series takes up the case of Proto-Germanic **pur(i)saz*, of which Proto-Finnic **tur(i)sas* is generally accepted as a loan. Phonologically, the word would have been borrowed before the final *-z* became *-R* as Proto-Germanic diversified, situating the loan at an early stage in Finnic–Germanic contacts. The etymology is generally accepted, although each instalment of this series raises critical issues in its evaluation, beginning with a study of the Germanic word, followed by a study of the Finnic word, and building up to a comparison that contextualizes the potential loan among other loanword vocabulary.

Semantically, Proto-Germanic **pur(i)saz* tends to remain largely undifferentiated from other Germanic words for ‘giant’, or to be viewed through the Old Norse term. The present instalment of this series critically evaluates what can be said about the term, its history, and the background of its semantics. This study builds on my own and others’ work on the Old Norse term (Schulz 2004; Hall 2009; Frog 2013; 2014) and work on Old English *þyrs* relative to other ‘giant’ terms (Bishop 2006; Mees 2015). The survey brings to light use of the word as a theonym in both Old English and Old High German glosses that have generally remained invisible. The uses of the word for different types of agent are considered in relation to use of the word as the name of the runic letter **þ**.

The second instalment on the Finnic word engages with a variety of tangled issues. These include a recently proposed alternative etymology, the early Finnish *hapax legomenon* theonym *Turisas*, which has been a nexus of etymological speculation, and an Estonian word that is regularly included in discussions but may be a modern creation. In one Karelian epic, an alternate form *turso* appears as the personal name *iki/iku Turso* [‘ancient Turso’] in a role potentially parallel to the World

Serpent when fished from the sea by Þórr in Scandinavian mythology. A key difference between Proto-Germanic **pur(i)saz* and Proto-Finnic **tur(i)sas* comes into focus as the latter’s characterization as an inhabitant or ruler of the sea or water, which is considered an issue that will need to be accounted for in the word’s etymology.

The third and final instalment turns to comparison. Consideration of an early Germanic loan is contextualized within a dataset of the Old Germanic loans accepted in the *Lexikon der älteren germanischen Lehnwörter in den ostseefinnischen Sprachen* (1991–2012; *LägLoS* hereafter) [‘Lexicon of older Germanic loanwords in Finnic languages’]. Of the more than 1,400 entries in that work, 517 items are considered with confidence as ‘Old Germanic’ and 6 as ‘Old Germanic or older’. This forms a dataset of 523 loanwords. Another 123 items are considered as ‘Old Germanic or younger’, which is added to give an extended dataset of 646 items. Within that data, the borrowing of Proto-Germanic **pur(i)saz* is contextualized among loans connected with ‘mythology’. Reviewing those loans and the potential information they may reveal about impacts on ‘mythology’ shows that loans related to mythology as a modern category exhibit disparate connections to culture rather than cohesion around, for instance, evidence of a change in religion. Once mythology is shown to be problematic for contextualizing the loan, the Finnic word’s connection to the sea is considered as an environment forming a nexus of exchanged vocabulary. This context leads to an argument for the word’s background and distinct semantics as connected to vocabulary of sea life and maritime culture, not borrowed as a word for ‘mythology’, but as a word considered to refer to an inhabitant of the sea that could be encountered in the empirical world.

The present article begins with an introduction to the Germanic word and suggestions for its etymology. Evidence for the word is then reviewed with emphasis on its use in Old Germanic languages. The Old Norse case is introduced first, followed by Old English, Old High German, and Old Saxon. Use of the word for a letter in the runic alphabet is then treated in a devoted section.

Key features of the common noun arising from the evidence are then reviewed. The possibility of a theonym **Pur(i)saz* is explored and found probable. Derivatives of **pur(i)saz* are then considered in relation to words for other types of mythic agents, bringing forward several points that suggest marked differences between West and North Germanic mythologies. While it might seem intuitive to correlate the differences in the mythologies with the diversification of Proto-Germanic language, an early Finnic loanword opens the possibility that diversification of the mythologies may have begun earlier. The question raised by this loan will be returned to in the third instalment of the series, where it is discussed in the context of a group of early loans linked to death and ritual commemoration of the dead.

The Problem of Proto-Germanic *pur(i)saz

Old Norse *purs*, Old English *þyrs*, Old High German *thuris/duris*, and their derivatives, as well as a possible Old Saxon example of *thuris*, are reconstructed to Proto-Germanic **pur(i)saz*. This gives a distribution of the word across both North (Old Norse) and West (Old English, Old High German) Germanic. The other major Old Germanic branch, East Germanic, has died out and is centrally known through Gothic. The lack of evidence of **pur(i)saz* in Gothic is not inherently surprising, because it is known almost exclusively through a translation of the New Testament and the few words and proper names for non-Christian supernatural agents known from East Germanic generally appear as vernacular terms in Latin works.

**Pur(i)saz* and its derivatives are most often treated as “[o]ne of the Proto-Germanic words for ‘giant’” (Kroon 2013: 552), which tends to be the limit of its semantic reconstruction. Translating different Old Germanic words as ‘giant’ is potentially misleading, or simply misrepresentative. This problem has received attention in Old Norse research, both for interpreting vernacular terms through modern cognates, like rendering Old Norse *álfar* (sg. *álf*) in English as ‘elves’ (Gunnell 2007), and in cases of convention like equating Old Norse *jötunnar* (sg. *jötunn*) with ‘giant’. The latter convention stems from modern Scandinavian

derivatives of *jötunn* being used for the equivalents of the giants of legends and fairytales in English (Motz 1986: 186–187). The apparent translatability as ‘giant’ in these contexts led to the convention of using English ‘giant’ to translate *jötunn* in discussions of the cosmological actors of Old Norse mythology (Kuusela 2021).

With regard to the diversity of ‘giant’ terms, Alaric Hall (2009: 199–200) frames the problem as a question of whether *jötunn*, *purs*, and other Old Norse terms referred to mutually exclusive categories like *sheep*, *goat*, and *pig* or had overlapping semantics like *king*, *ruler*, and *monarch*. The question is complicated by words’ potential to vary in use in relation to different types of context, as well as also over time. In Old Germanic alliterative verse, for example, the meter led the semantics of words to flex so that they could be used to ‘say the same thing’ while meeting different patterns of alliteration (see Roper 2012). Thus, the linguistic register of discourse that evolved in the oral poetry could diverge in manifold ways from other forms of speech (e.g., Foley 1996; Frog 2015). For instance, Old Norse *purs* and its poetic compound *hrímþurs* [‘rime-þurs’] are used in eddic narrative poetry to refer to agents that in prose would never be called *pursar* but rather *jötunnar* (Frog 2013; 2014). The context of the referent can also affect the meaning: use of *purs* for a human being is interpreted as metaphorical (see also Motz 1986: 188–189), whereas in a healing charm, *purs* seems to be an agent that causes illness (Hall 2009). Similarly, use of Old Norse *jötunn* in mythological narratives identifies cosmological actors with the capacity to compete with the gods: they are characterized by knowledge and wisdom to a degree that established formulaic epithets in the poetry. In human history, *jötunn* is often used for adversaries of human heroes and they blur with the stupid and oversized agents commonly called ‘giants’ in later folklore. Such variations are also relevant for considering diachronic changes in a word’s usage, since a break in one or several registers and contexts of usage could collapse whole dimensions of associations. Basically, if usage of *jötunn* in non-Christian mythology gradually collapsed through the Christianization process, associations of *jötunnar*

with knowledge and wisdom could collapse with it, leaving only the adversaries of human heroes. If usage of *þurs* to refer to supernatural agents were to drop out, metaphorical use might be all that remains, but without any longer recognizing that use as metaphorical. Since the categories referred to by these words concern types of mythic agents that exist in social imagination without regular tethering to the empirical world, they are constructed and evolve through discourse, with potential to slide, flex, converge, and transform.

In the case of **þur(i)saz*, reconstructing the category and its semantic prosody lacks the benefit of being able to trace attested usage along a thread that connects back to a still-earlier origin. **Þur(i)saz* is best considered as without a clear etymology (de Vries 1962: 627; Kroonen 2013: 552; see also Kuusela 2017: 26–27). The word is not found outside of Germanic languages, its counterpart in Finnic languages, and the subsequent borrowing from Finnic into Samic languages. Indo-European etymologies of **þur(i)saz* have of course been proposed. The most commonly repeated of these today traces it from the Proto-Indo-European stem **tuer-/tur-* [‘to twist, turn, whirl’], forming words related to moving quickly (Pokorny 1959: 1100; reproduced in e.g. Orel 2003: 429–430). This etymology connects **þur(i)saz* with the verb **þurjan-* (> Old Norse *þyrja* [‘to sweep, rush’]), which is formally possible but there seems to be no semantic connection to *þurs* or to the characterization of *þursar* (de Vries 1962: 627; Kroonen 2013: 552). Some uses in Old Norse considered below can be brought into comparison with the semantics of **tuer-/tur-*, though this may be accidental. Derivation from an *r*-formation from Proto-Indo-European *teu-/tuo-/tu-* would relate **þur(i)saz* to Old Irish *túra-* [‘strong, powerful’] and Latin *turgere* [‘swollen’] (Pokorny 1959: 1083; de Vries 1962: 627). This is semantically more appealing but appears to be phonologically irregular. Derivation from the Indo-European stem **trh₃-* [‘wound’] would be consistent with uses of **þur(i)saz*-derivatives for agents of malevolence and harm (Mees 2015: 3). Other etymologies, such as connecting the word to the ethnonym for ‘Etruscans’ (Lehmann 1986: 1; cf. de Vries 1962: 627)

have gradually dropped out of discussion. The challenge of proposed etymologies is that the arguments for one over the other tend to be guided by interpretations of **þru(i)saz*, spinning a thread that connects it to, for example, an Indo-European word stem.

Old Norse þurs

The largest body of evidence of **þur(i)saz* comes from Old Norse. Nevertheless, in her study on ‘giants’ (2004), Katja Schulz finds that the word *þurs* only seems prominent in eddic poetry, being relatively infrequent in saga prose, with the exception of one saga, where its prominence seems to be owing to an idiosyncrasy of the writer (2004: 39, 51–52). In a survey of uses of *þurs* in poetry, I previously showed that the majority of examples in eddic verse are formulaic. The word is centrally found in contexts of cosmological mythology as an equivalent of *jötunn*, but it is never used this way in prose. The central exceptions in poetry are in charms and curses, where *þurs* is used for an agent of illness or harm. (Frog 2013.) The related term *hrímþurs* is straightforwardly a poetic equivalent for *jötunn* used for alliteration, although Snorri Sturluson handled it as a word for a distinct ethnos in his *ars poetica* called *Edda* (Frog 2014). Generally, the number of appearances of *þurs* and *hrímþurs* in poetry are attributable to the word having developed a functional use for meeting alliteration, and it thereby became embedded in formulaic phrases and alliterative collocations.

Examples of charms and curses are quite limited (Frog 2013: 59–64; additional examples in Macleod & Mees 2006: 122–123), but echoes of them are also found in later traditions. For example, a list of contents of a book of magic found in 1664 reports the eightieth item as: “Vid stuldi, sædr hrýmþurs ok grímþurs ok allra trölla fadir, med 29 stöfum” (Jón Espólin 1829: 127) [‘For a theft, summon a rime-*þurs* and a mask-*þurs* and father of all *tröl*ls, with 29 (runic) marks’]. Lotte Motz finds *tossebid* [‘*þurs*-bite’] as a name for an abscess on a finger (1986: 188), and Terry Gunnell identifies this and its Icelandic counterpart *þursabit* with “pains suggesting the involvement of spirits” (2020: 1575; see also *Gammeldansk Ordbog*, s.v.

‘thurs’), which point to *þurs* as an agent of illness or harm, a characterization that may have once been commonplace in the charm genre. The epithet *þursasprengir* [‘destroyer of *þursar*’], attributed to a man in *Landnámabók* (ch. S225/H191), is formed from *sprengir*, from the verb *springa* [‘to spring, leap; burst, split’], rather than *bani* [‘bane, slayer’], as in the epithet *berserkjabani* [‘bane of *berserkir*’] (Peterson 2015: 131). The epithet opens the question of whether the destruction of *þursar* it refers to differed from slayings in armed conflict and may instead refer to overcoming illness agents.

Reviewing *þurs* among other Old Norse ‘giant’ terms, Tommy Kuusela (2017: 26) considers it to be distinguished by connotative semantics as a negatively evaluated and pejorative term, similar to *troll*. He finds *þurs* associated with causing suffering and to be especially threatening to female sexuality; he considers its metaphorical use describing people as suggesting a dangerous and ugly appearance (2017: 27). The adjective *þursligir* [‘*þurs*-ish’], used in phrases like *mikill vexti, svartr ok þursligir* [‘grew large, black, and *þurs*-ish’] and *þar eru menn sterkir ok þursligir* [‘strong and *þurs*-ish men were there’] (*ONP*, s.v. ‘*þursligir*’), supports this interpretation of metaphorical uses. Examples of people bearing the epithet *þurs*, such as ‘Þorsteinn *þurs*’ (*ONP*, s.v. ‘*þurs*’; see Peterson 2015: 245), can be viewed in this light.

There is one use in a saga that suggests a conception of *þursar* as stupid: *vit skulum ginna þá alla sem þursa* (*ONP*, s.v. ‘*þurs*’; Frog 2013: 56) [‘we shall deceive them all like [they are] *þursar*’]. In modern Scandinavian languages, Motz finds that use of *þurs* for a mythic agent had generally disappeared except in one network of vocabulary in Norwegian dialects, though its metaphorical use survived, but as referring to foolishness or stupidity rather than size, strength, ugliness, or threatening power (1986: 188–189). Although Motz views the earlier evidence through the same lens (1987: 232), this does not hold up well to that evidence when stupidity is not assumed (Schulz 2003: 32). In addition, use of *þurs* as an alliterative term for *jötunn* in mythological poetry may be washed out of distinctive semantics, yet the use itself has

connotations of significance. An oral-poetic register may bend and flex semantics, but equivalence vocabulary does not arise at random. Use as a poetic equivalence term points to a level of categorical identification, and it is noteworthy that neither *troll* nor *risi* were similarly used as poetic equivalents for *jötunn* in mythological contexts. That the term *jötunn* is characterized in these contexts as wise makes it extremely improbable that *þurs* would be used as an equivalent if it connoted the opposite quality of stupidity. At the time when *þurs* and *jötunn* began being used as equivalents in the poetry, *þurs* was presumably not linked to stupidity and was likely appropriate to the cosmological context in a way that *troll* and *risi* were not. *Ginna X sem þurs(a)* [‘deceive X like a *þurs* / *þursar*’] stands out in the earlier material as emphasizing stupidity, yet it aligns with later use and sounds like an idiom. A Google search for the verb with “sem þursa” or “sem þurs” reveals its use in modern Icelandic. The idiom *ginna X sem þurs(a)* does not exhibit alliteration, rhyme, or other phonic patterning that would drive the use of *þurs* over other possible words. The appearance of this idiom in *Njáls saga* may mark a shift in how the word was being used, at a time when it was dropping out of use in other contexts.

Even though the amount of Old Norse evidence is proportionately quite large, its ability to shed light on *þurs* as a category remains rather thin. As a type of agent, the charms, curses, and associated evidence point to *þurs* as belonging to a sphere of interactions with humans and as malignant, harmful, and dangerous. The narrative worlds of the sagas also place *þursar* in the human sphere, although it is much less clear what to make of their characterizations, which also sometimes link the word *þurs* to images and motifs connected to other ‘giant’ words or *þurs* simply seems used as a synonym for ‘anthropomorphic monster’. Use in eddic poetry sheds almost no light through individual examples, but the establishment of *þurs* and its compounded parallel *hrímþurs* suggest that it was not inconsistent with the category of cosmological agents characterized by wisdom. The idiom *ginna X sem þurs(a)* is linked to the word’s semantics in later use, when in almost

all language areas its connections with the supernatural had been forgotten. The use of the word seems already to have been waning in use in the sagas, which makes its prominence as a poetic equivalent in mythological poetry seem to have archaic roots. Vitality of the term and its distinction from other terms appears centrally in runic charms and curses. Maintenance of *þurs* in that context while it waned elsewhere appears directly attributable to *þurs* as a name for the runic sign **þ**, with which the conjuring or other use of *þurs* blurs in magical uses (Macleod & Mees 2006: 122–123). As genres declined or were transformed with the conversion to Christianity and *þurs* dropped out of other use, the semantic connections and connotations of *þurs* were disrupted and few seem to have survived.

Old English þurs

Old English evidence is much thinner, with three examples in poetry, another two in charters in the place names *þurs pyt*, *þurspyt* [‘þurs’s pit’], and it is otherwise found only in glosses. Bosworth, Toller, and others define *þurs* as “[a] giant, an enchanter, a demon” (*s.v.* ‘þurs’). Its use for a human performer of magic rests on what seem directly related glosses of Latin *marsus* (*DOEC*, AldV 1, C31.1, 3160 (3166); AldV 10, C31.10, 0183 (183); AldV 13.1, C31.13.1, 3278 (3271)), and the use should be considered metaphorical (McGowan 2009: 488).¹ In contrast to other Old English ‘giant’ terms, *þurs* is not used in connection with characterizations as wise or skilled in craftsmanship (Bishop 2006: 267).

The uses in Old English poetry are difficult to evaluate. In *Beowulf* 426, *þurs* refers to the monster Grendel, although the lexical choice may be driven by alliteration. Use in *Riddle* 40 63 appears in the b-line *ealdum þyrse* [‘old þurs’], characterized by the quantity it can eat. The adjective *ealdum* carries alliteration, and the more common ‘giant’-word *ent*, as well as *eoten* (~ ON *jǫtunn*), would produce an additional alliteration in the final lift of the line. *Þurs* may thus be used to avoid alliteration on the b-line’s final strong position, where it would be a violation – i.e., use would be driven by alliteration. These examples could point to *þurs* as having a functional role in Old English poetry comparable to that in Old Norse, yet it

does not alternate with other ‘giant’ terms in formulaic expressions linked to positive qualities such as craftsmanship.

The third poetic usage is in *Maxims II* 42b–43a, which states: *Þurs sceal on fenne gewunian ana innan lande* [‘A þurs shall live in a fen, alone in the land’]. Although *þurs* carries alliteration here, it appears selected as a common noun, distinguished from another ‘giant’ term – *ent* – within the poem (Bishop 2006: 267). This usage resonates with reference to Grendel as a *þurs* in *Beowulf*, where it could also have carried an association with a wetland environment (which would not be contradicted by its use for alliteration). A number of later place names are found that include the word, some of which may trace to Old English (Smith 2014). The place name evidence seems to link *þurs* with pits, ravines, marshes, and pools, concentrating in areas of Scandinavian settlement, and they may reflect Old Norse *þurs* or its influence (Smith 2014).

Þurs is mostly attested in glosses for monstrous agents of Roman and Greek mythology. The glosses are almost all in the plural. *Þurs* is found for *cyclopes* (*DOEC*, ClG1 1, D8.1, 1445 (1468)), in one case specified as *anige þursas* (*DOEC*, ClG1 1, D8.1, 1484 (1507)) [‘one-eyed þursas’], which may suggest size and perhaps stupidity. Its uses for *colossi* (*DOEC*, AldV 1, C31.1, 1635 (1637); AldV 13.1, C31.13.1, 1640 (1637)) would also suggest size. A single use glossing *Cacus* (*DOEC*, ClG1 1, D8.1, 1365 (1388)) – i.e., the monstrous son of Vulcan slain by Hercules – suggests a terrorizing anthropomorphic monster. The ‘giant’ word *eoten* (~ Old Norse *jǫtunn*) seems not to have been used in glosses at all; *gigant* (< Latin *gigas*) is found in three glosses of *cyclopes* (*DOEC*, HIG1, D16.1, 0956 (C1017); CorpG1 2, D4.2, 1613 (3.414); HIG1, D16.1, 1808 (C2255)), and *ent* in one (*DOEC*, AldÆ 1, C33.1, 0016 (16)), while *ent* is also used to translate Latin *gigas* (*DOEC*, ÆG1, B1.9.2, 0250 (302.3); PPs (prose) B8.2.1, 0243 (18.6), and cf. HyG1 3, C18.3, 0182 (39.4)), as well as used for Goliath and so on (Bosworth et al., *s.v.* ‘ent’). A second gloss of *Cacus* is found, but with the name simply given an English inflection: “Caci cacuses” (*DOEC*, ClG1 3, D8.3, 1804 (1804)).

Singular *þyrs* is twice used to gloss Latin *Orcus*. Latin *Orcus* is the name of a god of the underworld associated with punishment or torment, and the realm of death is identified as his house or hall (see also West 2007: 388). In Anglo-Saxon England, *Orcus* was also used to name the abysmal realm of the dead in Latin writing and is twice glossed as ‘death’ (Hofmann 2008: 135–136, 141–142, 268, 272–273, 302, 311 375–376 (Table IX.5)).² The word was borrowed into Old English as a noun or name *orc*, which is found in five instances glossing *orcus* (*DOEC*, AntGl 2, D1.2, 0695 (693); CorpGl 2, D4.2, 5610 (13.228); EpGl, D7, 0562 (562); ClGl 1, D8.1, 4481 (4502); ErfGl 1, D36.1, 0673 (698)). Only in one of these instances is *orc* accompanied by an additional translation, which suggests that the Old English word’s meaning was considered accessible, although it is only found in one additional passage (*DOEC*, Ch IWm, B15.1.188, 0003 (4)). In the two glosses of *Orcus* by *þyrs*, both accompany *þyrs* with an additional clarification *heldeofol* [‘*hel*-devil’], in which *hel* refers to the realm of death: “ðyrs, heldiobul” (*DOEC*, CorpGl 2, D4.2, 5613 (13.231)) [‘*þyrs*, *hel*-devil’] and “orc, þyrs oððe heldeofol”³ (*DOEC*, ClGl 1, D8.1, 4481 (4502)) [‘*orc*, *þyrs*, or *hel*-devil’]. These glosses clearly identify *Orcus* as an agent. Unlike most glosses in lists, accompanying *þyrs* with *heldeofol* suggests that someone thought additional clarification was needed.

The compound *heldeofol* is not found outside of these glosses, and *þyrs* and *heldeofol* paired in the two glosses suggests the glosses are related through manuscript transmission, with *orc* most likely added by a copyist, very possibly from a separate gloss. *Heldeofol* reflects a choice in translation that prefers *deofol* to *god* [‘god’]. *Ditis*,⁴ another Latin name for a ruler of the realm of the dead that could blur with *Orcus* in the Middle Ages, is found glossed as *helgod* (*DOEC*, ClGl 1, D8.1, 1850 (1874); ClGl 3, D8.3, 1917 (1917)), and a plural *helle god* [‘gods of *hel*’] is also found (*DOEC*, Bo, B9.3.2, 1302 (35.102.9)). Rather than a gloss in Old English, Pluto’s name is found glossed as *deus inferni* [‘god of the underworld’] (*DOEC*, ClGl 3, D8.3, 1818 (1818)). The glosses of *Orcus* that include *heldeofol* likely reflect an ideology of the

person making the gloss choosing to avoid the use of *god* for a non-Christian cosmological actor. Use first of *þyrs*, which is then clarified with *heldeofol*, seems to be a breakthrough into the vernacular motivated by that ideology.

Latin *Orcus* became used not only for the ruler of the realm of the dead but also for the realm itself, further blurring into the phenomenon ‘death’. This reflects a process I describe as ‘semantic correlation’, whereby an ideology bound up with language leads a theonym introduced into a culture to have its use extended to the phenomenon with which the agent is identified. Thus, in a culture where this principle operates for the sky or weather, the introduction of a new (name of the) sky god leads the theonym to be used as the new common noun for the phenomenon of the sky (Frog 2017; 2021b: 28–30). In this case, the theonym *Orcus* underwent semantic correlation with the realm of death and thereby enabled use of *Orcus* to express ‘death’. If correct, this implies that the name of the vernacular ruler of death was also used as a name of the location. This phenomenon is seen in Scandinavian mythology’s *Hel* as both the name of the realm of death and of the female agent that ruled it. Semantic correlation of *Orcus* with the realm of the dead might be interpreted as implying the reverse for Old English *hel* as having a counterpart ruler *Hel* as in Old Norse mythology, yet *Orcus* does not seem to be glossed as *hel* before the 15th century (“Hic orcus, -i, An^{ce} helle”: Wright & Wülker 1884: 802, 22). Instead, *Orcus* is glossed *þyrs*, and *þyrs* is clarified as a *deofol* of the realm *hel* – i.e., that *þyrs* in this context differs from those mentioned above and is a cosmological actor located in *hel*. If this use is not dismissed as some sort of a mistake, *Orcus* appears to be glossed as referring to a cosmological actor as in Classical mythology, and, rather than *þyrs* referring to a type of monstrous being in the context of the human world, it seems to be used here in the manner of a proper name, *Þyrs*, which is clarified as possibly a, but probably the, *deofol* of the realm of death.

Use of *Þyrs* as a proper name glossing *Orcus* opens the possibility that the glossing of *Cacus* may also have been by *Þyrs* as a proper name. Use as a proper name does not seem to be matched by other ‘giant’ terms. *Ent* in

particular is used for different agents, including Goliath (*DOEC*, *ÆLS* (Book of Kings), B1.3.19, 0007 (18), 0008 (22) x2, 0009 (25); *ÆLet* 4, B1.8.4.4, 0081 (476)), Nimrod (*DOEC*, *ÆintSig*, B1.6.1, 0192 (57.379); Or 2, B9.2.3, 0083 (4.43.21)) and Hercules (*DOEC*, HomU 34, B3.4.34, 0051 (144); Or 1, B9.2.2, 0313 (10.30.12); Or 3, B9.2.4, 0226 (9.72.5); *ÆLS*, B1.3.33, 0029 (112)), but is not used in the place of their names as a name itself.

Although *þyrs* is treated as a ‘giant’ term, it does not appear in uses where the terms *ent*, *eoten*, and *gigant* alternate (Bishop 2006). Three uses of *þyrs* in poetry and its only occurrences in prose being uses in a place name would seem to suggest that *þyrs* was already an archaism in Old English. The lack of alternation with other ‘giant’ terms might thus be attributed to an accident of the data. However, *þyrs* is also found in ten glosses, some of which are interdependent, yet the number of uses in glosses exceeds that of all of the other ‘giant’ terms combined. On the one hand, the glosses suggest that *þyrs* had more current use than an obscure poetic archaism and an element fossilized in a place name. The glosses point to a recognizability presumably from discourses outside of what was commonly written down. The apparent use of a personal name *Þurs* may seem anomalous, but, even if interpreted as a common noun, it suggests a connection to death and the realm of the dead not exhibited by other ‘giant’ terms.

Old High German *thuris*

Evidence of Old High German *thuris* is even more limited than that of Old English *þyrs*. The *Althochdeutsche Wörterbuch* [‘Old High German Dictionary’] divides examples into three categories: “Unhold, Riese, Kyklop” [‘monster, giant, cyclops’], “Pluto, der Gott der Unterwelt” [‘Pluto, god of the underworld’] and “böser Geist, Dämon, heidnischer Gott” [‘evil spirit, demon, pagan god’] (s.v. ‘thursis’).

Use of *thuris* as a word for monster corresponds to what is found in Old English, including its use to translate *cyclops*. The ‘giant’-word *riso* is also used to describe the cyclops Polyphemus, albeit in the manner of an epithet (“der riso Poliphemus”) rather than as a gloss or designation. *Riso* is used more generally in other references to giants of Classical

mythology, and also to gloss Latin *gigas* (s.vv. ‘bettiriso’, ‘riso’). The ‘giant’-word *gigant* is not as common, but used to explain *Polyphemus* (“Poliphemus id est gygande”) (s.v. ‘gigant’). Old High German does not exhibit a divide between *thuris* and other ‘giant’ words.

Several uses of *thuris* refer to the god of the underworld, variously called *Ditis* or *Orcus*. The *Althochdeutsche Wörterbuch* allows a reverse search of entries, but is not yet complete at the time of writing this article. With that caveat in mind, *Ditis* seems not to appear in any other available entry. *Orcus* and Pluto are otherwise also found in one example replaced together in the translation as *hellijovis* [‘helli-Jove (i.e., god)’]. Pluto is further identified as *fiurgot* [‘fire-god’], *helligot* [‘helli-god’], and *pehgot* [‘pitch-god’] (as an epithet: “behgote Plutoni”), linked to the idea of Hell as filled with pitch (*peh*) (*Althochdeutsche Wörterbuch*, s.vv.). In the compounds, *helli-* is cognate with Old English *hel* and Old Norse *Hel*, linked in Old High German to the underworld of the dead and Christian Hell. The use of *thuris* for gods of death matches glosses of *Orcus* with *þyrs* in Old English, but this use of *thuris* is much better attested, appearing in several independent contexts. Although *thuris* seems more or less interchangeable with other ‘giant’ words in its first field of meaning, *riso* and *gigant* are not used for rulers of death.

The third category of meanings lists only two examples. The first is *hazussa*, *thursa* (“hazzesa thuresa”) as a gloss of “deas deosque” [‘goddesses and gods’]. The *Althochdeutsche Wörterbuch* presents “Rachegöttin, Furie, heidnische Gottheit” [‘goddess of vengeance, Furie, heathen god’] as the first field of meaning of *hagazussa*, *hazussa*. However, with the exception of this example, the glosses are all for the synonymous Latin and Greek *Furies*, *Eumenides*, and *Erinys* (s.v.), collectively acting female agents of life-threatening violence. In contrast, *thuris* is used elsewhere to gloss cosmological actors that are also glossed with the word *got* [‘god’]. In this light, glossing *deos* with *thursa* appears to be an extension of a broader pattern of this word’s usage in glosses, whereas glossing *deae* with *hazussa* seems to be a solution to finding a plural term for mythic female agents that is markedly

‘pagan’. The second gloss is “dii paganorum sint demonia (tursa)” [‘the gods of the pagans are demons (*thurisa*)’], which can be considered equivalent to the first gloss, rather than reflecting any particular equivalence of *thuris* to ‘demon’ as such. Although the use of *thuris* in Christian discourse for ‘pagan gods’ is only found in two examples, the sources seem to be independent and, on the backdrop of uses of *thuris* to gloss names of gods of the realm of the dead, they seem likely to reflect a broader use of *thuris* in Christian discourse rather than being two isolated incidents.

Although *thuris* seems to be used more interchangeably with other ‘giant’ terms in Old High German than in Old Norse or Old English, it is also rather remarkably used for pagan gods, which is unparalleled by other ‘giant’ terms in any Germanic language. As in Old English, *thuris* is used both as a common noun and also for glossing a non-Christian ruler of the realm of death. Also as in Old English, *thuris* does not receive the sort of specification used with ‘devil’ or ‘god’ when glossing these cosmological actors, suggesting that *Thuris* could be used as a theonym for the agent in this role. The relative prominence of *thuris* in Old High German, comparable to *riso*, is supported by evidence of the word’s use through Middle High German (Kroonan 2013: 552).

Old Saxon *thuris*?

Compared to Old High German, Old Saxon (also called Old Low German) offers very little evidence of the vocabulary of non-Christian supernatural agents. This can only be partly attributed to the limited sources being prominently concerned with Christian subjects. Like the prominence of Old High German *thuris*, the lack of such vocabulary may be linked to ideologies structuring language use.



Figure 1. St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 878 (*Vademecum of Walahfrid Strabo*), p. 321.⁵

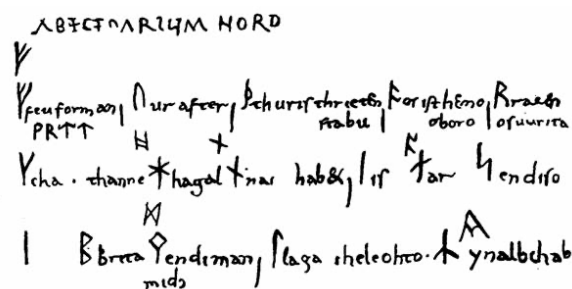


Figure 2. Wilhelm Grimm’s transcription of the *Abecedarium Nordmannicum* in St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 878, p. 321.⁶

A single example of Old Saxon *thuris* is preserved. The word appears in the 9th-century rune poem known as the *Abecedarium Nord[mannicum]*, where *thuris* is given as the name of the rune **þ**, although the original text was rendered unreadable in an attempt to preserve it (Figure 1). The text is now customarily read through Wilhelm Grimm’s transcription (although see also Müllenhoff 1869: 126–127), where the rune **þ** is accompanied by the text “*thuris thricten stabu*”, of which the second word is normally corrected to *thritten* [‘third’], giving a reading ‘*thuris*, the third letter’. The manuscript can be read through the damage as having the word *thuris*, which can be understood as a translation of Old Norse *purs*.

The source makes it likely that an Old Saxon word *thuris* was recognized as equivalent to Old Norse *purs*. However, there is no indication of the meaning of the word and the possibility that *thuris* is taken from Old High German cannot be excluded. It may also be observed that, in contrast to later languages deriving from Old High German, later languages stemming from Old Saxon do not exhibit forms of *thuris*, which speaks against prominence in Old Saxon.

The Rune **þ**

A form of **pur(i)saz* came to designate the runic letter or sign **þ**. Although many rune names are consistent across Germanic languages, names for **þ** are not. In Old Norse, it is called *purs*, in Old English, *þorn* [‘thorn’], and in Gothic, *thyth*, while the potential Old Saxon name *thuris* should be seen as a calque of Old Norse *purs*. The Gothic rune names “may not have genuine Gothic origins” (McKinnell et al. 2003: 22n.6). Gothic *thyth* has been interpreted as a reflex of *þiup* [‘good’] since

the mid-19th century (Lehmann 1986: 344, s.v. ‘thyth’). *Thyth* could also derive from the name of the corresponding letter of the Greek alphabet, *θήτα*, pronounced /thita/ (Miller 2012: 22). It is thus relevant to consider how *purs* should be considered in the history of names for the rune.

Arguments for which of the three names of **p** is oldest tend to advance without argument from a hypothesis that ‘pagan’ names found in Old Norse are older and underwent renewal in other languages owing to Christian impacts. Accepting this hypothesis makes *purs* appear to belong to the oldest naming stratum. The rationale of seeing the innovation as motivated comes into better focus when the case is contextualized among the other names for runes. The Old English runic alphabet has a much greater number of characters and correspondingly a greater number of names. However, without counting *purs*, it includes cognates or their homonyms of all the other Old Norse names save one (McKinnell et al. 2003: 23–25).

The additional case of a change of a rune’s name is where Old English has *cen* [‘torch’] and Old Norse has *kaun* [‘sore, boil’]. These might be considered distinct letters “c” and “k”, respectively, but the signs are the same, although one appears inverted (McKinnell et al. 2003: 23–24). More significantly, Old English seems to have no cognate of Old Norse *kaun*, which seems not to have survived as a common noun outside of West Norse. Conversely, Old Norse has no cognate of Old English *cen*. In this case, renewal of one name for the rune can be attributable to the loss of the corresponding common noun. The new name for the rune seems to be linked to the older name, varying the vowel to make the name a recognizable word.

Cases of homonyms in rune names would have only involved reinterpretation, or potentially simply advancing such an interpretation in the writing of a rune poem, which became the source of our data. In the case of the runic sign **t**, Gothic *tyz*, Old Norse *týr* and Old English *tir* appear to trace etymologically to the Proto-Indo-European common noun for ‘god’. This word can be assumed to have been the common noun for ‘god’ when it became treated as the personal

name of the god known in Old Norse as *Týr*, and whose earlier significance is attested in the use of his name to translate a Roman name of the day of the week that had been named for *Mars* (> *Tuesday*). The Old English rune name *tir* is explained as ‘a certain sign’ visible in the sky; the meaning of *tir* as a theonym or common noun for ‘god’ is invisible in the Old English corpus. The interpretation of *tir* as a star or star-like sign is most easily accounted for as an *interpretatio Germanica* of *Mars* as the planet named for the god (Bosworth et al., s.v. ‘tīr’), and the identification of the rune name with the planet can then be considered secondary. Similarly, the Old Norse rune name *áss*, identified as a word for ‘god’, ‘demigod’, or some similar type of non-Christian supernatural being,⁷ alongside Old English *os*, points to a potentially ideologically motivated interpretation. The Old English rune name is presented as meaning ‘mouth’ (McKinnell et al. 2003: 24), an interpretation through the Latin homonym that is not etymologically viable for the Old English word, which would then have to be a Latin loan (see Bosworth et al., s.v. ‘ōs’). The identification of the archaic or poetic words for ‘god’ with a planet and a Latin word for ‘mouth’ appear to be ideologically motivated interpretations.

Old Norse, Old English, and Gothic all had reflexes of Proto-Germanic **þurnaz* [‘thorn’] (Kroon 2013: 552–553), while Old Norse and Old English both had reflexes of **þur(i)saz*; Gothic may have had one as well. The difference in rune names therefore cannot be attributed to lexical loss, unless Gothic had lost an original name cognate to Old Norse *purs* or Gothic *thyth* represents an otherwise unknown word that was lost and renewed in both Old Norse and Old English.

Old Norse *purs* and Old English *þorn* are both potentially consistent with the semantics of other rune names. Modern readers might interpret *þorn* as a barb on a plant or tree, which does not fit well with other rune names, but it parallels other runes named for types of tree, like Old Norse *yǫr* [‘yew’] and *bjarkan* [‘birch’]. Use of *þorn* for a type of tree (hawthorn) was also current in Old Norse. Old English *cen* may also be mentioned here, since the word historically meant ‘pine tree’ and its use for ‘torch’ is a development (Kroon

2013: 289). *Purs* parallels runes named for mythic agents, which include (using the Old Norse terms) *týr* [‘god’] or the theonym *Týr*, *áss* [‘god’ or ‘god-like agent’], and perhaps *Sól* [‘Sun’], and *maðr* [‘man, person’] was also a category of agents in the world. In Old Norse, *purs* also relates to rune names connected with ill health, like *naud* [‘need, compulsion; an illness agent in charms’] and *kaun* [‘sore, boil’]. (McKinnell et al. 2003: 23.) The Old Norse rune name *áss*, *æsir* might be interpreted as not originally a word for ‘god’ but rather its homonym *áss*, *ásar* [‘beam, pole; ridge’], but the latter’s semantics are not paralleled by other rune names. Neither *purs* nor *þorn* is betrayed as an innovation by its semantics.

Another factor for consideration is that names of runes generally appear to have been very commonplace vocabulary, although some of these had become semantically opaque, like Old Norse *pertra* and its Old English cognate *peorð*. *Tyz/týr/tir* and *áss/os* can also be considered marginalized through historical change (McKinnell et al. 2003: 22–25). The Old English cognate of Old Norse *áss*, *æsir* had largely dropped out of use: the only example found outside of the rune name is in an Old English charm, where the word is collocated with ‘elves’ as in Old Norse and a cognate can be inferred as intended, but the stem vowel is irregular (*e-* for *o-*; see Bosworth et al., s.v. ‘*ös*’). The irregularity of the vowel in the source may be attributable to the word being suspended in a formulaic phrase while the individual lexeme had become opaque, opening the vowel to variation, although use in the charm might also reflect impacts from Old Norse (Hall 2007: 2–3, 66–67, 108). In either case, the Old English interpretation of the rune name could reflect making sense of *os* as its earlier meaning became opaque.

The rune name *purs* must also be considered on this background. If use of *purs* is attributed to the lexical renewal of an earlier name, it is probable that it became linked to the rune at a time when the Old Norse word held a central and significant position in the vocabulary. Continued use of Old Norse *purs* is clear in its appearance as a personal name epithet, yet it was not prominent. The closer a renewal of the rune name was to the period of the evidence, the more probable that the Old English name

þorn was the innovation rather than an obscure Old Norse word for ‘monster’ being chosen to represent the sound /th/.

The weight of probability falls to *þyrs* as the earliest form of the rune’s name. Gothic *thyth* might be a *hapax legomenon* that reflects the earliest name of the rune, lost from both Old Norse and Old English and thereby motivating independent renewal, but this seems like the least probable scenario, especially if the Gothic rune names may not be originally Gothic at all (McKinnell et al. 2003: 22n.6). A scenario identifying Old Norse *purs* as the innovation lacks a motivation for replacing *þorn*, especially when other rune names appear stable even when they became semantically opaque. In Old English, the renewal of *þyrs* as a pagan category of agents would be in line with interpretations of *os* and *tir* as having other meanings than ‘god’ or the latter’s identification potentially as a pagan theonym *Tir*. However, this parallel is less clear than the explanation might suggest. The ideological motivation for renewing terms for venerated non-Christian agents is fairly straightforward because the non-Christian and Christian evaluations of these agents are diametrically opposed. In contrast, *þyrs* as a noun for ‘monster’ is not linked to competing evaluations, in which case it is not transparent why religious change would make the rune’s name problematic – an issue that will be returned to below. Nevertheless, the most reasonable explanation for the difference between the rune names in Old Norse and Old English is ideologically driven renewal, even if the reinterpretation of *os* may be linked to the common noun becoming obscure.

Key Features of the Common Noun

Old Germanic evidence generally points to **þur(i) saz* as a type of supernatural agent, although presenting it as simply a ‘giant’ term appears reductive. The indicators regarding the agent’s nature are extremely limited, but it was clearly considered hostile and threatening to living human societies and/or the gods. The dangerous and threatening potential of these agents is not offset by conventional characterizations that are ambivalent or positive. Both Old English and Old Saxon connect other ‘giant’ words with the fashioners

of heroes' weapons, and both Old English and Old High German use 'giant' words also with reference to heroes. Old English *þyrs* does not seem to be used interchangeably with other 'giant' terms, while Old High German *thuris* seems to have had distinctively pagan connotations that allowed it to be used for 'pagan god'. Old Norse *jǫtnar* are cosmological actors who host the gods at drinking feasts, have sexually desirable daughters, and so on, and those of sagas may foster heroes and kings (Schulz 2004: 211–213), whereas *þurs* seems to be linked to illness and harm.

Physically, the basic form of these beings was anthropomorphic. Exceptional size is found connected with Old English and Old High German cognates in glosses of mythic agents from Classical mythology. Old Norse *þurs* was not used in such glosses, but comparable implications are found in metaphorical uses for human beings, even though size seems to become marginal in later Scandinavian languages. A metaphorical use characterizing a *dverg* in poetry (*Alvíssmál* 2) also seems to point to ugliness or monstrosity, although it may equally index the threatening quality of *þursar* to women and their sexuality found in other contexts (Frog 2013: 64–65). One description in poetry of a *þurs* as having three heads (*Skírnismál* 31.1–2⁸) is linked to an established alliterative collocation of *þrír* : *þurs* ['three : *þurs*'], and it is unclear whether the description can be considered informative about characterizations of *þursar* generally or simply draws on the collocation in a way that augments the image's monstrosity (Frog 2013: 58, 62).

Although Old English *Maxims II* identifies a *þyrs* as a lone agent, the Old English word is used to gloss groups of agents in Classical mythology. *Maxims II*'s identification of *þyrs* with marshland is of special note because Proto-Finnic **tur(i)sas* is strongly tied to water. This connection finds some support in Old English and later place name evidence. Edward Smith's (2014) survey of Old English and later toponymy suggests that, among Old English 'giant' terms, only *þyrs* was customarily used to form placenames. Potential links to water also appear in Scandinavian languages. Motz points out that

Icelandic *þursaskegg*⁹ ['beard of *þursar*'] is used for "the marine plant *corallina officinalis* and the sea weed *fucus corneus*" and that Danish *tossefugl* ['*þurs*'s bird'] is used for the type of seabird known as a gannet (*sula bassanius*) (1986: 188). Although 'beard of *þursar*' may inspire the imagination, both names seem to be metaphorical extensions that may not be motivated by a connection of *þurs* to the sea. These connections with a maritime environment also only weakly align with the Old English connections to what seem to be inland watery landscape features. However, the later place name evidence is not restricted to locations with water. A connection to water may therefore be a development within Old English traditions. Alternately, if *þyrs* was more generally used in names for places outside of what was customarily domesticated for human habitation, links to marshes and such may simply be accidental.

Both Old Norse and Old English evidence connect *þurs/þyrs* to an active agent in the human world, yet the traditions seem to do so in unrelated ways. The malevolence of Old Norse *þursar* in charms and incantations is bound up with what appear to be magical uses of the rune **þ** (MacLeod & Mees 2006: 122–123), but "*þursar* are called on in Northern magic for reasons above and beyond those which are warranted by the connection with writing represented by the rune name *þurs*" (Mees 2015: 2). Hypothetically, the lack of evidence for Old English *þyrs* and Old High German *thuris* as an agent of illness and as directed in curses could be an accident of the data. However, this is doubtful for Old English, where the manuscript evidence for charms and medicine is greater than in Old Norse (cf. Hall 2009: 206), and indeed one Old Norse runic charm against *þurs* is preserved in an Old English manuscript (Cotton MS Caligula A XV). Accident is more possible for the far more limited evidence of Old High German.¹⁰ The Old Norse malevolent agents of charms and curses accord with the Old English and Old High German uses of *þyrs* and *thuris* to gloss rulers of the realm of the dead, but the latter agents operate on a level of cosmological scope while those of Old Norse operate at the level of human personal encounters.

In his discussion of *þurs* as an agent of illness, Hall (2009: 205–207) finds a parallel in Old Norse *dvergr* and Old English *dweorg* [‘dwarf’] being found as an agent of illness. Hall connects this parallel to a recently proposed etymology that semantically links dwarfs to delusion, which can be connected to their identification as agents of, for instance, fever (2011: 75–76), although the word’s etymology remains debated (Kroon 2013: 112). If the latter etymology is accepted, it could potentially provide an analogy for tracing *þurs* to the Proto-Indo-European stem **twer-* : **tur-* [‘to twist, turn, whirl’], for instance if this were connected to dizziness. Tantalizing as this possibility might be, it would require that these semantics trace back to the initial formation of the noun, with the implication that the word **þur(i)saz* formed with reference to the agent of illness. The probability of the etymology becomes contingent on whether this role as an illness agent should be considered lost in other languages or an innovation in North Germanic.

Concerning the parallel of *dvergr* and *þurs* as agents, the implication seems to be that these beings directly embody the illness experienced by people. In this regard, they are comparable to a *mara* [‘nightmare’], imagined as physically riding its victim, rather than to an illness or harm caused by forms of ‘shot’, imagined as a projectile that the agent seems to use from a distance. In other contexts, however, the gap between *þursar* and *dvergar* seems considerable. Whereas *þurs* groups with ‘giant’ words, Old Norse *dvergr* does not. In Old Norse traditions, the former group includes cosmological actors in counter-roles to the gods. Both male and female *jǫtnar* could advance to the status of gods in the divine community.¹¹ In contrast, *dvergar* were represented as the maggots of creation, spontaneously emerging from the flesh of a primal corpse (*Vǫluspá*, *Gylfaginning* 15). Furthermore, *dvergar* are characterized by positive productive activity, as well as being dangerous, while *þursar* do not seem to have any positive characterizations or roles.

A Theonym *þur(i)saz?

Old High German *thuris* is prominently used to gloss Classical mythologies’ rulers of the

realm of the dead, and a corresponding use is found for Old English *þyrs*. If only found in Old English, this might seem like an anomaly or accident of the data. The Old High German examples multiply this with what seem to be several independent examples that gloss different names in equivalent roles with *thuris*. This type of usage is restricted to rulers of death rather than glossing other major cosmological actors of these mythologies, with the possible exception of the one Old English gloss of *Cacus*, the monstrous son of Vulcan in Roman mythology. Whereas words for ‘god’ or ‘devil’ used in such glosses always appear in compounds, the glosses use *thuris* or *þyrs* directly for the name.¹² *Thuris* and *þyrs* thus appear used in the manner of proper nouns *Thuris* and *Þyrs*, comparable to using ‘Devil’ and ‘God’ as names in Christian discourse. When name or name-equivalent usage of *Thuris* and *Þyrs* is found for names from Classical mythology but not used for the ruler of the Christian Hell, it suggests that this usage was linked to vernacular mythology rather than a new use created through Christian discourse. *Thuris/Þyrs* therefore seems to be treated as a vernacular ‘pagan’ name. The evidence points to *Thuris/Þyrs* as the name of a hostile and threatening ruler of the realm of the dead in West Germanic.

Theonym-type usage of Old English *Þyrs* is poorly attested, but this must be viewed against the total number of examples in Old English as three uses in poetry, three in a place name, and ten in glosses. Theonymic use accounts for 20% of the uses of *þyrs* in glosses and more than 12.5% of all examples. The uses are so few and interconnected that it opens the question of influence carried through Old Saxon. Old Saxon had great influence on Old English Christian discourse, with whole Christian epics being translated from the former into the latter. However, Old Saxon did not develop *thuris* as a prominent term in Christian discourse in contrast to Old High German, leaving so little evidence that it is at least possible that the one Old Saxon example of *thuris* may be an Old High German word. Use of *Þyrs* as a proper name in Old English cannot be attributed to Old Saxon.

Although the use of such a common noun as a theonym might seem peculiar for Germanic

religion, Old Norse mythology offers a number of comparable examples, such as *Freyr* [‘Lord’], *Freyja* [‘Lady’], *Baldr* [‘Leader’], and *Týr* [‘God’]. Comparison can also be made with Tacitus’s *Mannus* [‘Man, Person’] and *Tuisto* [‘Twin’] (*Germania* 2). The production of such theonyms was likely at a time when the respective nouns were dominant commonplace terms rather than being limited to poetry, as most were when they were recorded in all but the examples from Tacitus’s work.

The same word both as a common noun for a type of malicious or hostile mythic agent in the human world and as the name of a cosmological otherworld ruler is not found in Scandinavian sources. However, it is paralleled in mythologies across the Baltic Sea region. In these other mythologies, the hostile agent is linked to a dualist structure: this name designates the adversary or antithesis of the celestial god and the common noun designates a type of agent that the celestial god strikes and potentially hunts with the lightning weapon, as for instance in the case of Lithuanian *Velnias/velnias* [‘Devil/devil’] and *Perkūnas* [‘Thunder’] (see e.g. Laurinkienė 2023). Usage of **Pur(i)saz* or its derivative within such a schema would suggest that the common noun **pur(i)saz* was the central word for malicious or hostile and dangerous mythic agents active in the human world – i.e., the adversaries regularly struck by lightning, equivalent to ‘devil’ or ‘troll’ in more recent legend traditions.

Within this dualist structure, the identity of the adversary or antithesis may be shaped by linking it to a cosmological structure, although it may evolve over time. Thus, in Finnic traditions, the adversary is linked to water, a connection with deep roots in a cosmogonic conception of sky and water as the two primary elements with which the god ‘Sky’ and his antithesis were identified (on which, see Frog 2012). In Baltic traditions, Lithuanian *Velnias*, Latvian *Velns*, is an agent of chaos identified with the Christian ‘Devil’, but his connection to death and the dead is at an etymological level (Vēlius 1987; Laurinkienė 2023). The identification of *Thuris/Pyrs* as the lord of the realm of death is consistent with this pattern.

The earliest name of the rune **þ** seems to have been **pur(i)saz/ *pur(i)saR*. Although this

is generally assumed to represent a common noun, the West Germanic evidence allows that the rune was named for the theonym **Pur(i)saz/ *Pur(i)saR*, comparable to naming the rune **t** as **tīwaz/ *tīwaR*. Rune names appear to have been words in common usage at the time they came into use. The inherited Indo-European word for ‘god’, which became Proto-Germanic **tīwaz*, seems to have been superseded and marginalized by **guda-* [‘god’] already in or before Proto-Germanic. The rune **t** was most likely named for the god **Tīwaz > *TīwaR > Týr* [‘God’], comparable to the rune **ŋ** being named for **Ingwaz/ *Ingwar*, which is known exclusively as a theonym or proper name without a corresponding proper noun. The rune name **pur(i)saz/ *pur(i)saR* was doubtless interpretable as a proper name where such a name was used, although this would not be exclusive of interpretation through the common noun. Indeed, the same may be said about the rune **m**, which could have been interpreted as the theonym behind Tacitus’s *Mannus*, as well as the common noun for ‘person’.

Recognizing *Pyrs* as a theonym situates the replacement of the rune name *pyrs* by *þorn* in a new light. Attributing the impacts on rune names to a religious ideology in Anglo-Saxon England is most compelling in the case of venerated agents that opened channels to supernatural agency outside of the Church’s administrative authority and thus threatened their monopoly on otherworld interactions. The motivation to renew a vernacular word for ‘giant’ or ‘monster’ is less clear since its hostile relationship to the community would remain unchanged rather than being inverted and polarized (see also the discussion in Frog 2021b).¹³ However, if *Pyrs* was used for the non-Christian ruler of death and the dead, belonging to the system of vernacular gods even if not venerated *per se*, this would give a pronounced motivation for reinterpreting the name of the rune. In this case, renewal can be attributed to the lack of homonyms through which the rune name could be reinterpreted.¹⁴

***Pur(i)saz versus *Haljō- as Ruler of Death**

If West Germanic *Thuris/Pyrs* was a dangerous and threatening ruler of the realm of the dead, he would seem to fill the same role as

the female agent *Hel* in Old Norse mythology. *Hel* has cognates across the Germanic languages but is not otherwise found as an agent personifying death.¹⁵ The word reconstructs to Proto-Germanic **haljō-*, which seems to have designated the realm of death rather than being a common noun for death *per se*. **Haljō-* may ultimately derive from an Indo-European stem with a meaning of ‘covering’ or ‘concealing’ (Kroon 2013: 204, s.v. ‘*haljō-’). This etymology has led to a view that **haljō-* originally referred to a grave and was first extended to an otherworld realm of the dead (cf. West 2007: 388), and later to the female personification of death (e.g., Lindow 2001: 172). Old Norse *Hel* was used both for the location and as the name of the female agent *Hel*, as well as with some fluidity in expressions that allowed *hel* to blur into a common noun and element in compounds referring to ‘death’ (see Abram 2003: 8–50).

The difference in genders between *Thuris/Pyrs* and *Hel* makes it clear that these refer to distinct images of the otherworld rulers rather than alternative names for the same agent or that they represent cognate images of the agent that received a new name in one language branch. In other Indo-European mythologies that identify the realm of death as the abode of an agent, that agent seems to be male, as with Greek *Hades*, Irish *Donn*, and Indic *Yama* (e.g. West 2007: 388). Bruce Lincoln (1981) reconstructs Proto-Indo-European mythology’s **Manu* [‘Human’] as slaying or sacrificing his counterpart **Yemo* [‘Twin’] as the first killing, after which **Yemo* rules the realm of death. **Yemo* appears to be the source of the Old Norse name *Ymir*, whose slaying initiates the creation event, while Tacitus appears to refer to a different tradition of ‘Twin’ (*Tuisto*) and ‘Person’ (*Mannus*) (*Germania* 2), in which the name **Yemo* would have been replaced by a current, semantically transparent synonym. If Lincoln’s reconstruction is accepted, the Germanic ruler of the realm of the dead may have changed from **Yemo*, as seems also to have occurred in Greek and Irish mythologies. Nonetheless, *Pyrs/Thuris* remains consistent with the more general pattern of this agent as male. In Baltic mythology, however, *Velnias* is a chthonic agent linked to death, but the

material does not point to the realm of death as his house. This realm is instead called in Lithuanian *Pragaras*, today used for the Christian Hell but semantically equivalent to ‘abyss’, of which the etymological sense might be described as ‘that which swallows completely’ (Vėlius 1989: 228). In Lithuanian laments and Latvian *daina* poetry, the place of the dead is commonly identified with a ‘high hill’, noting that it was taboo to use the word or name of death in laments (Stepanova 2011: 135, 139). Even in this structure, the agent of death is male. On this backdrop, *Hel* as a female ruler appears to be an innovation.

Scandinavian *Hel* may be viewed within an isogloss of female otherworld rulers. Samic mythologies on the Scandinavian Peninsula exhibit a female ruler of the dead (e.g., Karsten 1955: 89; cf. Itkonen 1946). In North Finnic kalevalaic mythology, female agents appear as dominant figures in otherworld households and as adversaries in mythological epics, while the prominence of female agents in incantations seems to correspond to the otherworld ‘mothers’ of illnesses and injuries known from shamanic traditions of North Asia (Siikala 2002: 200–201). Finnic languages lack grammatical gender, and the gender of the Proto-Finnic ruler of the realm of the dead **Tōni* [‘Death’] is uncertain. However, the Late Proto-Finnic name **Tōni* is a borrowing of a Germanic feminine noun meaning ‘death’ (< Middle Proto-Finnic **towēne* < Pre-Germanic / Early Proto-Germanic **d^how(ey)eni-*; cf. Old Norse *dán* [‘death’], mainly preserved in genitive in compounds) (Koivolehto 1986; EVE, s.v. ‘toone’). The feminine noun could be an indicator of the adoption of a female agent, which is a topic of critical discussion in the third instalment of this article series. In any case, although a female ruler is reconstructed for a positive otherworld location in Proto-Uralic, Vladimir Napol’skikh considers the ruler of the realm of the dead more likely to have been male (1992: 11–12), in which case a female ruler would be an innovation. Innovations in adjacent Germanic- and Uralic-speaking groups form an isogloss that appears attributable to contacts and interactions of the respective populations.¹⁶

Usage of *Orcus* in Anglo-Saxon England points to a phenomenon of semantic correlation

between the name of the ruler of the realm of death and the name of the realm itself – i.e., the theonym is correlated with the placename so that the same name is used for both. As this use of *Orcus* does not appear to stem from Latin, it can be assumed to reflect a language ideology of semantic correlation in Old English, and thus that either feminine *Hel* or masculine *Pyrs* were used as both theonym and toponym. The difference in grammatical gender between the two names would exclude both as synonyms to refer to the same agent. Semantic correlation is unexpected in Old English because West Germanic only offers examples of **Haljō-* as a toponym and **Pur(i)saz* as a theonym. This situation could be accounted for through three different scenarios of varying degrees of probability.

1. Conflation of *Orcus* with a placename is not rooted in Old English language use. This possibility seems the least likely without identifying some motivating influence. Possible interference from Greek *Hades* is unlikely because *Hades* does not seem to appear as a name in the Old English corpus (cf. *DOEC*).
2. *Hel* was the name of both the realm of death and its ruling agent, and the principle of identifying these was extended to *Orcus*. This scenario would seem to contradict identification of *Pyrs* as a proper name for the ruler of the realm of the dead. *Pyrs* was then perhaps not a theonym at all. This would imply the same for Old High German *Thuris*, and the distinctive use of *thuris* for glossing rulers of death would need to be accounted for in another way.

The difficulty with this scenario is that the agents' genders are grammatically encoded, and *interpretatio Germanica* did not jump the gender boundary. *Orcus* and *Hel* would not have been viewed as referring to identities that would be directly linked by language speakers. Mapping semantic correlation from *Hel* onto *Orcus* would thus require interpreting incommensurate agents as having commensurate relations to the realm of the dead in such a way that their names could be used for the realm itself. The scenario is complex in that it requires the correlation of identities over a gender distinction, and it is more complex insofar as the realm became gendered by semantic correlation. Correlating the agent *Orcus* with the incommensurate agent *Hel* through their

roles as rulers of the realm of death requires the gender of the realm to be invisible in order to be renamed for a masculine agent.

3. *Pyrs* was the name of both the realm of death and its ruling agent, and the principle of identifying these was extended to *Orcus*. The advantage of this explanation is its simplicity: interpreting *Orcus* as translating *Pyrs* extends its use from the agent ruling the realm of death to the realm itself.

In this scenario, *Hel* would be a parallel term for the realm but not the agent, possibly rooted in euphemism or avoidance terminology (cf. taboos in lament). The difficulty is that the identification of *Pyrs* as the name of both the mythic agent and his realm would need to be strong enough to impact the use of *Orcus* without entering the written record. However, if *Pyrs* was the name of an agent of pagan mythology while *Hel* was an alternative term for the same realm, it is unsurprising that *Hel* was adopted into Christian discourse while *Pyrs* was avoided. Christians avoiding *Pyrs* and *Thuris* in referring to the otherworld realm of death in Old English and Old High German would be analogous to Christians avoiding *Hel* for the Christian otherworld in Old Norse and instead referring to it by the compound *Helviti* ['Death-Torment'].

All three of these scenarios are conjectural, and the conjectures are built on an argument for the use of *thuris* and *pyrs* in certain glosses as reflecting a theonym. However, if the theonym is accepted, then the third scenario seems the most probable to account for the evidence of semantic correlation.

Although the evidence is quite limited, *Pyrs* and *Thuris* appear to have been names for rulers of the realm of the dead in the respective West Germanic mythologies. This theonym connects with a dualist structure found across mythologies in the Circum-Baltic area in which Proto-Germanic **Pur(i)saz* would be comparable to the Baltic god that later becomes Latvian *Velns* and Lithuanian *Velnias*. If Proto-Germanic **haljō-* ultimately derives from a common noun or euphemism for 'grave', euphemistic use would, according to this model, occur alongside the theonym **Pur(i)saz*. If semantic correlation of *Orcus* in Old English reflects use of **Pur(i)saz* also for a location, the location may also have been distinguishable from **Haljō-*, for instance one

as a geographical space or ‘realm’ versus a walled enclosure or dwelling. Although the agent *Hel* is here identified with an isogloss of contacts, the agent cannot be assumed to be a loan. These contacts may have included creating awareness and perhaps engagement with traditions of otherworld ‘mothers’ (Siikala 2002: 200–201), and possibly also with the sort of structural contrast observed in North Finnic mythological epics of otherworlds ruled by female agents as opposed to male heroes. Rather than borrowing a female ruler of the dead *per se*, the Old Norse name *Hel* points to an operation of semantic correlation that extended the Proto-Germanic feminine placename **Haljō-* or its derivative to the agent ruler, which may have involved a hybridization of conceptions. Whether a borrowing or a hybridization, the transition from a male ruler of the realm of the dead to a female agent personifying the realm looks like a marked change that may have involved significant restructuring in the mythology.

The emergence of a female ruler of the dead likely co-occurs with the displacement of a male ruler, opening the question of when this occurred. John Lindow (2001: 172) states that in the earliest Old Norse poets *Hel* appears used to refer to the location but not the agent. Lindow connects this to the emergence of *Hel* as an agent from *Hel* as a realm of the dead. This would mean *Hel* as an agent emerged in the Viking Age or was a product of medieval discourse. However, the ‘first poet’ Bragi Boddason (*Rdr* 9^{III})¹⁷ and the early poet Þjóðólfr ór Hvini (*Yt* 7^I) refer to *Hel* through kennings based on her kinship relations to Loki as her parent and to her siblings; therefore, she must have been established as the ruler of the realm of the dead already in the 9th century.

One innovation of Scandinavian mythology was to create a gap between theonyms and commonplace nouns. For example, Proto-Baltic **Perkūnas* [‘Thunder’] and Proto-Germanic **Pun(a)raz* [‘Thunder’] exhibit semantic correlation of the name of the thunder god with the noun for thunder: whichever name one sees as renewed, that name also became the common noun for ‘thunder’ (Frog 2017: 111). In Old Norse, however, semantic disambiguation has occurred between the Proto-Germanic name **Pun(a)raz* and evidence of the theonym *Þórr*:

Þórr is used exclusively as a proper noun, while other words or expressions are used for ‘thunder’ (2017: 112–113). Evidence of this ideology in connection with venerated gods could suggest that continuity of **Pur(i)saz* as a theonym would interrupt continued use of the common noun *þurs*. Consequently, continued use of *þurs* as a common noun would make this shift a potential *terminus ante quem* for the loss of a **Pur(i)saz*-theonym. However, *Hel* was retained in use for both the agent and the location ‘Death’, which also blurs in idioms with the phenomenon ‘death’. It is unclear whether the principle of semantic disambiguation applies to agents that were not venerated. *Hel* may also have been unaffected by the ideology because the name *Hel* was correlated with a placename ‘Death’ rather than with the phenomenon ‘death’. A Pre-Germanic common noun for ‘death’ was borrowed into Proto-Finnic and became the theonym **Tōni* [‘Death’]. This loan points to Proto-Germanic **dawīni-* as the common noun for ‘death’ (Koivulehto 1986), distinct from the place name **Heljō-*. The question of semantic disambiguation in the case of **Pur(i)saz* is clouded by the common noun *þurs* being interpretable as referring to a hypostatic array of the god’s manifestations. The hypostatic array of manifestations would be comparable to **pun(a)raz* [‘thunder’] in relation to **Punaraz* [‘Thunder’]. However, *þursar* were conceived as anthropomorphic agents rather than phenomena classed as part of nature, culture, or personal experience. Consequently, they may have been imagined as having a different relation to the god or theonym, perhaps more comparable to that of the common noun **tīwaz* > *týr* to **Tīwaz* > *Týr*.

Although it may be tempting to correlate a change found in North Germanic with language diversification, it is artificial to imagine that the farther we look into the past, the larger the geographical areas that were linguistically and culturally homogeneous. Such imaginings reflect our models becoming more abstract the farther back we reconstruct from the present, and variation becoming invisible. However, early regional variation in Germanic mythology is observable, for instance, by a theonym **Þingsaz* in the place of **Tīwaz* for the name of ‘Tuesday’ in translating Latin *dies Martis*

['day of Mars'] (Gutenbrunner 1936: 24–30; Höfler 1992 [1979]). The borrowing of Pre-Germanic **d^how(ey)eni-* into Middle Proto-Finnic presents the possibility that the loan was connected with a female ruler of the dead already in the Pre-Germanic language period. In this case, **Dawīni-* or **Haljō-* was likely a theonym in at least one Proto-Germanic dialect or area (presumably across from the Gulf of Finland), and accordingly the spread of the rune name **þur(i)saz/*þur(i)sAR* would have been interpreted in these areas as 'troll, giant, monster; illness agent' without reference to a corresponding theonym.

North versus West Germanic

The differences in representations between derivatives of **þur(i)saz* form clusters that seem to reflect differences in the evolution of mythologies among North and West Germanic language groups. These differences extend through different 'giant' terms rather than being limited to derivatives of **þur(i)saz*, and they raise questions about the differences in conceptions of the realm of the dead.

The Old Norse term *jǫtunn* is sometimes treated as "[t]he original word for giants" (Simek 1993: 107) in Northern mythology, and the Old English cognate *eoten* is introduced alongside it as though the Old English word supports this view. Etymologically, *jǫtunn* is commonly identified as formed from the verb that in Proto-Germanic would be **etan-* ['to eat'], though neither *jǫtunn* nor its cognates are characterized by large-scale consumption of food, corpses, or anything else (*pace* Harris 2009: 491). The semantics of such an etymology of *eoten* ~ *jǫtunn* must have been long since divorced from the agents, if they were ever there at all (Mees 2015).¹⁸ The model of *jǫtunn* ~ *eoten* as a historically primary 'giant' term is centrally based on the Old Norse material in which *jǫtunn* is the central term for 'giants' that are cosmological actors. Old English *eoten* seems more poorly attested than *þyrs*. *Ent* seems to be the most common and flexibly used Old English 'giant' word, although it is lacking clear cognates and is potentially some sort of loan (Mees 2015: 5). The only cognate of *eoten* ~ *jǫtunn* in other Germanic languages is found in a Low German appositive phrase "de olde Eteninne" ['that old

eteninne'] in a line of Johann Lauremberg's *Niederdeutsche Scherzgedichte* (1879 [1652]: 24, poem II, line 297), where the noun is feminine and used to describe a character, leading it to be translated as 'witch'. The example is comparable to metaphorical uses of *þurs* and *þyrs* for people. The evidence points away from *jǫtunn* as a prominent or significant word outside of North Germanic.

An absence of evidence does not necessarily equate to evidence of absence. Nevertheless, non-Christian terms for supernatural agents hostile to human society were not impacted by the transition to Christianity in the same way as theonyms. The basic relationships of these agent categories to society remained largely unchanged, although those that were in a more ambivalent relation to society like 'elves' and 'dwarfs' were likely to also become viewed as opposed to Christian society. If cognates of *jǫtunn* had been the historical terms for the cosmological adversaries of the gods in Old High German and Old Saxon non-Christian mythology, that prominence and significance would be expected to leave more traces in the lexicon, if not to become productive in later languages. And, if such cognates were the terms for cosmological actors, this word rather than *thuris* would be expected to gloss agents of Classical mythology. The same can be said of Old English *eoten*: if this were a central term in non-Christian mythology, why would *þyrs* be better represented than *eoten*, and *þyrs* rather than *eoten* be used in glosses of Classical mythology? If Old Norse *jǫtunn* reflects the dominant term of a much earlier period, the term must have been marginalized at a relatively early period in West Germanic languages, potentially having dropped out of Old High German and Old Saxon entirely.

Mythic craftsmen are also identified with different categories of beings in Old Norse and Old English. Old Norse evidence characterizes *ðvergar* as the mythic craftsmen in the time of the gods. In Old English, 'giant' words other than *þyrs* are characterized as the mythic craftsmen (Bishop 2006). This characterization was integrated into the poetic idiom in the variable formula *GIANT'S geweorc*, seen in the expressions *enta geweorc* ['the work of *entas*'] (*Beowulf*, *Andreas*) and *giganta geweorc* ['work of *gigantas*'], *Welandes geweorc*

['work of *Weland* (~ Old Norse *Vǫlundr*')] and *wundorsmīpa geweorc* ['wonder-smiths' work'] (*Beowulf* only), while the objects they created could be called *eotenisc* ['eoten-ic']. The Old Saxon expression *uurisilic giuuerc* ['*wrisi*-work'] (*Heliand* 1397a) exhibits the same concept in what appears to be a historically related formula, through with a different 'giant' term. The lack of evidence for this formula in Old High German may be related to so much less epic poetry being preserved in the language. Comparable expressions are not found in Old Norse.

The identification of large and potentially mysterious structures as the work of giant beings in ancient times is widespread in Europe, and this is augmented in Old English by attributing these types of agents with the crafting of weapons and armour. In Old Norse, the building of the fortification of the gods is the 'work' of a 'giant' and later legends of the 'master-builder' type reproduce the respective narrative pattern (e.g., Simek 1993: 108) as localized 'echoes' of the cosmogonic event (Frog 2022) adapted to a Christian milieu. However, the Scandinavian traditions are linked to a particular cosmological event rather than attributing 'giants' with acts of construction generally or characterizing them as craftsmen. One *jǫtunn*, Geirrǫðr, seems to be a smith, yet he is never said to craft anything and the connection might only be that he possesses a hammer, which is acquired by Þórr and becomes the god's attribute (Clunies Ross 1981: 388–389). The Old Norse and Old English traditions evolved on different trajectories that linked craftsmanship to *dvergjar* in the former and to the *ent~eoten~gigant* category in the latter. The Old Saxon example points to an alignment with the Old English tradition (but see also Motz 1977 on later folklore). It is unclear whether this difference between North and West Germanic only emerged following language diversification or may instead have deeper roots in regional differences perhaps already in Proto-Germanic.

West Germanic evidence of a theonym *Pyrs/Thuris* contrasts with Old Norse use of *purs* as an agent of illness and harm manipulated through verbal charms. The theonym points also to a dualist schema in which Proto-Germanic **pur(i)saz* would be a primary term

for agents of chaos. In Old Norse, use of *purs* as a poetic equivalent for cosmological actors in counter-roles to the gods contrasts with other 'giant' terms outside of *jǫtunn*. Old Norse *jǫtunn* seems to have expanded its semantic field to a broadly inclusive term for agents characterized as anthropomorphic others and their descendants. For example, in the account of the building of the walls of Ásgarðr, the master-builder seems to be one of the *jǫtnar*, with the plural noun used repeatedly to allude to his background. At the story's climax, he is identified as a *bergrisi* ['mountain-giant'] (*Gylfaginning* 42) – thus a *bergrisi* appears in such use to be a type of *jǫtunn*. The use of *jǫtunn* as the basic word for cosmological actors that are both other and capable of threat from the perspective of the divine community must be viewed in relation to the word's potential inclusiveness. The distinctive use of *purs* and the associated compound *hrimþurs* with reference to cosmological '*jǫtnar*' appears rooted in a long-term use of *purs* in that role, in contrast to other 'giant' words. This interpretation is supported by the Old High German usage of *thurisa* to gloss 'pagan gods', suggesting that this noun was identified with cosmological actors. This use of Old Norse *purs* seems to have been eclipsed in a combination of the rise of *jǫtunn* to a general term and a dislocation of the reflex of the proposed theonym **pur(i)saz*. Use of *purs* to refer to supernatural actors manipulated in verbal charms may be linked to the associations of death bound up with the earlier theonym. However, the continued use of *purs* as the name of a runic sign was doubtless more significant in the long term. As uses of *purs* outside of sorcery were eclipsed, uses in sorcery dominated the construction of the word's semantics and associations.

North and West Germanic mythologies clearly evolved in different directions. **pur(i)saz* designated a type of being that was distinguished as particularly malevolent and hazardous, although these connotations seem to have been maintained in Old English and Old High German through identification with the ruler of the realm of the dead and in Old Norse in connection with sorcery. The marked characterization as malevolent correlates with the contrasts between **pur(i)saz*-derived words and agents characterized by other 'giant'

terms. The North Germanic development of a female ruler of death seems to be an indication of abrupt and marked change,¹⁷ which is among manifold developments that also marginalized **bur(i)saz*-derived words, such as the rise of Old Norse *jötunn* and Old English *ent* as central terms.

Conclusion

Any model of features of mythology among Proto-Germanic speakers depends on the evaluation and interpretation of a wide range of fragmentary evidence, on which the model becomes conditional. **Pur(i)saz* seems to have held a more prominent position in Proto-Germanic than its derivatives in the Middle Ages, but the evidence is far more limited than for a category like **guda* [‘god’] or a deity like **Pun(a)raz* [‘Thunder’]. Consequently, the resulting model remains vague and surrounded by uncertainties, and yet a model of the referent of the Proto-Germanic word remains crucial for considering its borrowing into Proto-Finnic.

The preceding survey allows the conclusion that a **bur(i)saz* was characteristically anthropomorphic, noting that Germanic perspectivism projects anthropomorphicity as iconic of agents with human-like capacities for independent decision-making and directed action. The characteristic form of agents could be in tension with their external form to varying degrees, whether that form was changed through some type of shape-shifting or it was the agent’s form from birth (cf. *Völuspá*, *Reginmál*, *Völsunga saga*). If the greater centrality of **pur(i)saz* is construed as roughly analogous to the range of uses of Old Norse *jötunn*, then **pur(i)saz* did not exclude having a zoomorphic form, whether born into that form or taking it through transformation. The external form might only condition the location in which one lived, or the individual’s capacities for action and perhaps emotional profile; the individual might also completely converge with the identity of the external form, without being attributed the capacity of speech or control over their own impulses and actions.

West Germanic evidence indicates that reflexes of **Pur(i)saz* were used as a proper name of the ruler of the realm of the dead, in addition to use as a proper noun. Theonymic usage is considered lost in North Germanic in

relation to the contact-based innovation of **Heljō-* as a theonym, reflecting the establishment of a female ruler of Death. The possibility that **Pur(i)saz* was also used, like **Heljō-*, as a name for the realm of the dead remains highly conjectural and depends on an otherwise idiomatic usage of *Orcus* in Old English. However, use as a place name does not impact on the overall discussion here.

Proto-Germanic **Pur(i)saz* was most likely conceived within a dualist structure that opposed him to the celestial god wielding thunder, **Pun(a)raz* [‘Thunder’ > ‘Thor’]. Depending on how early the development occurred, the cosmological opposition could potentially have emerged in relation to Pre-Germanic **Teiwaz* [‘God’] > Proto-Germanic **Tīwaz* or his antecedent.¹⁹ The theonym **Pur(i)saz* corresponded to a common noun for agents of chaos. These **bur(i)sōs* were likely characterized as dangerous to humans and as threats to divine and social order. **Pun(a)raz* may have actively struck and probably hunted them without being in direct opposition to the otherworld ruler **Pur(i)saz*. This would be analogous to Old Norse Þórr having conflicts with cosmological *jötnar* and striking supernatural trouble-makers in the human world without any connection to the realm of the dead or its ruler, in contrast to Óðinn and his wife Frigg (e.g., *Baldrs draumar*, *Gylfaginning* 49).

According to this model, **pur(i)sōs* would have been the central noun of contemporary Germanic legend traditions about ‘Thunder’ striking ‘devils’, which are so prominent cross-culturally in the Circum-Baltic. The common noun **pur(i)saz* was likely a primary word for agents of chaos also in the contemporary human world. This model is consistent with the word’s connotations of malevolence. The Old Norse poetic use of *purs* but not other ‘giant’ words as a poetic equivalent for wise and threatening cosmological actors otherwise called *jötnar* suggests that **pur(i)saz* was also historically used for these actors before the semantic field of *jötunn* had extended. This interpretation is consistent with Old High German use of *thurisa* and not other ‘giant’ words to gloss ‘pagan gods’. In the northern language area **pur(i)saz* or its derivative became used for an illness agent and as an

agent of curses. These connections seem likely to be an extension of the connection to the realm of death, although it is unclear whether than extension occurred before the proper name dropped out of use, or in the process itself. The evidence points to **þur(i)saz* as a primary word for malevolent anthropomorphic supernatural agents. Rather than having the inclusive scope of Old Norse *ǰotunn*, reflexes of **þur(i)saz* seem to lack connections to positive activity and productivity outside of Old Norse poetic use for cosmological actors. The word's use may thus have been centrally structured by connotations of malevolence and potential for harm. However, it is possible that this was only fundamental to actors in the human world, while **þur(i)sōs* as cosmological actors were more ambivalent like Old Norse cosmological *ǰotnar*, and their West Germanic counterparts were never referred to in writing (cf. Old High German *thursa* glossing 'pagan gods').

The evidence further supports **þur(i)sas/þur(i)sAR* as the earliest name of the rune **þ**. West Germanic evidence suggests that the rune was named for the theonym, comparable to the rune **t** being named for **Tīwaz/*Tīwar* (> Old Norse *Týr*). The displacement of the theonym **þur(i)saz* in the North Germanic area would mean that the name of the rune would only be identified with the common noun.

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Notes

1. Similar usage as a metaphorical derogatory term is also found in Middle English (Scott 1895: 36).
2. "Orco" is glossed "deaðe" (DOEC, ClG1, D8.1, 4570 (4591)) ['death-DATIVE'] and "orci, .i. mortis" ['orcus-GENITIVE, that is death-GENITIVE'], and also "muþes" (DOEC, AldV 13.1, C31.13.1, 4570 (4591); also DOEC, AldV 1, C31.1, [0900 (900)] ['mouth-GENITIVE']). Rather than "muþes" representing an imagination of death as a 'mouth' like that of Behemoth, Petra Hofmann is probably correct that "muþes" is a scribal error for *morþes* ['death-GENITIVE'] (2008: 136n.35).
3. Bosworth et al. interpret *orc* and *þyrs* in this gloss as a compound *orcþyrs* (s.v. 'orcþyrs'), which, with their interpretation of *orc* as referring to an infernal realm of the dead (s.v. 'orc'), can be considered

semantically parallel to the compound *heldeoful*. However, the number of glosses of Latin *Orcus* with *orc* as its Old English equivalent suggest instead that a copyist has simply brought together different translations of *Orcus* (noting incidentally that the transcription of the gloss seems to have a space between *orc* and *þyrs*).

4. *Ditis* is a form of what had been a rare Latin word *dis* ['divinity'] that began being used exclusively for the god of the underworld, sometimes with the epithet *pater* ['father'].
5. Image source: www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/csg/0878/321/small_unifr.ch.
6. Image source: https://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Datei:Abc_nord.jpg&filetimestamp=20090312090219.
7. The common view that *áss, æsir* was an ethnonym for one race of gods among others is false. This view is rooted in the euhemerized history of *Ynglinga saga*, and in the Prologue of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, where the word is etymologized as referring to their origins from 'Asia'. Contrary to popular belief today, *áss, æsir* was simply a poetic synonym for *goð* ['god'] used mainly in poetry and also in some elevated forms of speech (e.g., oaths) (see further Frog 2021a and also note 11 below).
8. Eddic poems are cited according to the edition of Neckel & Kuhn 1963.
9. Motz writes and translates this: "*þursa skeggr* – 'giant's beard'" (1986: 188).
10. However, Old High German glosses as well as vernacular words appearing in charms written in Latin preserve a variety of comparanda for this type of vocabulary, such as *liodrūna* (Steinmeyer 1878: 247) ['song-sorceress'], which corresponds directly to Old English *leodruna*. The lack of evidence in this case is thus noteworthy.
11. In his mythography, Snorri Sturluson opposes the Old Norse word *vanir* to *goð* ['gods'] in both his references to the war at the beginning of the world (*Gylfaginning* 23; *Skáldskarmál* G57). It is thus clear that he did not view *vanir* as one of two races within the category *goð*. It is instead most probable that *vanir* referred to *ǰotnar* as the opponents of the gods in other conflicts throughout the mythology (Frog 2021a: 168n.168). In this case, the entry of the god Njǰrðr and his son Freyr as well as the goddess Freyja would constitute the incorporation of *ǰotnar* into the community of the gods, which is otherwise found only for goddesses (e.g., Skaði, daughter of the gods' adversary Þjazi), while Loki has been interpreted as having an ambiguous status because his mother was a goddess and his father a giant.
12. See however note 3 above on Bosworth and others' reading "orcþyrs" rather than "orc, þyrs".
13. That the use of the rune in magic connected it with manipulating *þyrsas* and renaming the rune was aimed at breaking that link is improbable, since there is no evidence of this type of manipulation of *þyrsas* in Old English as attested in Old Norse. That the ideology motivating the change concerned not paganism, but a conception that naming these agents

could summon them, would not account for *tir* and *os* being reinterpreted rather than renewed.

14. Bernard Mees (2015: 3) connects the question of renewal of the rune name with the etymology of **pur(i)saz* as derived from the Proto-Indo-European stem **trh₃-* [‘wound’], from which *þorn* and its cognates are also derived with a *no*-stem, **trh₃-no-* (see also Kroon 2013: 552–553). Accordingly, a substitution of *þorn* for *þyrs* “may well not have been due purely to chance substitution of an overly unlucky (even demonic) label for this most Germanic of letterforms” (Mees 2015: 3).
15. There is an example in Old English of the location *Hel* being attributed speech in a dialogue with Satan (*DOEC*, Nic (A) B8.5.2.1, 0210 (20.1.1)).
16. There are widespread examples of traditions in which ‘Death’ is a personified agent independent of the ruler of the realm of the dead, but this agent interacts with humans in their world and is a cause of death (Березкин & Дувакин, n.d., type h7); *Hel* only appears as a ruler of the realm of the dead; under the name Proserpina, she makes an appearance in Saxo Grammaticus’s *Gesta Danorum* (III.iii.7) before the dying Balderus, but she only informs him of his coming death and is not responsible for his death *per se*; she does not take him to the realm of death herself, but says that she will receive him.
17. Citations to skaldic poetry are by sigla according to the Skaldic Project Database.
18. It may be tempting to identify this etymology with those proposed for **dvergaz* and **pur(i)saz* that would be primarily interpreted as linked to semantics of illness. However, there is a lack of evidence that *þotunn* or its cognates were used as words for illness agents, and the lack of evidence outside of Old Norse for **pur(i)saz* as an illness agent makes it dubious to presume that these uses of the word reflect the historical semantics on which it was coined.
19. I have discussed elsewhere (Frog 2017: 100–111) a cross-cultural religious change, in which the inherited god called ‘Sky’ was displaced by a divinity called ‘God’ in Baltic, Germanic, and an Indo-Iranian language among Indo-European languages and in Maric and probably Mordvinic among Uralic languages. This change is only visible in the lexicon while remaining otherwise obscure. A relationship to **Pur(i)saz* is thus purely speculative, but it has the appeal of a symmetry between the central celestial divinity being named by a common noun for divinities and the counter-role being named by a common noun for agents of chaos opposed to the divinities and their social order. The etymological connection of Lithuanian *Velnias*, Latvian *Velns*, to ‘death’ parallels the connection of **Pur(i)saz* to death and both are also in the dualist structure discussed above as well as being both a proper name and common noun for agents of chaos opposed to divine and human order. Within the broader Indo-European context, these parallels must be attributable to historical contacts. That the change from ‘Sky’ to ‘God’ is also attributable to contacts and concerns a celestial agent that could participate in the dualist structure makes it reasonable to

consider that these may all belong to the system of changes that spread across language groups.

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