

# Viktor Rydberg's Investigations into Germanic Mythology, Vol. II

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## 33.

### Yima's Grove and Mimir's Grove.<sup>1</sup>

128) The Iranian documents say that when the fimbul-winter was imminent, Ahuramazda, the Creator, held a meeting with the holy angels and with some of the progenitors, among them the patriarch, Yima (*Rigveda's* Yama). Ahuramazda said to Yima that a terrible winter was imminent, with a hard, killing frost that would destroy the vegetation not only on the mountain peaks and in the plains, but even in deep valleys. Thus, he commanded Yima to make a protective enclosure and there secure "the seed of all men and women who are the greatest, best, and most beautiful on the earth," the seed of the best and the most beautiful of domestic animals, the seed of the tallest and most fragrant plants, the seed of the tastiest foodstuffs, and to make matches of these things. Inside this refuge against the fimbul-winter and the ruin of the world, said Ahuramazda, there shall be no "arrogance, no timidity, no apathy, no poverty, no deceit, no deformity, no disability."<sup>2</sup>

Yima, as he was enjoined, established this haven, a beautiful grove in the underworld (according to *Bundehesh*, chapter 30, 10, under the mountain Damkan).<sup>3</sup> Those who dwell there think that one year is a day. Sickness and death never enter. Every fourteen years, two human beings are born to every two human beings. The pleasure-garden remains after the end of the fimbul-winter and continues through the rest of this world-age to preserve its treasure of unspoiled humans, animals, and plants. It endures even during the world's conflagration and is untouched by its flames. When the regeneration of the world occurs, the enclosure that Yima built will open its gates and from them human beings, animals, and plants shall repopulate the fresh earth anew.

According to Germanic mythology, before the fimbul-winter ravaged the earth, a well-protected grove was established in Mimir's subterranean kingdom, and an ornate hall was built there by his artisans. An unspoiled human couple, the *ásmegir*, Lifthrasir and Lif, are transported there.<sup>4</sup> Inside of the grove's protection never come sorrow or suffering, never disability and

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<sup>1</sup> [Rydberg's footnote]: This myth is explored in detail in *Investigations into Germanic Mythology*, Vol. I, nos. 52, 53, and 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Vendidad*, *Fargard* 2.

<sup>3</sup> The reference should read *Bundehesh* 70, 11, and appears to originate in Darmesteter's *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 233. In modern editions, this corresponds to *Bundehesh*, chapter 29, 14, which says: "[The enclosure] formed by Yim [Jamshed] is in the middle of Pars, in Sruva; thus, they say, that what Yim [Jamshed] formed (Yim-kard) is below Mount Yimakan." [E. W. West tr.]. Darmesteter gives the name of the mountain as *Djemkân*.

<sup>4</sup> Called *holtí Hoddmímis*, "Hoard-Mimir's grove" or *Mím[is] holdi*, "Mimir's grove," it preserves the human beings Lif and Lifthrasir "through the ages" (*ok þar um aldr alask*) until Ragnarök, according to the variant of *Vafþrúðnismál* 45 in the *Uppsala* manuscript of *Gylfaginning* 53. Rydberg demonstrates that the "new earth" which rises from the sea after Ragnarök, is actually the current underworld, with life preserved in Mimir's grove. Thus Baldur and Hödur, who currently reside in Hel, and even the dragon Nidhögg are found there (*Völuspá*). In

sickness, never aging and death. Delling, the elf of the rosy dawn, is its guardian.<sup>5</sup> The winter cold does not touch them; nor shall Ragnarök's flames harm them. The human beings therein are nourished by Yggdrasil's strength-producing morning dew. After Baldur descends to the underworld, this hall is his home, and its human inhabitants are his students and "children."<sup>6</sup> After the conflagration of the world, Mimir's kingdom of bliss rises, with beautiful green fields, up out of the sea, and Lif and Lifthrasir become the parents of the new world's happy and virtuous human race. Yima, the ruler of the Iranian grove of immortality, was killed by a brother (*Avesta* 19, *Zamyad Yasht*, 46),<sup>7</sup> like Baldur, the corresponding ruler in Germanic mythology. The food of immortality that the inhabitants in the former enjoy is the white Haoma, the world-tree's most precious sap, corresponding to the *ásmegir*'s morning dew that drip down from the world-tree's uppermost branches into the dales of the kingdom of bliss.

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*Grímnismál* 27, the place is referred to as *hodd goða*, "the hoard of the gods," which underworld rivers wind around. It acts as an oasis of life in the realm of death and was remembered long after the heathen age in medieval tales, such as those of Gudmund of *Glæsisvellir* and Erik *víðförli* in the *Fornaldarsagas*, as well as Hadding's journey to the underworld in Saxo's *Danish History*, Book 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Fjölsvinnsmál* 33-34.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. *Fjölsvinnsmál* 33 and *Baldurs Draumar* 7. Rydberg interprets the *ásmegir* ("sons of the Aesir") as Lif and Lifthrasir and the other inhabitants of Mimir's grove. In *Baldurs Draumar* 7, some scholars have had a difficult time understanding why "the sons of the Aesir," whom they interpret as the Aesir themselves, wait with *ofvæni* to receive Baldur into *Heljar ranni*, "Hel's high hall." *Ofvæni* literally means "intolerable expectation" and refers to eager anticipation. Since the Aesir cannot be eager for Baldur's death, scholars have proposed an emendation of *ofvæni* to *óvæni* ('no-anticipation') or have suggested that at least two lines are missing here. According to Ursula Dronke (*Poetic Edda*, Vol. II), B. Sijmons and Hugo Gering (*Die Lieder der Edda*, 1927) "suggest that the lost lines probably noted the happy anticipation of the inhabitants of Hel in contrast to the Æsir's fearful anxiety, at the thought of Baldur's death" [based on their emendation of *ofvæni* to *óvæni*] rather than seeing the *ásmegir* themselves as inhabitants in Hel, as Rydberg does. The related term *ásliðar* in *Skírnismál* 34, if understood as a parallel formation of *ásmegir*, suggests that Skirnir invokes a variety of underworld inhabitants. See *Investigations into Germanic Mythology*, Vol. I, no. 53.

<sup>7</sup> *Yasht* 19, *Zam Yasht*, 46: "The Evil Spirit flung a dart, and so did Akem-Mano, and Aeshma of the wounding spear and Azhi Dahaka and Spityura, he who sawed Yima in twain." [Darmesteter tr.]. The *Greater Bundehesh* 35, 3 identifies Spityura as the brother of Yam [Jamshed], who is equated with Yima.