

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

University of London

EXAMINATION FOR INTERNAL STUDENTS

For The Following Qualification:--

B.A.

Mythology and Religion in Medieval Scandinavia

COURSE CODE : SCAN7404

UNIT VALUE : 0.50

DATE : 17-MAY-06

TIME : 10.00

TIME ALLOWED : 3 Hours

Answer QUESTION (1) (40%), QUESTION (2) (30%) and ONE OTHER QUESTION (30%).

A candidate may not in any answer cover the same ground as in an assessed or extended essay. Avoid duplication of material in this paper.

- (1) Write notes on FOUR of the following subjects, explaining their nature and significance within medieval Scandinavian mythology and/or religion. In each case, identify the primary sources from which our knowledge of the subject is derived.
- (a) Ginnungagap
 - (b) Þórr
 - (c) Euhemerism
 - (d) The mead of poetry
 - (e) Loki
 - (f) Sacrifice
 - (g) Runes
- (2) Read the following passage, then analyse it using the methodology of any ONE of the following theories of myth. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your analysis.
- (a) The comparative method (after Frazer)
 - (b) Psychoanalytic theory (Freudian and/or Jungian)
 - (c) The myth-and-ritual theory
 - (d) Structuralism (after Lévi-Strauss)

Þórr's journey to Geirrþǫðargarð, as described by Snorri Sturluson

Then Bragi replied: 'The story of how Þórr went to Geirrþǫðr's courts is worth detailed treatment. On that occasion he did not have the hammer Mjöllnir or the girdle of might or the iron gauntlets, and that was Loki's doing. He went with him, for it had befallen Loki, having gone flying once for fun with Frigg's falcon form, that out of curiosity he had flown into Geirrþǫðr's courts and saw there a great hall, and he alighted and looked in through the window. But Geirrþǫðr looked out at him and ordered that the bird should be caught and brought out to him. The person sent got with difficulty up on to the wall of the hall, it was so high; Loki was pleased that it caused him trouble to get at him, and planned to delay flying up until the man had performed the whole of the difficult climb. But when the fellow came at

him, he beat his wings and jumped hard upwards, and found his feet were stuck. Loki was captured there and brought to giant Geirrøðr. And when he saw his eyes, he had a feeling it must be a person and demanded that he answer him, but Loki remained silent. Then Geirrøðr locked Loki in a chest and starved him there for three months. And when Geirrøðr took him out and demanded that he speak, Loki said who he was, and to redeem his life he swore Geirrøðr oaths that he would get Þórr to come to Geirrøðr's courts without his bringing either his hammer or girdle of might. Þórr lodged for the night with a giantess called Gríðr. She was Víðarr the silent's mother. She told Þórr the truth about Geirrøðr, that he was a cunning giant and awkward to deal with. She lent him a girdle of might and some iron gauntlets of hers, and her staff, called Gríðr's pole. Then Þórr approached the river Vimur, greatest of all rivers. Then he buckled on the girdle of might and pressed down on Gríðr's pole on the side away from the current, while Loki held on beneath the girdle of might. And when Þórr got to the middle of the river, the river rose so much that it washed up over his shoulders. Then Þórr spoke this:

“Rise not thou now, Vimur, since I desire to wade thee into the giant's courts. Know thou that if thou risest then will rise the Ás-strength in me up as high as heaven.”

‘Then Þórr saw up in a certain cleft that Geirrøðr's daughter Gjálp was standing astride the river and she was causing it to rise. Then Þórr took up out of the river a great stone and threw it at her and said:

‘ “At its outlet must a river be stemmed.”

‘He did not miss what he was aiming at, and at that moment he found himself close to the bank and managed to grasp a sort of rowan-bush and thus climbed out of the river. Hence comes the saying that Þórr's salvation is the rowan. And when Þórr got to Geirrøðr's, he and his companions were first of all shown into a goat-shed as their lodging, and inside there was a single seat to sit on and it was Þórr who sat on it. Then he realized that the seat was lifting under him up towards the roof. He pushed Gríðr's pole up into the rafters and pressed himself down hard on the seat. Then there was a great crack accompanied by a great scream. Under the seat it had been Geirrøðr's daughters Gjálp and Greip and he had broken both their backs. Then Geirrøðr had Þórr called into the hall for games. There were great fires there along the length of the hall. And when Þórr came into the hall opposite Geirrøðr, Geirrøðr picked up with tongs a glowing lump of molten iron and threw it at Þórr, and with the iron gauntlets Þórr caught and raised the molten lump into the air, while Geirrøðr ran to the shelter of an iron pillar for protection. Þórr flung the molten lump and it crashed through the pillar and through Geirrøðr and through the wall and so into the ground outside.’

(Translation: Anthony Faulkes)

- (3) Why was Baldr's death so significant to Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*? How far would you agree with his interpretation of this myth?
- (4) 'Scandinavian mythology both objectifies women and renders them entirely passive.' How far would you agree with this assessment?
- (5) 'The main problem with twentieth-century theories of mythology is that they ignore the role of conscious artistic creation in the production of myths.' Discuss this statement with reference to medieval Scandinavian mythology.
- (6) To what extent do you think it possible that the actions of the gods as described in the Norse myths might have provided moral instruction or example to Scandinavian pagans?