

**Indo-European Myths of the [WOMAN/WIFE – of the FIRE-Deity]:
the Etymology of Old Norse *Sigyn***

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The Old Norse theonym *Sigyn*, name of the wife of the god Loki, is often explained as a compound of *sig(r)*° ‘victory’ and **vin* ‘girl-friend’ (de Vries, s.v.; Simek, s.v.), showing the same development as e.g. *Björg^oyn* < *Björg^ovin* ‘Bergen (Norway)’ (Noreen 1923:165). **Loki**’s original character is unclear (cf. Liberman 1992:106ff), but Scandinavian folklore (cf. Dumézil 1959:51) and Loki’s depiction on a hearthstone (cf. Madsen 1990) seem to point to his role as a **fire-deity**.

The aim of this paper is to make the case for ON *Sigyn* as the reflex of an *-*unjō*- derivative built on PGm **sigā*- ‘trickling (liquid)’, on formal (A), semantic (B) and mythological (C) grounds.

(A) The expected outcome of **Sig^ovin* is **Sygvīn* (Noreen 1923:165). Some Old Norse compounded man’s names show a second element *vinr* ‘friend’ (PGm **weni-*, cf. de Vries, s.v.), but there are no attested motional counterparts with **yn* from **vin* (PGm **wenjō-*), nor is a motional simplex **vin* (vs. masc. *vinr*) attested. In fact, a second element *yn* (the outcome of *vin* ‘meadow’ < PGm **wenjō-*, cf. de Vries, s.v.) is exclusively attested in toponyms (cf. Jánsson 1951). The Old Norse theonym *Sigyn* should be analysed as a derivative built with the Proto-Germanic pertinentive suffix *-*unjō*- (cf. Meid 1967:119-22), which also occurs in the theonym *Fjörgyn* ‘Earth’ (PGm **fergunjō-*, cf. ON *fjor* ‘life’ < PGm **ferh^ua-*); the theonym *Sigyn* may be the *lautgesetzlich* outcome of **Sigunjō-*.

(B) Although a connection with ON *sig(r)* ‘victory’ is possible, an interpretation of *Sigyn* (**Sigunjō-*) as a derivative of PGm **sigā*- ‘a sinking, dripping, trickling (liquid)’ (whence ON *sig* ‘sinking’, ModNorw *sig* ‘trickling water’) would closely match the single act performed by *Sigyn* according to the myth: when Loki is imprisoned and tortured (*Gylf* 50), *Sigyn* “**holds a dish under the venomdrops** [*sc.* falling on Loki’s face]; whenever the dish becomes full, she goes and **pours away the venom**” (*heldr mundlaugu undir eitrdropa, en þá er full er munnlaugin, þá gengr hon ok slær út eitrinu*).

(C) The narrative of *Gylf* 50 has a parallel in the only mythical act ascribed to the wife of the Indian **fire-god** Agni, Svāhā (‘Oblation’): each time they had intercourse (*MBh* 3.214.7-15), she “**held the semen virile** in her hands” (*śukraṃ jagrāha pāninā*) and “**threw that semen** into a golden lake” (*prākṣipat kāñcane kuṇḍe śukraṃ*). Another parallel is the Roman legend of Tuccia (Dion. Hal. *Ant.* 2.69), priestess of the **fire-goddess** Vesta, who, having been accused of *incestus*, “**drew up water** from the river in a sieve, and carrying it as far as the Forum, **poured it out** at the feet of the pontiffs” (*ἀρυσάμενην ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ καινῶ κοσκίνῳ καὶ μέχρι τῆς ἀγορᾶς ἐνέγκασαν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἱεροφαντῶν ἐξερᾶσαι τὸ ὕδωρ*). These parallels point to the possibility of an IE myth in which a [WOMAN/WIFE] belonging to the [FIRE-DEITY] was said to [COLLECT] and [POUR] a [LIQUID] of some sort, and lend support to the etymology of Loki’s wife *Sigyn* as PGm **Sigunjō-* ‘the one of the trickling (*sc.* liquid)’.

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