

Time / Wurt / Urlag

by James Coulter (author of "Germanic Heathenry")

Once we've regained an internalization of the proper, Germanic understanding of time (as a bifidic cyclic movement as opposed to the Augustinian linear progression) we can then gain a true comprehension of urlag and wurt, and of related concepts and terminologies such as forthcoming, forethought, foresee, etc...

".to the unlearned, such words bring to mind a notion of 'future', of that which lies ahead of the present, and are often presented in argument against a bifidic or binary recognition of time in Germanic thinking. Concepts such as foresee, and foresight bring to the uninitiated mind thoughts of destiny, of a determination of 'future' times and events yet to be." (fr Germ.Hea.)

Without the establishment or manifestation of a 'future' within the reckoning of time, it seems hardly conceivable that there would be derivative terminologies/activities associated to it in the whole scheme of things...and this is more apparent when we consider the *true* meanings of such terms themselves...

The prefix fore- (OE fore-, Go faura-, OHG/OS fora-) denotes something that holds an 'advanced place' or position, something coming or occurring first, that which precedes, or comes before in time, order, or space. It is also used in relating a 'forward motion' ...well, you obviously can't have a forward motion from a 'future' into further 'future' without any real substance or foundation for such a movement.. so it is clearly NOT what is related in the real meaning(s) of relative terms. Instead, what we have is an indication of a forward motion out of the past into the non-past, out of that-which-is to that-which-is-shaping...so, such a prefix doesn't denote a 'future' to come, but that which already is or has come: foreknowledge and the ability to foresee have nothing to do with 'knowing' a non-existent future, or being able to see that which is immaterial or stands in some 'time to come', but rather is having that ability to know or see what has come before -specifically, what actions have been laid within Wurt's Well, and what is shaping or forthcoming (literally, coming forward) out of that well to influence or effect that-which-is-becoming in the non-past.

[[Sure, you might think that understanding or seeing these actions/deeds, these layers in the Well is obvious enough, or that it doesn't take such great insight or ability to read...but think about all of the days in all of the years of your life...how much of all those days do you truly recall?]] .. for those gifted, or for those who are capable in some means of divination (such as runes, tarot cards, pendulum, or any combination of the three or by some other means) a deeper assessment can be made of what's about to unfold in the Present/Non-past based on the totality of the layers placed within the well over some period of/or the whole of one's life, and of the real effects that our deeds/actions have made, of the shaping influences one layer of stratum has had in the placement/shaping of the next, and of the results which are yet to unfold (and become manifest in some form in the Non-past)....

The Germanic perception of time fosters and interactive and influential role

of not only time, but those actions and deeds which are manifest within that 'time' from one state or condition to the other- the Past directly influences the Non-past, just as the Non-past directly influences or shapes a continuously growing Past. What further establishes the importance of the ever-growing, ever-expanding past for Irminen is the phenomena of urlag and wurt -what each is, how they work, and how they act in the Being of all that is, and what is taking shape. The foundation to our understanding lies within the cosmological wisdoms encrypted (and so, preserved) in Germanic mythology. In the nineteenth and twentieth stanzas of the Voluspá, we are told:

I know an Ash that stands called Irminsul (Yggdrasil)-
High boughed, wet with white water:
From there come the dews that fall in the dales;
It stands ever-green over Urdabrunno.

From there come the maidens, great in wisdom-
Three from the sea that stands beneath the tree:
One is called Urda, another Werdanda,
Sculd is the third:
There, they scored on slivers of wood,
They laid laws,
They chose life for the children of men,
and spoke urlag.

And in Grímnismál (st. 26),

Eihthorn, the hart is called which stands upon Herifater's hall
And eats from the Irminsul's limbs; [In the original, Lærað] Moreover, drops
from his horns Fall into Huergelmer- From there, all waters rise. [JHC, Edda]

Snorri elaborates a bit further in his Gylfaginning, Telling us that each of three great roots of the mighty Irminsul stand over one of three levels or aspects of Wurt's Well, and he likewise places them within particular realms or worlds of the Germanic cosmos: Urdabrunno lies within Hellaheim, Huergelmer within Nebulheim, and the third- Mîmesbrunno, lies within Rîsiheim. All three act in accordance to one another, though not necessarily conterminously, as each respective well/aspect of the Well has a certain function or property peculiar to itself.

Huergelmer is the oldest component of the three. It is the source of the primordial rivers which flowed out of Nebulheim into Ginentigruba{An Ginungagap} at the dawn of creation. Huergelmer's name is formed from a compound of hwer (huuer)- kettle, and gelm (from gellan): to resound loudly or roar. and so, is the Roaring or Resounding Kettle. Because of its great age -having existed since before the creation of the cosmos, the ordering of Being- it is also known as The Old Kettle. In a manner of speaking, Huergelmer the origin of the primal waters which work upward into the other components/aspects of the collective Well of Wurt, and is the source of the upward momentum also found within those same components, or as embodied within the collective whole. Huergelmer directly feeds into the motion or turning of wurt itself, lending the very power or force needed to generate 'becoming'. it is the spring from which the waters of life and generative force/momentum flow.

.the next level or aspect of the Well is Mîmesbrunno. This aspect is named for the Giant who wards/has charge over it, Mîmi {An, Mimir}.
And now that we've come to the mention of brunno, perhaps it would be a

benefit to point out the significance of just what this is/means in the scheme of things. typically, when we think of a well, we often are left with that mental image of some standing water of some source, some rather inactive or static 'thing'. in all reality, the collective whole of the Well of Wurt isn't at all some source of standing water or idle pond from which the Wurtâ simply draw their water. it is instead an active spring or water source, more like a natural fountain than a standing reserve. the true significance to the distinction is yet another manifestation of *incessant* action, constant motion: that very 'thing' which IS true Being. which, goes along those lines of 'We are Our Deeds' (to quote Eric Wodening) and the thought that we're not Irminen/Heathen because we BELIEVE we are, but that we are Irminen/Heathen because we ACT it. not only are we practicing what we preach (so-to-speak) but 'are' and 'have Being' because of the incessant momentum of action and deed. but before I totally digress into another whole conversation: Mîmi's Well, Mîmesbrunno (or, if you prefer something more 'modern', Mîmesbrunnen) is the Well of Memory that contains the 'All-consciousness' of everything that is or was.

Within this level/aspect is kept ur-essence, and the repository of all primeval wisdom and knowing. It is in this level of the Well that the layers which influence what will take shape in Being are ultimately laid or placed. These layers, which shape the patterns determined by previous placements (and also influence or determine the next pattern or the formation of forthcoming, additional layers) are the essence of urlag.

The term Urlag, is a compound of ur- (indicating something primordial, 'original', or first) and lag (law or literally, layer, from OHG leggan: to lie, lay down), and indicates a primordial layer, or the first or most significant thing laid down. In the Well of Wurt, these are the most impacting or influential of actions, deeds that bear some sort of profound effect upon the course of lives and Being. Needless to say, once something has been placed within Mîmesbrunno, once a layer of action has been set, or committed to cosmic memory, it cannot be undone or changed, and becomes part of the ever-expanding and growing consciousness of Being within the ever-deepening well of All-memory. those able to read these patterns can rightfully pick out how these layers will manifest (in the movement of Wurt), and so gain an ability in 'writing around' their affects (as Gundarsson once put it) or, committing to the Well further layers of action and deed that would lend some 'better' or more desirable influences/outcome in Wurt's movement.

The 'waters' flow directly from Huergelmer into Mîmesbrunno, continuously pushing upward into the complex weaves of urlag which it holds. The influences / influential energy or magan of the layers are then imparted into the water as it continues to pass through them, and work its way into Urdabrunno {Mo, Urdabrunnen) 'above'. This is the top layer or aspect of the collective Well of Wurt, and in essence, the most *active* and most instrumental of the three in shaping Becoming. From this level or aspect of the Well, the Wurtâ draw the water and mud with which they feed/nurture the Irminsul, and set to motion the turnings of wurt itself. the water, of course, bears within the energy/ energy forms collected at this point in Urda's Well. these same energies are absorbed the roots of the Irminsul and are then carried throughout the nine worlds (in which their influences will be made manifest). In pouring the water/mud onto the Irminsul's roots, the Wurtâ are quite literally 'laying laws' , that is, laying layers and ensuring due course of action / re-action. in the manifestation of wurt, we find incessant movement, and a constant catalyst of further action/re-action and influences.

"the term itself points us to this notion of action, or, action and

re-action- drawn from the verb, werdan (to become), it ultimately traces to the Proto Indo-European root, wert (variously, uert): to move, to set into motion, to turn. also, to spin or rotate." (fr, GHAPG)

Wurt is a cyclic and evolutionary process, similar in concept to the turning of the year- with each passing cycle, we return to the same points within the calendar. not within a static context (of a non-progressive or evolutionary return to the *exact* point in time from which we moved) but to that point in an elevated or evolved state of being. this is often compared to or given analogy to climbing a spiral staircase- as we climb, it brings us to the same points on the revolution, but spatially elevated, evolved or advanced. Wurt, in its complete form, is a motion of cycle, of cyclic nature and growth, of turn and re-turn. So, we can grow out of one condition of the Past, but we never truly leave it in whole form and Being- it always remains a part of us, and so with us on some level

"This is also part and parcel to the eldritch notion of worthing one's self into a higher level or position with one's community or society -an individual conducts him/herself in a fashion that lends appropriate layers, places suitable patterns within the Well that shapes his urlag- in this, he sets the trend for further patterns, and so growth: a refinement of the self, rather than say, a complete 'gutting-out' and rebuilding out of nothingness. This is the positive accrual of luck or true worth for which we all strive, that evolution of Being which allows us to lay right and proper foundations, to set a 'goodly' weave of furtherance and luck for our children and lines, and so our folk." (fr, GHAPG)

.as we might guess at this point, and as suggested in the Eddaic verse itself (where the involvement of the Wurtâ are concerned), the processes of laying laws, of laying literal layers upon layers, and the effecting of those layers/ laws/ patterns isn't self-actualizing, or auto-responsive, but rather one that is governed or maintained by the Wurtâ who tend to the great Well. The Weird Sisters have been dealt with in a fair amount of studies over the years, but until fairly recently, the main body of writers dealing with them have been thoroughly grounded in a notably Christian or otherwise Augustinian/ Augustinian-influenced scholarly body. The biggest problem this presents is the imposition of trends or perceptions that have no real place in a Germanic mystery or comprehension in any real form. here, then we are surely best served in immediately and wholly discounting the Augustinain interpretation of the Maidens that we see more often than not in texts/written treatments concerning the Wurtâ. these, which so readily and seemingly easily transform them into just a Germanic counterpart to the Classical Fates, and the respective roles/functions/embodiments which they (Fates) are thought to govern or control. In such examples, we see the Wurtâ given definition as:

Urda: past
Werdanda: present
Sculd: future

This, however not only misses the mark with a rather wide stroke, but is altogether an incorrect assessment of the three.

Among the Sisters, Sculd {An Skuld} might be the least understood, or is at least the most *inaccurately* represented. Quite contrary to the Classical or Classically influenced would-be or pseudo-Heathen interpretation, her name doesn't mean *future*, but: what is owed, duty, obligation or debt. She

governs the energy of Need or Necessity within wurt's turning.

"that which must occur according to what has been laid within the Well. It is she who ensures the incessant mobility of wurt, and so the perpetual cycle which sustains the All. Her task is meted out with indifference to gain or loss, triumph or failure, or any sort of preference to outcome for the individual or group of individuals- and from that obligation she cannot be swayed or entreated." (fr, GHAPG)

Werdanda's name (at least, from an OHG standpoint) draws its roots from the verb werdan (uuerdan): to become. As we might surmise from the implied action in her name, Werdanda's main governance or concern is on *that which is becoming or shaping*.her is a focus on all actions taking place within the 'non-past', on the turning of immediate action, results, reaction, etc. which is, of course a direct unfolding of wurt itself, or of its 'influences' and effects..

But Without question, it is Urda who retains the prominence in the tro:

"Her name signifies Being, 'that which is', or 'that which has become', all that exists within the great past. Urda is also known as Wurt, and it is from her name which is drawn the name of not only the collective levels of the Well, but also the name of the phenomena itself. Her importance far exceeds that of the other two sisters -this is evident enough in the significance of the past in Germanic considerations, and in the frequency in which her name appears within preserved texts: Urda is given mention at several points throughout, unlike her counterparts who only appear but two or three times between them!" (from GHAPG)

Because of the role Urda holds, and of her ultimate importance within the overall scheme of things, we often find scholars suggesting that the other two (Werdanda and Sculd) are actually part of a sort of over-categorization within the myths, offering the hypothesis that in all reality, Werdanda and Sculd are but extensions or hypostasis of the one and central figure, Urda/Wurt... this, of course to Irminic thinkers and most other Heathen is in truth an over-simplification of complex manifestations, one which falls into line with the 'all Gods are aspects of one God/all Goddesses are aspects of one Goddess' line of thought....

The universe is governed by Wyrð [OE-Fate], the transcendent relationship between one's action, the actions' of others, and the process of Universal cohesion that these actions share. This is not the calculated predestination of other religions, but an ever shifting, and all pervasive arrow that outlines patterns. It is very truly the "Web of Life", for each element affects and is affected by the other strands in the web. The personal circlet, your own Orlog [ON-Destiny] takes its shape from your heritage (via your ancestral Clan) and melds it onto the life you make by your own actions, and changes as these processes interact with others on the overall Web of Wyrð, the Universal pattern of existence.

The Norns are the personification of the triplicity in the Norse Concept of Time, which has a three function base: Urd [ON-That Which has Become- Past],

Verdhandi [ON-That Which is Becoming- Present], and Skuld [ON- That Which Should Become- Future]. Your own personal Norns (actually Family Disir, or Personal Fetch) act in concert with these Greater Norns, who weave the tapestry of the Omniverse.⁶⁷ Your path of life follows a basic plan, the nuances shaped by your actions and circumstances. This life pattern in turn bears on the overall Web, and thus impacts other people. Your family line has set down certain characteristic gifts (skill, intelligence, strength, beauty, u.s.w.) that help or hinder you in your journey. The key to living life is to work with what you have, and by thus integrating your whole self, achieve beyond (the sum of the parts is greater than the whole...). The mystery of three; the sum of the parts (past actions, and present action, shaped by that past) becomes greater than the whole (in that which should become). Wyrd may be seen as the imposition of connective order, and thus the ability of energy (consciousness) to achieve form (existence) through relation (interaction).

Wyrd And Scyld
by Swain Wodening Canote

The impact of Wyrd can be seen everywhere. In nearly every theological construct in Germanic heathendom, including Anglo-Saxon heathendom and Ásatrú, Wyrd plays a role. Just as Wyrd is central to the ancient heathen conception of Law, so too is it central to their conception of Sin or wrongdoing. Three basic principles play a role in heathen conceptions of Sin. The first is Wyrd. The second is mægen. The third is known as scyld in Old English or skuld in Old Norse. In Old Norse the word skuld, meaning "debt, obligation," shows how the heathen conception of Sin was tied to the conception of Wyrd--Skuld is the name of the third Norn in Norse myth.

Wyrd is the principle by which the multiverse operates. For the ancient heathen this may have been represented by the World Tree Yggdrasil and the Well of Wyrd. The world tree Yggdrasil holds the nine worlds and represents the present, the dew that forms on the tree represents deeds being done in the present. The water in the Well of Wyrd represents the results of deeds from the past. These results are brought to the present to shape the results of deeds in the present; when the Wyrd sisters water the tree, the influences of past deeds are drawn up by the roots of the tree, or by evaporation from the well condensing on the tree.

Everything has its own personal wyrd or, in Old Norse, orlög and, in Old English, orlæg. This personal wyrd dictates how actions taken by a being or thing resolve themselves in accordance with wyrd. According to Edred Thorsson, orlæg is passed down family lines, from one's ancestors to one's descendants, as were the duties and obligations of ancestors. This could be taken to mean the physical duties of dead ancestors, but that is not likely the case. It seems unlikely that an individual would be responsible for the physical debts of a long dead ancestor; however, it is not hard to assume that individuals inherited the spiritual abilities and obligations of the long dead ancestor, his or her "karma" or "metaphysical baggage."

According to Edred Thorsson, when the orlæg was inherited, so were the duties and obligations of the dead ancestor. We could take this to mean the physical duties of the dead ancestor, but that is likely not the case. It is unlikely that an individual would be responsible for the physical debts of a long dead ancestor. However, it is not difficult to assume that the individual inherited the spiritual abilities and obligations of that long dead ancestor, his or her "karma" or "metaphysical baggage." Evidence of personal orlæg is usually found in the Old Norse texts, the other Germanic tribes using instead the term Wyrd, which has implications of the more universal law than personal

orlæg.

In Old English the word *mægen* and in Old Norse the word *hamingja* appear to have been used as a term for the spiritual energy contained in every living thing in the multiverse. Similar terms used in Old Norse were *gipta*, and *gæfa*, both of which could mean "luck, fortune" and both of which are related to modern English *gift*. *Mægen* could be loaned to others or even given away. The exchange of *mægen* could even take place between the living and the dead. *Mægen* seemed to have been passed down family lines along with the *fetch* and *orlæg*. How far these acts of transference go is anyone's guess, but one might assume that *mægen* was acquired as the results of one's deeds. In *Waldere I*, it is said, "Weorð ðe selfne, gódum dædum" "Worth gain for yourself, thru good deeds." Throughout the lore we are faced with the improvement of one's *orlæg* or the gaining of strength thru deeds of renown. It is one of the central themes of *Beowulf* and plays a major role in the other epics. If *mægen* can be earned through good deeds, then can it not be lost through bad ones (deeds that harm the tribe)? We are told in the *Eddas* that the *fetch* flees the wicked. If the *fetch* flees the wicked, then it might be assumed that other numinous qualities which are inherited, such as *mægen*, may also be lost every time an evil act is committed.

In the Dark Ages, fines were the primary form of punishment for any given crime. In a sense, the various Anglo-Saxon laws reduce every offence to 'theft,' for which a monetary equivalent can be found. In fact a term for crime in Old English was *scyld* "debt." The word *gylt*, our modern word "guilt," packed similar connotations. Other terms such as Old English *dolh* "injury" are related to words meaning "debt," such as Gothic *dulgs*. When the Christians first needed a word for "sin" they chose the word *scyld*. This seems to be true of most Germanic languages. One can only assume that this was because the term *scyld* packed not only the threat of physical retribution or the need to pay compensation, but also a spiritual penalty. Finally, the third Norn's name is *Skuld*, which means that the concept of "debt, obligation" must have played some role in *Wyrd*. The only other mention of *Skuld* outside of *Voluspa* 20 and the *Gyfaginning* is in *Voluspa* 30, where she is mentioned in a list of *valkyrjur*, the *valkyrjur* as choosers of the slain, were often the collectors of debts owed to *Wóden* for a promised victory in battle.

If as it appears the ancient Heathens used the term *scyld* as a word for "sin," then what was the currency of exchange? The only logical answer would be *mægen*. If as the lore seems to indicate, one gained *mægen* by doing good deeds, then by inference they would lose *mægen* by doing evil deeds. One can further assume that if tribal laws could be changed by "setting a new precedent," so too could one's personal *orlæg*. This would most likely be done through an expenditure of *mægen*. Any deed one does will have a result influenced by *orlay* from the Well of *Wyrd*. The results of deeds or actions depend on two things; 1) the past actions of the thing or being doing the deed, and their personal *orlæg*, 2) the amount of *mægen* the thing or being has and is willing to expend to change the influence of *orlay* on an action currently being done. In order to set a new precedent, the thing or being must expend *mægen* to bring about change. A new precedent forever changes the results of all actions similar to the one being taken, at least until another new precedent is made. This is the way English Common Law works, so it is only reasonable to assume the spiritual parallels the physical.

The amount of *mægen* any sentient being has is determined by their deeds. Deeds helpful to the tribe earns one more *mægen*. Deeds harmful to one's community, a crime or sin, results in a loss of *mægen*, unless those harmed are recompensed for the harm done. Any harmful deed is a *scyld*, a "debt" or "obligation." The one committing the crime by harming another or stealing

their property is in debt to the harmed or obligated to correct the problem. Failure to do so will result in a loss of mægen by the one who committed the deed. Another form of sin was that expressed by Old English synn, our word "sin." Synn may have originally meant "inaction or stasis." A synn may have been a failure to take appropriate action or simply action that did not gain one mægen. This type of sin may have been represented by such Old English words as undæd and misdæd. Non-action may have interfered with the operation of the Well and the Tree making non-action a sin, synn. Regardless, this form of sin seemed secondary to that of scyld "debt for causing harm." One must be careful not to start thinking that scyld is an entirely negative term. The world scyld merely meant "debt" or "obligation" and often times that debt or obligation resulted in a reward. Béowulf for example created a scyld to slay Grendel when he made his boast. Upon paying that scyld he received rewards in the form of gifts from the king of Héorot, as this was a deed beneficial to the tribe. What the ancient Heathens thought harmful to the tribe and helpful to the tribe are clear. They did hold certain qualities to be virtues or in Saxon English thews.

What is the origin of the term 'word'? 'Word' in modern German is 'wurt', but in Old High German the word 'wurt' meant Wyrđ. To emphasise this point the Old Saxon for 'Wyrđ' was 'Wurd', phonetically 'similar to 'word'. The Norse word for Wyrđ is Orlog, which is literally 'primal layers' or 'primal word'. The last part '-log' is the same as the Latin for 'word': we still use the word 'log' for a book of record, or of records of any kind. So we, as Heathens, are safe to say - IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WYRD.

And so it must be that the Cosmic Mind existed before all things. The Cosmic Mind must have been there in order that Creation could take place. Even certain sections of modern science have turned full circle and ditched the idea of a mechanical universe in favour of the idea of the universe being more like a vast thought-pattern. So what is the Wyrđ and how are its workings?

To answer this question we can only scratch at the surface, for only a part of Wyrđ can be comprehended at a time. But we can get slight hints at the workings of Wyrđ. Orlog has its similarity to a Flemish-Dutch word 'oorlog' which means 'war'. I am led to believe that the word 'war' is an Indo-European root word meaning: 1. To will/choose; 2. To speak; 3. To wind or turn.

These words and meanings seem to have little link, and not much with Wyrđ, until we contemplate their word-association. 'To will' hints at the Will of Wyrđ - that which is, and that which is to be - evolution - for Wyrđ is ever evolving and changing. 'To speak', of course, gives us the 'word', which is touched upon in the first paragraph here. "To wind or turn" is associated with change, with evolution, and also 'wind' is to spiral. Scientists now consider the universe to be a vast spiral.

War is seeming conflict, but not so if we look-closely at it, for war can have very strange results. The same with Wyrđ, for on the surface the Cosmos appears to be a war of opposite - Light and Dark, Day and Night, Summer and Winter, Hot and Cold, Fire and Ice. But not really so, for because those are the totality of Wyrđ, they are in truth harmonious. 'It is this harmony of opposites which causes the eternal process of Birth-Life-Death to Rebirth, of Creation-Preservation-Destruction to re-Creation. This process we call 'evolution' and this is the ever upward-growing spiral. Wyrđ is in a constant state of flux and change.