



Skegg: The Norse Beard

Beards are seen as sacred and as a defining feature of the **Æsir** in ancient texts such as **Konungsbók Eddukvæða**. In addition, beards are likewise traditionally associated with men and masculinity throughout Norse history, as highlighted in **Íslendingasögur** (Icelandic Sagas), including the very significant **Njáls saga**, but also **Eyrbyggja saga** as well as **Færeyinga saga** and **Völsunga saga**. Beards are further even historically protected by law under **Jónsbók**, **Grágás** and **Guta Lag**.

Overall, beards are an essential and fundamental defining features of any Norðmaðr, Víkingr, Heathen, and ultimately, warrior's identity. The beard is the one characteristic of those who otherwise follow **Forn Siðr** (Old Ways). Beards are in fact the true expression of spirituality, masculinity, and what it means to be Heathen. Beards define the Heathen man.

Konungsbók Eddukvæða:

A distinct and defining feature of the **Æsir** (also known as the Norse gods) is their beard.

All Norse gods, but one, are described in traditional and sacred texts, as well as illustrated throughout Norse history, as sporting a beard: **Baldur** (Beauty), **Bragi** (Poetry, music, harp), **Forseti** (Justice), **Heimdallr** (Guardian of Ásgarðr), **Hermóðr** (Messenger of the Æsir), **Höðr** (Darkness, winter), **Hœnir** (Silence, Óðr), **Meili** (Son of Óðinn), **Móði** (Anger) and **Magni** (Strength), **Óðinn** (Ássinn), **Óðr** (Spirituality, poetry, passion, battle frenzy, and sexual ecstasy), **Pórr** (Battle, thunder, men), **Týr** (War, skies), **Ullr** (Archery), **Váli** (Revenge), **Vé** (Creation/wisdom), **Villi** (Creation/will), and **Víðarr** (Forest, revenge, silence).

A notable exception is **Loki** (Mischief, lies). **Loki** is the least favorite of all **Æsir**, and a Norse god typically associated with negative behavior as well as the dark side of humans. **Loki** is known to have wrecked havoc among the **Æsir**, even being responsible for the death of some of them, including **Baldur**.

Loki is also known for having turned himself into a mare in order to be impregnated by the stallion **Svaðilfari**, eventually giving birth to Sleipnir, **Óðinn's** 8-legged horse. An event greatly frowned upon in a culture that emphasizes gender polarization and strongly stigmatizes feminization of men.

From any perspective therefore, **Loki** is the very opposite of what a man should strive to be. **Loki** also happens to be the only Norse god without a beard. Therefore emphasizing the association between beard and manly virtues in Norse culture.

Numerous references in **Konungsbók Eddukvæða**, the most sacred text in Norse culture and religion, actually reinforce the association between beards and masculinity as well as virtue.

In **Atlakviða** (The Lay of Atli) specifically, a direct association is made between beards and warriors, with stanza 34 stating "Long-bearded, bold, the warriors entered". In stanza 11, another connection is made between beard and wisdom, reading "The wolf shall rule the Niflungs' heritage, O bearded sages".

From an **Æsir** and traditional Norse god perspective, a beard is therefore always associated with masculinity and virtue, including moral strength, manliness, valor, excellence, and worth, while the absence of a beard expresses feminization as well as depravity and immorality.

Íslendingasögur:

Possibly the most significant **Íslendingasaga** in Norse history and culture is **Njáls saga**. This Icelandic saga not only encompasses all the fundamental and essential Norse values that form the basis of **Forn Siðr**, but the saga has also established the foundation of Icelandic culture for the past millennium.

A main character in **Njáls saga** is **Gunnar Hámundarson**. A man known for his physical prowess, his masculine virtue, and of course, his beard. A man who encompasses so well what it means to be a Norðmaðr, that his name, Gunnar, is now one of the most common and revered names in Iceland and other Nordic countries.

Throughout this extensive text, in fact the longest and most developed Icelandic saga, countless references are made to not only associate beards with masculinity and virtue, but also to greatly insult and disparage any man who does not sport a beard:

Chapter 35

"There's not much to choose though between you two. Thou hast hangnails on every finger and Njal is beardless."

"But Thorvald, thy husband was not beardless and yet thou plottedst his death"

Chapter 41

"Who will avenge it? She asks, is it the beardless carle?"

Chapter 44

"Why doesn't he make them cart dung over his beard that he may be like other men? Let us call him "the beardless carle" but his sons we will call "dung-beardlings."

"Prithee why should dung beard boys reft of reason, dare to hammer."

"He the beardless carle shall listen while I lash him with abuse."

"Making mirth of dung beard boys, here I find a nickname for these noisome dung beard boys."

"Him, that churl, the beardless carle."

"Ye are nicknamed "dung-beardlings" but my husband "the beardless carle."

Chapter 90

"Away with you home ye dung-beardlings! Says Hallgerda "and so we will call you always from this day forth, but your father we will call "the beardless carle."

Chapter 122

"I think that thy father the beardless carle must have given it."

Chapter 144

"While his beard blushed red for shame?"

Other sagas still make various references to the importance of beards for a Norðmaðr. This includes **Eyrbyggja saga** (The Saga of the People of Eyri):

Chapter 3

"He was a big man and strong, fair to look on, and had a great beard. Therefore was he called Most-Beard, and he was the noblest man on the island."

Chapter 15

"Snorri was middling in height and somewhat slender, fair to look on, straight faced and light of hue, of yellow hair and red beard."

Chapter 32

"Ulfar wagged his beard and handed him the sword and shield."

As well as **Færeyinga saga** (The Saga of the Faroe Islands):

Chapter 3

"Thronð was a big man of growth, and red haired he was, and red bearded."

And in **Völsunga saga** (the Saga of the Völsungs):

Chapter 38

"When they heard he was dead for sooth, all the warriors wept, as was meet. Down beard and chin ran the tears of Dietrich's men."

From the perspective of **Íslendingasögur**, the ancient texts that provide us with such great insight into traditional viking life and thus **Forn Siðr**, a Norðmaðr is not considered worthy, or even a man, if he doesn't have a beard. As with the Æsir perspective, a beard is again always associated with masculinity as well as the value that form the foundation of **Forn Siðr**.

Lög:

The importance of beards as a defining feature of Norðmenn is also very well expressed in medieval Norse laws, including **Guta Lag** (The Law of the Gotlanders).

Section 20 (Concerning bald patches), clearly states that “a man's beard incurs fines as for other hair pulling.”

As a matter of fact, “apart from throwing ale in someone's face, insults included man handling a person riding or walking on the highway, making a minor attack on a man's beard or hair.”

In addition, Section 19/25-30 uses beards as a point of reference for an offense, “causing a scar on the face between hat and beard”, resulting in specific penalties, half a mark in silver or a mark in silver if the scar is very noticeable. This points yet again to the prevalence of beards in Norse culture.

The fact that specific offenses relating to beards were codified under the law, and that such offenses could also be deemed insults to a man, reinforces the importance of beards in Norse culture and history, and more specifically, as a foundation for **Forn Siðr**.

Forn Siðr:

Forn Siðr (Old Customs) is very different from Abrahamic religions or faiths. For us Norðmenn, Víkingar, and Heathens, **Forn Siðr** represents our truth, our ancestors, our culture, our identity, our knowledge, our masculinity, and our spirit. **Forn Siðr** is what makes us men and our own man, taking our own decisions, and taking our own responsibilities.

In fact, we do not pray or worship per say the Æsir, Ásynjur, Vanir, Jötnar, Aðrir, Kindir, or Kynja. This is because the Norse gods are seen as our ancestors, they are ideals we strive to achieve, they are ourselves, they are us. They are our religion. They are our soul. As such, we can only honor them, and be one with them, if we share similar characteristics, in virtues and behavior, but also in appearance and traditions, including by sporting a beard.

The beard is and has always been a defining feature of being Heathen, and a religious symbol of **Forn Siðr**.

In fact, the beard is a religious symbol of **Forn Siðr** or Heathenry as much as the kippot is a religious symbol of Judaism, or the beard and the pagri are a religious symbol of Sikhism.

