

*PIE \*Heh<sub>3</sub>s (ash tree) is the source of Proto-Germanic \*askō “ash, ashes” in the sense of “that which is left behind after fire burns something”*

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2023---February 1<sup>st</sup> 2024  
updated about an hour later, this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

I have come to the conclusion that \*Heh<sub>3</sub>s the PIE root of “ash (tree)” meant primarily “pointed; to prick, to goad, to drive/to set in motion” and was an old Pre-PIE variant of PIE \*h<sub>2</sub>eḱs- “axis, axle” from “to drive, to set in motion” in turn from “to goad, to prick” from “pointed, sharp” (and PIE \*h<sub>2</sub>eǵ- “to drive” is another variant, and also originally derives from “to prick” from “pointed, sharp”). This is why the World-Tree/Axis Mundi in Norse myth was an ash tree named Yggdrasil. The Axis Mundi rotated the apparent cyclical movement of the constellations in the night-sky, and the Axis Mundi was located in the far north: it is the North Pole. And the Axis Mundi was believed to be set in motion/driven by a higher power, by a deity or a set of deities.

From PIE \*Heh<sub>3</sub>s derives Proto-Germanic \*askaz (which means “ash tree”), as is already known. But in Indo-European linguistics, it has long been a debate about what PIE root if any is the source of Proto-Germanic \*askō (the source of English “ash, ashes” in the sense described in this paragraph) meaning “ash/ashes (in the sense of that which is left behind after fire burns something)”. No one apparently has thought to derive it from PIE \*Heh<sub>3</sub>s, because they did not know the earlier meanings that give rise to the meaning “ash tree”, and which provide a source for the meaning of Proto-Germanic \*askō.

I have come to the conclusion that from PIE \*Heh<sub>3</sub>s also derives Proto-Germanic \*askō meaning “ash/ashes (in the sense of that which is left behind after fire burns something)” for two reasons at least:

1) because the ash tree was a tree so often used to make the drill part of the bow-drill: in a Norse myth, the first man is named Ask (known to be cognate to Old Norse Askr=“ash tree”) and the first woman is named Embla, which is already posited to likely have meant “vine” and referred to soft/softish vinewood into which the harder ashwood-drill drills to make by friction a bit of “coal” that is used to make fire. In Indo-European societies and Non-IE societies, an analogy is derived from the drilling of fire and sexual intercourse.

Vines were used as a flammable wood, where they were placed beneath a drill made of harder wood, resulting in fire.

So, that bit of ashy “coal” that is produced from drilling using a wooden bow-drill would have easily led to a word for “ash/ashes” (in the sense of that which is left behind after fire burns something).

2) words for ashes/ash often derive from bitter because ashes taste very bitter, and words for bitter in turn often derive from “sharp, pointed” (sometimes instead bitter derives from “to bite” as in English where “bitter” is cognate with “bite” as in “to bite”: and biting suggests pointed fangs stabbing into the skin).

3) the original meaning of PIE \*Heh<sub>3</sub>s was probably “birch” tree, a tree that has white bark: and words for birch trees are known to often shift to ash trees, and vice versa. So the main impetus could

have been naming “ash, ashes (that which is left behind by fire)” for the white color of the birch tree, a tree that was identified the Axis Pole of the world and with the stick of the bow-drill, which was probably often made of birch wood as well.

4) because the root-meaning of PIE \*Heh<sub>3</sub>s was “pointed; to prick, to goad”, and such meanings are known to give rise to the meanings “to drive”, “to propel”, “to throw” (both “pointed” and “to throw” led to the meaning “spear”: ash trees were a very go-to source of spear-wood and in Old English *æsc* meant “spear” as well as “ash tree”; and in Latin *ornus* means “mountain ash tree” and “spear/lance”, while *fraxinus* in Latin means “ash tree” and “javelin/spear made of ash wood”) “to cast”: and in many cases, words for ash/ashes (in the sense of that which is left behind after fire burns something) come from the earlier meanings “that which is blown around by a puff of air or a breeze or a wind-gust”: so the meaning “ash/ashes” could have come from “that which is thrown around, cast around, propelled about” by a puff of air, by a breeze, by a gust of wind. But notice that this root didn’t give rise to words meaning “dust”, “powder” and “chaff”: so reason 3 cannot be the sole reason, but it could have been an additional impetus, but not the primary impetus, which would be either reason 1 or reason 2 described above.

In a Norse myth, the three Norns cover the Yggdrasil World-Tree with water from their well under the tree, as well as covering it with *Aur*, which in the myth is a white “clay”, a white “mud” which I think is actually white ash left over from the burning of the Titans (the Titans were turned to ash after being burnt by the thunderbolts of Zeus in one version) and from the burning of former worlds/former universes. I agree with the classical scholar Jane Harrison (1850–1828) that Ancient Greek *Τιτᾶν* (Titan) derives from *τίτᾶνος τέτᾶνος* meaning “a kind of white earth (probably gypsum); chalk; lime”. I conclude that they used the word *Aur* in the Norse myth because the idea was not that the ashes of the former world were applied directly unmixed, but instead that the white clay/white mud was composed of that ash mixed with a cosmic water: Old Norse *Aur* derives from Proto-Germanic \**auraz* meaning “wet sand, wet earth; mud” and “liquid, water, sea”: the older meanings of \**auraz* are the meanings without soil, only water.

A mythologist whom I exchange mythology information with often since 2023 Christopher Johnsen thinks that the “white clay/white mud” of this Norse myth referred to some white paste that he says was made from the white sticky berries of the mistletoe plant; but though I agree that the white clay/white mud of Norse myth could have been associated with the mistletoe, I told him as I tell my readers here that I do not think that mistletoe was the primary and real reference at all, instead I think the white mud/white clay is what I describe above: the ashes of the Titans and of former worlds, burned as this world too is figuratively believed to someday burn away, and from those ashes a new tree (a new universe) will arise.

I agree with Christopher Johnsen’s suggestion that the Birch tree may have been the original tree believed to be the Axis Mundi in Norse culture at least; the ash tree and birch tree are very similar: and words for “birch” and “ash tree” often shift in meaning from one tree to another: but the birch actually has white bark, so the birch tree fits better in that aspect at least.

A.G., 2023 to February 1<sup>st</sup> 2024