

categories of being exist in a realm which is impossible to “diagram” in models making use of two or even three dimensions. Material relating to the Gothic tradition should be compared to that of the other (especially the Norse) Germanic terminologies in order to understand the Gothic mind thoroughly. A convenient repretation of the Norse material can be found in *Runelore* by Thorsson (Weiser, 1987, pp. 167-173)

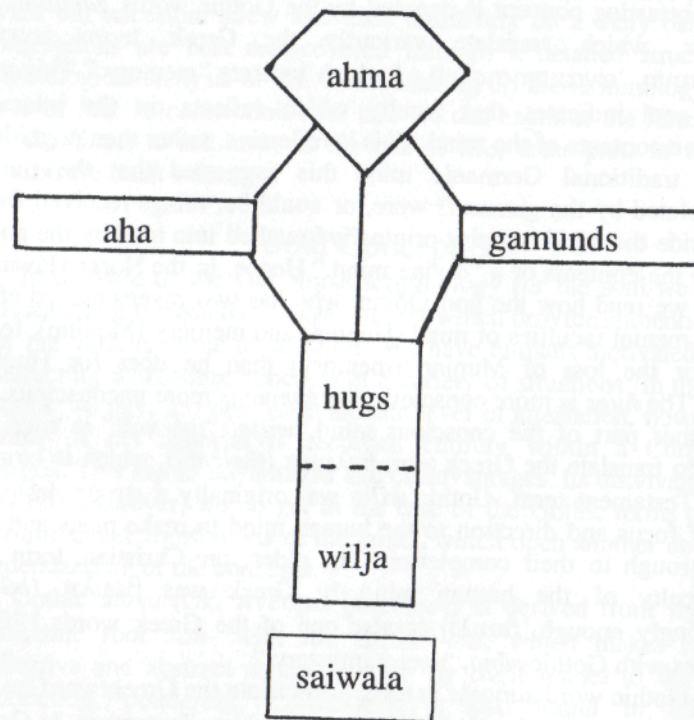


Figure 3.1: The Configuration of the Gothic Soul

Funerary Customs

In the absence of autochthonous texts one of the ways to discover something of the indigenous ideas about the soul is to analyze the various ways in which the bodies of the dead were treated. From early on it appears that the Goths practiced a mixture of inhumation (burial)

and cremation (burning) the bodies of the dead. In the case of cremation, the ashes were usually subsequently buried in urns. It also appears, however, that the Goths gave up the practice of cremation fairly early on. (Helm, pp. 10-11)

Both inhumation and cremation aim to achieve similar goals in the Germanic culture. Inhumation returns the body to the earthly, or chthonic realm, through the slow decomposition of the body in Mother Earth. While cremation effects an immediate and dramatic decomposition of the elements of the body by fire and returns it to Father Sky. In general cremation was preferred by warriors and kings of the second and first functions in Indo-European times. But in either case grave mounds could be erected as memorials to the dead ancestor.

In ancient times graves most typically had what are called “grave goods” deposited in them. These are objects, practical and symbolic, which are placed in the grave so that the departed will have use of them in the next world. Most typically, warriors would have weapons, etc. However, in the case of the Goths it has been noticed that their inhumation graves have no weapons as grave goods. (Helm p. 12ff.) On the other hand, the Vandals, a related East Germanic tribe did have weapons as grave goods. It appears that the Goths, although often a warlike people in the earthly world, emphasized the idea of the warriors’ paradise less than other East Germanic peoples did.

Ammatas Procopius (*De bello Vandalico* I,21) reports that there was still the practice of cremation in special circumstances among the Goths. The Eruli (*De bello Goth.* II, 14) are said to kill and burn the sick and old. Sidionius Apollinaris (*Epist.* 3,3 [470]) says that the Visigoths burned their dead in their wagons after the battle of Clermont against Ecdicius.

Gothic history provides several examples of famous funerals given to various well-known individuals which we can examine for more information.

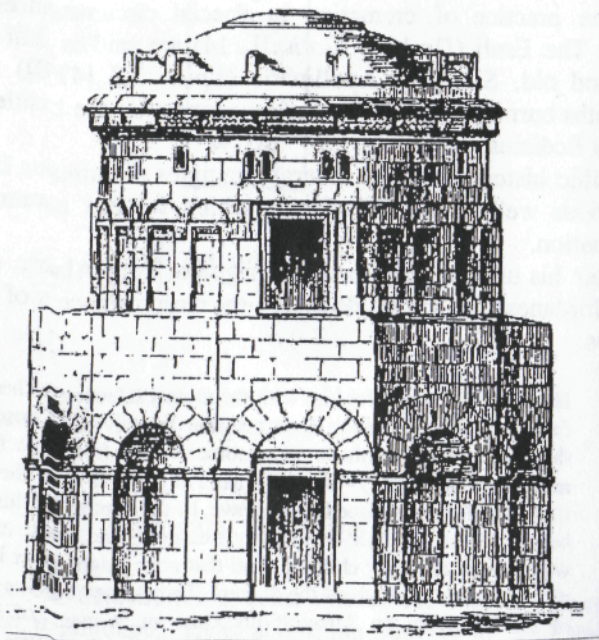
After his untimely death, the Visigothic king Alaric was buried in Italy. Jordanes (XXX.158) describes the circumstances of his funeral as follows:

His people mourned for him with the utmost affection. Then turning from its course the river Busentus near the city of Consentia--for this stream flows with its wholesome waters from the foot of a mountain near that city--they led a band of captives into the midst of its bed to dig out a place for his grave. In the depths of this pit they buried Alaric, together with many treasures, and then turned the waters back into their channel. And that none might ever know the place, they put to death all the diggers. They bestowed the kingdom of the Visigoths on Athavulf his kinsman, a man of imposing beauty and great spirit; for though not tall of stature, he was distinguished for beauty of face and form

We will discuss the idea of the treasure of Alaric in much more detail in chapter 4.

The burial of Attila is also reported by Jordanes (XLIX.256ff.) in some detail. It seems to have many Gothic characteristics, which is only fitting as much of his army was actually made up of Goths and other East Germanic tribesmen.

In the most traditional circumstances the Goths would be expected to raise an earthen mound over the body and funerary goods of the dead. One of the most extraordinary structures of the ancient world is the tomb of Theodoric the Great in Ravenna. This tomb, the structural mysteries of which still await a fuller analysis, is an architectural version of the same idea conveyed by the ancient grave-mound. As the historical circumstances of the death of Theodoric and the subsequent quick disappearance of his body from the tomb show, the tomb was never able to be used in the manner for which it was obviously designed. This purpose was an elaborate form of ancestor worship. The tomb held the body in a sarcophagus in the lower level of the structure, and above this was a level containing a space, with no apparent access from the inside in ancient times, in which rites of ancestor worship were to be performed by the descendants of Theodoric the Great. This perfectly reflects the ancient practice of the Germanic peoples in which rites were held either in front of, or on top of, earthen grave mounds.



Tomb of Theodoric the Great in Ravenna, Italy

As a side note it should be perhaps be pointed out that the killing of "slaves" at the burial of Attila and Alaric as reported by Jordanes was probably not motivated by the prevention of such slaves from betraying the site of the burial. It is rather more likely that this was a reflection of the old practice of sacrificing slaves and prisoners of war as a part of the funerary rite in pagan times. This practice is more elaborately described in the *Travel Report of Ibn Fadlan* (Rûna-Raven, 1998, pp. 8-11).

Spirits and Demons

In addition to humans, there is also a variety of beings which are thought to inhabit the world alongside living humans. Some of these are malevolent, or dangerous to humans, while others are more neutral. Perhaps the most famous example of demonic entities being mentioned in Gothic history occurs in Jordanes' history (XXIV, 121ff.) where he tells how the Gothic king Filimer chased sorceresses (Lat. *magas mulieres*) into the wilderness. The Latinized Gothic word for these sorceresses is given as *haljarunae*, which reflects the purely Gothic word **haljarunos*. In the wilderness areas these exiled sorceresses are said to have had intercourse with "unclean spirits" who were lost in that forested region. The phrase "unclean spirits" certainly seems influenced by Christian terminology. It is further said that from this admixture the Huns were produced. This legend reflects the fact that the Huns came from beyond the forests to the east, and furthermore may explain that the Huns who did actually invade Europe were to some extent "Gothicized" ethnically and culturally.

The most common word for a "demon" in the Gothic Bible is *unhulpo*, a grammatically feminine word, which literally means "unfriendly one(s)". Although *unhulpo* is grammatically feminine, it is used as a masculine one time (Mat. 9.33). This translates both Greek *δαιμόνιον* and *δαίμωνιον*. The latter term originally referred to a collective body of demons. Another term for "demon" is the grammatically neuter *skohsl* = *δαίμων*. Etymologically *skohsl* means "wood-spirit" and was originally a plural form which came to be used as a singular.

It should be noted that the many biblical references to "demonic possession" seems to try the patience of the Gothic tongue. The Semites had the basic theory that diseases and maladies of all kinds (from leprosy to blindness) were caused by possession by demonic spirits. On the other hand the Germanic peoples generally believed that diseases, although they could be caused "magically" by a sorcerer, were generally and for the most part to be explained by things such as small worms, many of which were too small to be seen by the human eye. Because of this discomfort with the many "casting out of unclean

spirits" found in the New Testament, Ulfilas often resorted to the Greek-derived term *daimonareis*.

Ancestral Spirits

As strongly implied by the funerary customs of the ancient Goths, they practiced a form of ancestor worship. This was quite common among all the Indo-European peoples. The Germanic peoples often seem to have envisioned the gods as the divine progenitors of mankind, and most directly of certain ruling families, or royal dynasties.

Among the Goths there was a tradition surrounding a certain Gauts, who was both a divine hero from whom the Goths were descended, and to whose name the name of the Goths appears to have been linked. The etymon, or word element, **gut-* in Proto-Germanic is linked to *gaut-* by means of ablaut variation, an expected linguistic phenomenon in Germanic. Gauts is at the head of the Amali royal house to which Theodoric the Great belonged. The manuscript of Jordanes' history has the spelling as Gapt, but this is likely to have been a scribal error. Gauts is etymologically identical to ON *Gautr* and OE *Geat*, which figures prominently in the story of Beowulf.

In a famous passage in the history of the Goths by Jordanes (XII 78), he reports, following a victory of the Goths over the Romans:

And because of the great victory they had won in this region, they thereafter called their leaders, by whose good fortune they seemed to have conquered, not mere men, but demigods, that is *Ansis*. Their genealogy I shall run through briefly, telling the lineage of each and the beginning and the end of this line.

This is one of the few times where Jordanes provides an original Gothic word, where he has to explain what he means in Latin. The Goths worshipped and gave thanks to what he calls in Latin *semidei*, "demigods." These are clearly ancestral spirits, the spirits of dead ancestors which make up an important part of the ancient religion of the Goths. The Gothic term *ansis*, is a later form of the more ancient spelling **anseis*. This word is derived from the name of the ancient ancestral gods of sovereignty and war. In Old Norse these were called the *Æsir* (sg. *Áss*), both are descended from the Proto-Germanic word **ansuz*, ancestral sovereign god. (In the older rune-row this is the name of the fourth rune, the *a-stave*, but Ulfilas did not use a variant of this for his Gothic letter *𐌱*, no doubt due to its overtly pagan religious meaning.

The *anseis* are original and true gods of the Germanic and hence Gothic peoples. Some of the Gothic families thought of themselves as being descended directly from these *anseis*, but it would be a mistake to limit the importance of these entities to mere ancestral spirits. In a similar way the Vandals had their founding hero Vandill.

Closely connected to the idea of ancestor worship is the need for blood vengeance for the deaths of relatives or ancestors. Such acts of blood vengeance are very common in Gothic legend and history. (Helm pp. 20-21)

Some examples of this are when Sarus and Ammius avenge their sister Sunhilda on Ermenric (Jor. XXIV, 129), or when Gudrun/Hildico avenges her brothers on Attila. Theodoric the Great, despite being raised at the court of Byzantium was thoroughly Gothic in his morality and temperament. He avenges one relative on Rekitach, a son of Theodoric Strabo, and another relative on Odovacar, whom he is said to have killed with his own hand with the words: "I will do to you what you did to my people."

In the world the Old Norse sagas we discover more about the motivation and underlying ideology behind the idea of blood vengeance in the Germanic world. It was thought that if a relative was killed, his honor was taken from the tribe or clan. In order to restore this honor to the clan, and allow it — as a virtually concrete substance — to be reborn in to a yet-to-be-born member of the clan, a descendent, such vengeance had to take place. In Old Norse the term for avenging someone is *hefna*, which is etymologically related to our word "heave." Soul, luck, or honor of the individual had to be heaved up, lifted back into the clan of its origin. This ideology is what was at the foundation of this moral and legal imperative in the Germanic world.

Gods and Goddesses

From the earliest times the Goths worshipped gods and goddesses in human form, just as the Greeks and Romans did. They were polytheistic, which meant that they had a variety of value centers in their complex culture. The previously mentioned *anseis* were never given up, but were allowed to "devolve" into more ancestral demigods in Christian times. In the Old Norse terminology the *Æsir* were contrasted with the *Vanir*. The *Æsir* were gods of sovereignty, law, magic and war. The *Vanir* were more gods and goddesses of the earth, of agriculture, of material well-being and riches. Although we have not myth or explanation of the contrast between the *Æsir* and the *Vanir* in Gothic lore, some scholars have been moved to indicate that the Goths were heavily involved in the worship of the *Vanir* deities. Helm sees this as being likely on ethnographic as well as geographical grounds. (1937, p. 34) On the other hand, a great deal of other data points to a continuing cult of the *anseis*, which was kept alive as ancestor worship, but which had its roots in the old religion. The Gothic kings of pagan and Christian times would have ruled on the theoretical basis of their connection to the sacred and royal bloodline— in both instances back to the true Gothic gods— the *anseis*. One Gothic name, *Ansila*, which is

attested from the 4th century literally means "the little god," or more clearly "the descendent of god."

Besides the word for a god derived from PGmc. **ansuz*, the Goths also used the old Germanic term *gub*, which was commonly used to translate Greek θεός, "god." Originally this term grammatically a neuter, which is remains in the compound *galiuga-gub*, "idol," in 1 Corinthians 10.19, however, elsewhere, when used to indicate the Christian god, it is grammatically masculine.

Individual Gods

One of the oldest questions in the history of Gothic pagan theology has been whether or not the god Wodan was known to them. The name is not recorded in the sources. If it were, it would have the form *Wodans. This has disturbed many historians of religion in the past who regarded the Goths as the most archaic of the Germanic peoples and at the same time want to see the theology of Viking Age Scandinavia as essentially unchanged from Proto-Germanic times. First of all, the Goths are merely the first Germanic group to be widely attested in their own literary language. This does not make them any more archaic than any other Germanic group. Second, the Germanic theological structure, like all Indo-European pagan structures is not organized according to the names of the gods, but rather according to their functions, according to their characteristic actions.

Helm and other scholars interpret the fact that Wodans is not recorded among the Goths to mean that that god (Wōðanaz/Óðinn) was not an original Germanic god, but rather "migrated" to the north after the Goths had left. This interpretation is unnecessary. The idea of the divine pairing of Mars:Mercury = Tiwaz:Wōðanaz, which is recorded and attested by outside observers from before the Gothic migration from the north, clearly shows that a god (by whatever name) filled the function which Óðinn assumes in the Icelandic sources. Another East Germanic tribe, the Vandals, who also migrated from the north were by contrast historically connected to Wodan. So if we look at the gods of the Goths from a *functional* perspective, perhaps a clearer picture will emerge.

Gauts

This god or ancestor, one of the *anseis*, can be taken to be the origin of the Gothic tribe, or at least of the Ostrogoths. As we have already pointed out Go. Gauts is identical with ON Gautr, which is in fact one of the many *heiti*, or bynames of the Norse god Óðinn. In ON the name seems to have something to do with being a progenitor. This is very much in keeping with Óðinn's general function as the All-Father (ON Alföör or Alfaðir). Like Gauts, Woden appears at the head of the

Anglo-Saxon genealogies of kings. Woden and Óðinn are etymologically identical forms: the initial v- sound regularly drops off in words when it comes before a stressed vowel. This is also why we have ON Urðr, "fate," whereas the same word appears as (OHG) *wurd* or (OE) *wyrd*. Another instance which firmly connects this Gauts with the function shared by Óðinn is found in the Norse runic tradition, where we find a kenning for the æ-rune (*áss*, god) the equation : *áss er aldingautr* (Old Icelandic Rune Poem, stanza 4). The phrase translates "The Ase (= Óðinn) is the ancient father." Therefore it can be said that Gauts and Wodan most likely serve some of the the same or similar functions in the respective pantheons of the Goths and North Germanic peoples.

*Teiws

As is well-known, earlier Greek and Roman commentators established a system of name-substitutions for the gods and goddesses of other peoples. In the case of the Romans this is called the *interpretatio Romana*. Many subsequent writers in Latin adopted the same practice. In this system Germanic Wōðanaz/Óðinn was called Mercurius (Mercury) and Tiwaz/Týr was called Mars, or in Greek Ἀρης (Arēs). In Gothic the name of this god has been reconstructed as *Teiws. But how did the Roman god of war, Mars, come to be equated with the Germanic god of law and justice, Tiwaz? This came about because for the ancient Germanic peoples all acts of war, or any conflict of any kind, including games of chance, were conceived of as events adjudicated by the gods or by the forces of nature over which the gods may be able to exert some control. In this context Tacitus reports in the *Histories* (XIII, 57) that the Hermunduri sanctified those killed in battle (as virtual human sacrifices) to Mars and Mercury (i.e. Tiwaz and Wōðanaz).

Jordanes (V, 41) has the following to say about the god Mars:

Now Mars has always been worshipped by the Goths with cruel rites, and captives were slain as his victims. They thought that he who is the lord of war ought to be appeased by the shedding of human blood. To him they devoted the first share of the spoil, and in his honor arms stripped from the foe were suspended from trees. And they had more than all other races a deep spirit of religion, since the worship of this god seemed to be really bestowed upon their ancestor.

This passage requires a number of additional comments. Clearly the passage refers to the same god as known among the Germanic peoples as Tiwaz. He and Mercury (Wōðanaz) were the gods who received bloody human sacrifice. Other evidence seems to show that the god of

war was not so much appeased by the sacrifice of captives taken in war as he was merely receiving what had already been promised him before the battle. Archeological evidence in the north shows that the early Germanic peoples sacrificed the equipment and weapons of the defeated army (often throwing them into sacred lakes or bogs after rendering them useless by breaking or bending them), but other reports also tell of them being hung in trees, although this was probably a ritual technology more reserved to Wōðanaz/Mercury. Again Jordanes returns to the theme of the gods being the ultimate ancestors of the Goths.

The Gothic letter-name recorded as *tyz*, reconstructed by most scholars as **teiwz*, the Gothic form of the old rune-name **tīwaz*, seems to reflect an old (pre-6th century) linguistic form. This can be said because after that time Gothic lost its *-s* nominative masculine singular ending (Helm 1937, p. 38)

The influence of Greek in the Gothic world is, of course, profound. This is seen in the fact that the Gothic weekday name for Tuesday (ON Týsdagr) is **Areinsdags*, "day of Arēs." In the Bavarian dialect this shows up as *erintac*, which among other things, is an indication of the missionary activity of the Goths outside the Gothic realms during the Migration Age.

*Fairguneis

Helm also speculates about the presence of a thunder god who would have had the name Fairguneis, which would correspond to the Norse form Fjörgynn. This name etymologically is connected to a word for the oak, and would have translated "oak-god." This name would then have been related to the weapon the god carried (an oak club, perhaps).

*Iggws

Scant but compelling evidence points toward the worship of a god known from common Germanic times as Ingwaz, the earth-god. Ingwaz has been identified as a Vanic deity in the north, and his name is linked with that of Freyr, whose name is really a title, "the Lord." The combination Yngvi-Freyr is known in Sweden, and Yng- may have indeed been the root of the true name of the god who went by the title the Lord (Freyr) in the north. In the Gothic realms there is evidence for the presence of this god, and further evidence that he was consciously syncretized with the new Christian cult. Ingwaz was the older rune-name for the /ng/ sound. As we see with the Gothic writing system, the /gn/ sound is spelled with a double /g/ in imitation of the Greek orthography. However, Ulfilas used the name **iggws* for the Greek letter X (*chi*), which was used almost exclusively in Gothic for writing the name of Christ. Ulfilas has gone well out of his way to use the name **iggws* and to attach it to a letter which is primarily a label for the name of the hero of the new religion.

From what we have been able to discover, we can see that the pagan Gothic pantheon was little different from the other Germanic pagan pantheons. Functionally all the major features are in place. There is a sovereign ancestral god, a god of justice and war, one of thunder and an earth-god to whom the culture was so attached, he even iconically survived well into Christian times— and even among the churchmen.

Cosmology

As no texts of an authentic pagan type survive in Gothic, the exact cosmological map believed in by the Goths remains a matter of some conjecture. However, it seems that the major features of Germanic cosmology were set in place in common Germanic times. Nothing in the Gothic material, which mainly consists of isolated words or concepts, contradicts the cosmic map as we can infer it from Norse sources, for example.

The Germanic peoples conceived of the realm of man being in the middle of the cosmos, that there was a divine realm above and a dark and misty world below. In all directions there were different qualities of being, the further out one goes on a horizontal plane. As with the Celts, the Germanic peoples often conceived of these various levels as planes, fields, or meadows.

As far as the vertical axis is concerned, surviving Gothic terminology confirms the idea that there was a higher, lower and middle realm, in the last of which humans live and thrive.

Below is the realm of the dead. In Gothic this is called *halja*, which is used to translate the Greek ἄδης (*hadēs*). This is thought to be a misty world, but not a place of punishment. When Ulfilas is called upon to designate hell as a fiery place of punishment he feels compelled to use the foreign word *gaiainna* (< Gk. γέεννα < Heb. *gehenna*) When translating the Greek ἀβυσσος (abyss) Gothic *afgrundīþa*, "the deep" is used with no apparent religious connotations, or at least no negative ones.

Above is a paradise, Gothic *waggs*, "meadow." this terminology is shared by other Germanic languages, for example Old Norse Fólkvangr, "field of the people or army," which is the abode of the goddess Freyja, Old Saxon *godes-wang*, "the meadow of god" and *heban-wang*, "the heavenly meadow" (*Heliand* 748, 2791, 5969), and Old English *neorxnawang*— a pleasant and friendly field of the dead. This idea may also be reflected in the Gothic letter name for the w-sound (Υ), which could either be derived from the old common Germanic name, **wunjō*, meaning "joy, pleasure," or it could be the Gothic word *winja*, meaning "meadow."

In the middle of the world is the place where humans live. In Gothic the word *midjungards* (Gk. οἰκουμένη) survives, meaning "the

inhabited world, the world of men, etc." This Gothic word answers so perfectly to ON *miðgarðr*, OE *middangeard*, OS *middelgard*, and OHG *mittilgart*, that there can be no doubt that both the form of the word and the concept are elements inherited from common Germanic times.

As with so much else in the Gothic world the cosmology remains something which we can not be entirely sure about. However, in its broad outlines we can be sure that it reflected the general polar axis model of an upper and lower realm connected through the middle by a place inhabited by humanity, the center of the world.

Cultic Forms

Now that we have looked at the nature of the human being, the idealized divine forms and the structure of the world according to the pagan Goths, we next want to delve into the technologies used by them in order to communicate with the higher realms of the ideal (divine) world, as well as forge solidarity and organization in this world. This latter motivation was extremely important to the ancient Goths due to the fact that they were so mobile that it was not settled landscapes, but rather social order and cohesion which gave them their sense of identity and stability in the world.

There are certain technical features of cultic activity, such as the tools or implements used, the timing of the rituals, the location of the ritual, the personalities of the active agents in the ritual, as well as the general symbolic acts performed. All of the factors combined give shape to a ritual or cultic technology the principal purpose of which is to organize and focus the spiritual life of the folk and to communicate, both actively and passively with a higher level of spiritual organization (e.g. the gods). The main act of this sort of communication is the sacrifice, i.e. the sending of gifts to the gods in exchange for what they have already given the folk or what they are bound to give them.

Timing

Religious ceremonies or rituals are usually done at specific times. These may be on the occasion of some special event, such as victory in battle, or more usually at certain times determined more or less by natural or celestial events. For example, the popular assembly of the Goths is reported always to begin at dawn. (Apolinaris Sidonius *Carmina* VII, 452ff.) The *Lex Visigothorum Recessvindana* (VI. 2, 3) prohibits sacrificing at night to "demons." It is likely that this prohibition refers to the worship of the pagan gods, who might have on occasion originally been worshipped at night, or it may be an example of the old religion being forced into darkness and hiding.

Apparently the ancient Goths made it a part of their religious practice to perform certain rituals at the time of the full moon. This

idea is obliquely referred to in Ulfilas' translation of the Bible. In Colossians 2.16 there is reference to the observation of the new moon (a Jewish religious practice), but this apparently made no sense to Ulfilas, and he replaces the idea of the new moon with one relating to the full moon (Go. *fullipe*).

There was probably a springtime ritual circuit made by an image of a deity in a wagon pulled by animals. This appears to be the kind of rite we find reported by Tacitus (*Germania* ch. 40) concerning the goddess Nerthus, and one we hear of later in Sweden in which the image of the god Freyr is similarly caused to go about on a springtime circuit. The purpose is to bring the powerful organic blessings of the gods or goddess to the land and animals. The function of these rituals, added to the fact that in the two historical examples of a similar practice the case could be made that they are in celebration of Vanic deities further leads some scholars to point to the Vanic character of much of the Gothic cult. (Helm, 1937, pp. 59-60)

Sozomenos in his *Historia ecclesiastica* (VI, 37) reports that Athanaric sent just such a huge wagon out and commanded that any Christian who would not worship it should be put to death. This occurred in the year 348. Sozomenos tries to make it sound like Athanaric sent the wagon out with the expressed purpose of discovering Christians, when it was probably just a part of an annual ritual. The fact that the Christians would not worship the image of their community simply showed the king that he had subjects who were disloyal to the folk-group and not a part of the popular solidarity. In modern terms the refusal of the Christians was as much a "political" crime as it was a "religious" one.

In the religious technical terminology of the Goths a periodic festival, one which occurs at regular intervals of time, is called a *dulps* "festival," while the verb *dulpjan* means "to celebrate a festival."

We know that the pagan Goths knew Yule and practiced it. The fragmentary Gothic calendar calls November *fruma Jiuleis*, i.e. the month before Yule. Also in the in the 10th century in Byzantium in December there occurred a festival which they still called the "Gothicum." This was the remnant of the old Gothic Yule-tide or Christmas celebration.

Priests

In *De bello Gallico* (VI.21) Caesar makes the famous statement that the Germans do not have "druids" (*nam neque druides habent*). This has been interpreted as meaning that they had no professional separate class of society which has a purely religious function, as the druids were in the Celtic world. The ancient Germanic peoples certainly had priests of various kinds as the linguistic data shows and subsequent commentators and historians such as Tacitus describe priestly functions.

Gothic terminology provides several words for "priest," all of which are derived from the pagan terminology. Most frequently used is *gudja* which translates Greek ἱερεὺς (*hiereus*). This is an ancient Germanic term, and is even found in one early fifth century runic inscription. This is the stone of Nordhuglo (Krause 1966, pp. 146-147) discovered in western Norway. The text of this stone reads:

M<XNMIƷFN†XF†MIYIH///

ekgudjaungandirih///

ek gudja ungandir ih ///

I (am) the priest, unaffected by sorcery *ih* ///

Here we have an ancient term for "priest," etymologically linked to the word for "god," PGmc. *gud*, "god." *Gudja* becomes *goði* in Old Norse. Additionally, this inscription shows a term for magic or sorcery, *gandir*, ON *gandr*, the negative *un-* prefix probably indicates that the priest is immune to the effects of sorcery or knows how to counteract it. The symbol /// indicates that the stone is broken off at that point.

Two other terms for "priest" occur in the gospel of John. One is *weiha*, priest. It comes up in the phrase *auhumists weiha*, "high(est) priest" (John 18.13) and translates the Greek term ἄρχιερεὺς (*archiereus*). Originally the term *weiha*, derived from PGmc. *wihaz*, holy, inviolate, sacred" must have indicated the priestly function of making objects, space, time, etc., separate from the mundane or profane world. This originally contrasted with another word for "holy," *hailagaz*. The latter term indicated something that was holy due to its being filled with divine power. This dichotomy of the holy has been much discussed in Germanic culture. For a summary of this question, see "The Holy," by Thorsson printed in *Green Rûna* (Rûna-Raven, 1996). Most Germanic languages did not preserve both terms for the holy equally. As a result of the Christianization process the nomenclature of the holy was simplified, as was the case for most religious concepts, and one or the other of the terms fell into disuse.

The third term for a priest which seems derived from pagan nomenclature is *gudblostreis*, which means "divine sacrificer" and is used to translate Greek θεοσεβης (*theosebēs*), "worshipper of God" (J. 9.31). The Gothic word is a compound made up of the well known element *gud-*, "god," and *blostreis*, "sacrificer." The latter element is related to Old Norse *blót*, "sacrifice."

It is likely that Ulfilas is not shy about using pagan terminology to describe the priestly functions of the Jews in the Bible because the historical and cultural contrast Jews : Christians was used by early churchmen to draw a distinction between indigenous pagans and Christians. Therefore old pagan terminology could be used to describe the activities of the Jews while a newer, more internationalist

terminology was used to describe Christian activities and functions. This attitude perhaps also often led the Jews into friendly relations with pagans, Arians and other non-Roman Catholic and non-Orthodox peoples.

Helm (1937, p. 48) identified the Naharvali as an East Germanic tribe and cites the report of Tacitus (*Germania* ch. 43) that the priests of the twin-gods, the Alci, regularly don the dress of a woman in order to carry out their rites. Another example of the peculiar dress of the Gothic priesthood arises when we analyze the appellation given to the Gothic priests who are called the *pillaeti*, which means those "wearing a *pilleus*." A *pilleus* is a felt cap made to fit close to the head like half an egg. (Helm 1937, pp. 48-49) This may have arisen as a result of a confusion with Getae, an Iranian tribe, or it may have been a fashion taken over by the Goths from Iranian Getae.

As concerns the organization of the Gothic priesthood, it is obvious that it is not very hierarchical. Every social unit at every level had its own independent person functioning in priestly role—the family, clan, tribe, and nation. The king seems to have been the priest for the whole nation. This is further enforced by Eunapius (*Fragm.* 55) who reports that every φυλη, "clan" brought its own priests and sacred objects with them north of the Danube when they crossed it around 376. Among the Burgundians Ammianus Marcellinus (28, 5, 14) reports that the most powerful of their priests is called Sinistus "the oldest." Ulfilas uses the title *sinista* for πρυσβυτερος (*prysbyteros*). So it would seem that the Arian church organization was more informal and looser than the Roman Church, following the lead of the pagan Gothic culture. Eunapius also mentions priestesses ἱερεϊας (*hierēias*)—but they were probably actually *seeresses*, according to Helm (1937, p. 51).

Pagan Ritual Elements

No document exists which describes what a Gothic pagan ceremony or ritual would have looked like. There are, however, copious references to various ritual features in historical descriptions, and linguistic data also give us a great deal of insight into the rituals of the pagan Goths and the theories which lay behind them.

Sacrifice

The usual words for "sacrifice" with Ulfilas are *saljan* or *gasaljan* which indicate the idea "to bring forth, transfer." This fits well with the basic theoretical idea that the process of "sacrificing" was one of making something sacred, giving it over to the world of the gods. The sacrificial object or victim is made separate and inviolate, i.e. *weihs* and made holy *hailags*. *Hailags* seems to have been avoided by Ulfilas, perhaps because of its pagan connotations. (Helm 1937, p. 53; 57)

Other terms are revealing about the background of pagan Gothic ritual. The word *sauþs* means "sacrifice, offering" and translated the Greek *θύσια* (*thysia*). Etymologically it means "the boiling (of meat)," and is derived from the verb meaning "to boil." This word can be compared to the Old Norse word for "sheep," *sauðr*. Another Gothic word frequently used to translate Greek *θύσια* is *hunsl*. This is a widely attested word in Germanic for "sacrifice." We also find Old English *hūsel*, "the eucharist" and Old Norse *húsl*: "housel." Although this is attested almost entirely only in a Christian context, the word is Germanic and not borrowed from Greek or Latin. Its etymology is also controversial. The fact that it occurs as a Gothic verb, *hunsljan*, "to sacrifice," (Gk. *σπενδειν*) and in a compound Gothic *hunslastap̃s*, "place of sacrifice, altar" makes it likely that it was a Gothic word which was borrowed into the other languages at an early date. It probably originally referred to the substance of the sacrificial meal, i.e. the meat of the victim which was consumed by the folk. This was then naturally and easily transferred to the "Corpus Domini." Ulfilas also uses *blotan* in a pure Christian sense of "worship" (Helm 1937, p 55-6) However, the term is also one that was inherited from pre-Christian religious terminology, its cognate is found in Old Norse *blóta*, "to worship (with sacrifice)," Old English *blōtan*, "to sacrifice" and Old High German *blozan*, "to worship." The plain Germanic verb "to give" and the noun derived from it, Gothic *giba*, "gift, giving" was also used in a sacred or holy context to mean "sacrifice." This noun seems to have been the name of the Gothic *g*-letter.

Another conspicuous element of Gothic religious ritual is the circumambulation of a divine image, which nevertheless was not practiced in all cults. This circling of a central symbolic object was also a part of funerary rites with the mourners doing this on horseback around the burial mound (Jordanes II, 257) This was probably an Indo-European feature from the steppe culture. It has been noted that the Huns also did this, but in the Germanic rites this was done in a solemn way, whereas among the Huns it was a wild affair. That this mode of mourning was a part of the most ancient Germanic funerary ritual among the heroic class is evidenced by the final passage in the Old English *Beowulf* where we find a detailed description of the ceremonial of the cremation of the hero which includes twelve chieftains riding around the grave mound signing songs praising the hero and lamenting his loss. (*Beowulf* 3171ff.)

Other features include *laiks*, "dance," which probably originally related to measured movements used in sacrificial actions. This term is also found in Old English *lāc* "sacrifice." There was also song and oath-taking. (Helm 1937, p. 53) Singing of some sort seems to have been important to the pagan Goths and it continued to be a conspicuous part of holy services even in Christian times.

Oath-taking plays a large part in Gothic history. For example it is recorded that Athanaric swears an oath to his father never to step foot on Roman soil (Ammianus Marcellinus 27, 5, 9). This same Gothic king also swears an oath of peace with the Emperor Valens (in the Fall of 368). The Visigoths swear an oath before the battle of Salices (377). This was probably an oath of renewed loyalty. Helm notes that in history, after Christianization of the Goths, oaths were most usually broken. However, these oaths were generally sworn to non-Goths. This clearly demonstrates that among themselves the oaths were inviolable, but as far as enemies or non-Goths were concerned, they could be used duplicitously. The story of St. Sabas shows family members protecting Christian Goths — and even swearing false oaths to fellow Goths to protect them. This demonstrates an example of blood-ties superseding "religious" ones, or "legal" ones. In reality all three types of relationships reflect deep cultural features. (Helm 1937, pp. 64-65)

In heroic literature the famous example of the fight between the father and son, Hildebrant and Hadubrant, in which obligations of oath took precedence over blood-ties forms a mythic icon.

Around 600 the East Germanic Gepids are reported to have had a nocturnal festival involving ritualized drinking. This was probably a heathen practice which was later transferred to some saint (Helm 1937, pp. 59). A funerary feast was held at the mound of the dead. In Gothic this feast was known as a *straua*. "funerary feast." This term is derived from the Gothic verb *straujan*, "to spread, strew" which referred to the laying out of the corpse and grave goods in state. Feasts were similarly held at the grave mounds in remembrance of the dead at Yule-tide (Helm 1937, 20).

As already discussed the Goths had various forms of sacrifice. Things which were sacrificed in this process ranged from valuables to animals (which were consumed in a form of sacral meal) and human beings. In the last case the victims of sacrifice were usually prisoners (criminals or prisoners of war) or slaves.

Votive offerings of valuables were common. The famous deposit Pietroassa is likely an example of this kind of sacrifice. Most of these deposits come from the second to fourth centuries. At least thirty of these were known by the early 20th century, although most of such deposits would have been discovered and looted in antiquity, of course.

That the animal sacrifice was both essentially a religious affair and a communal meal is shown in the *Martyrdom of Sabas* which reports that Christians were forced to eat sacrificial meat.

Human sacrifice was practiced as a part of funerary rites, when sometimes prisoners and slaves were sacrificed and burned along with the bodies of noblemen. Isidor of Seville, writing in the *Chroicon Gothorum* (14) reports about Radagais that in 405 when he attacked Italy he declared that if he won the battle the blood of all the Christians

would be considered a sacrifice. This can be directly compared to the attitudes reported by Tacitus concerning the Hermunduri who similarly considered all enemy combatants killed in battle to be tantamount to human sacrifices to the gods. (Helm 1937, p. 55-6.) The Vandal king Gelimer has captured citizens killed in honor of his fallen brother, Ammatas (Procopius *De bello Vandalico* I,20).

Among the Goths human sacrifices were usually bloody ones (to the war god), but also sacrifice by drowning was known. The aforementioned Christian St. Sabas was so drowned in 372. This martyrdom is mentioned elsewhere, but otherwise in the literature concerning the prosecution of Christians by the Goths this type of "martyrdom" is not mentioned. (Helm 1937, p. 56.)

Drowning the victim of sacrifice is akin to the general cult practice of sacrificing objects in water. Bog finds from late imperial times along the Baltic (between the Oder and the Passarge) indicate that coins, amber and glass beads, bronze objects, necklaces, etc., were so sacrificed. These finds have led some to compare the practice to the worship of Nerthus (Tacitus *Germania* ch. 40). Among these finds no objects relating to men (weapons, etc.) are found. Helm points to this form of human sacrifice and the procession with a divine image as indicative of specifically Vanic practice among the Goths. He additionally points to the apparent Christian equation between *Iggws, a Vanic Earth-God, and Jesus as an indication of the Vanic character of early Gothic religion. (1937, pp. 41-2). The more likely interpretation, given what we can see of the fully developed ancient Gothic pantheon, is that Jesus, as a Man, i.e. a human being who has been perfected, is equated with the Earth-god simply because he became a god on earth.

Several ritual elements are reported that are particular to funerary rites, e.g. that there is a solemn procession with the corpse, accompanied by a clashing of weapons, there are songs in honor and praise of his deeds and of lament (Jordanes XLI, 214). The solemn procession on foot is a common Indo-European feature. The Gothic word for a song of lament is *gaunopus*, "lament for the dead." Funerary songs of lament are specifically Gothic and specifically opposed by the Roman church. In Article 22 of the Acts of the Synod of Toledo (589), which concluded with the transition of the Goths from Arianism to Roman Catholicism, it is specifically indicated that the people are to sing Psalms at funerals—not the *carmen funebre* which the folk had been singing previously. (Helm 1937, pp. 18-19) Finally the particular practice of riding around the grave mound on horseback in a ritual circumambulation must again be cited as a peculiar Gothic practice (Jordanes II, 257).

Shrines

Helm (1937, p. 45) mentions a variety of types of sacred sites used by the Goths, e.g. groves (*trunci*), holy lakes and mobile shrines or temples on wheels. Ambrosius (*Epistola* 20,12) says of the Goths that their wagons are not only their homes, but their churches as well. As this is not a usual Christian practice it is most likely that this stems back to heathen practice and custom.

There is an old Gothic word, *alhs*, which means "sanctuary." It is used by Ulfilas to translate the Greek *ναος*, "temple" and *ἱερον*, "holy area." Etymologically this term is derived from Proto-Germanic **alhaz*, all Germanic attestations of which indicate that it was a temple, grove or holy enclosure. We also have Old English *ealh*, "temple." All of this evidence does not exclude the idea that the *alhs* did not contain a building or structure of some kind (Helm 1937, pp. 45-6).

Another term used by Ulfilas to translate Greek *ἱερον* (*hieron*), is *gudhūs*, "god-house." This compound word seems to suggest specifically a temple building. This appears to be a word invented by Ulfilas, and it occurs only once in John 18.20. Although permanent large structures for religious worship are not definitely attested, it does appear likely that some sort of structure was part of the sanctuary complex, or the *alhs*.

Holy Objects

Because the record of Gothic culture is so much represented by the idea of treasures and mysterious artifacts, certain objects possessing some sort of holy or sacred quality, such treasures have always played a part in the process of rediscovering the secrets of the Goths. Certain items appear to have been necessary for the performance of many rites of the pre-Christian Gothic cult, for example a wagon, animals (either for people to ride or to pull the wagon), and divine images to be transported in the wagon (Helm 1937, p. 47). There is a description by Flavius Vopiscus in *Vita Aureliani* which indicates that a Gothic wagon was actually pulled by a deer (Helm 1937, p. 60-1). This can be compared to the fact that among the Scythians ceremonial costumes for horses were fashioned which made the horses appear as if they were deer or stags. (Rice 1957, plate 11)

Spears

Both written and archeological sources demonstrate the importance of the spear to the symbolic practices of the early Goths, and Germanic tribes generally. I will address this subject in much more detail in chapter 5. At this point it suffices to say that spears, such as those discovered at Kovel and Dahmsdorf, were obviously ceremonial

objects. They were never used in combat, and were decorated with symbols of religious meaning and tribal affiliations. The ritual and symbolic uses of spears in Germanic culture are well documented and extremely archaic. Tacitus notes that the young man, when he comes of age, is invested with a shield and spear by his father (*Germania* ch. 13). The spear is seen as a legal symbol and one of sovereign power. (Jan de Vries 1956-57, II, 13-14)

Rings

One of the most spectacular examples of Gothic religious symbology is represented by the now fragmentary ring of Pietroassa. The details on this particular ring are more fully discussed in chapter 4. It is known that the earliest reported symbol of Germanic kingship is not the *crown* but the *neck ring*, and it appears that this is what the ring of Pietroassa actually is. Its original function is a matter for further discussion, however, it appears that the treasure of which it was a part was not a hidden "temple treasure," but rather a votive offering or sacrifice (Helm 1937, p. 47).

Rings are an important part of the symbolic temple equipment reported from the Viking Age. The oath or altar ring is mentioned in several accounts in the Icelandic literature (de Vries 1956-57, I, 390). The best single description is that found in chapter 4 of the *Eyrbyggja saga*. This account lists objects such as a solid ring weighing twenty ounces, upon which the people swore oaths. It is further said that the priest wore the ring on his arm at public meetings. Here we are reminded of a letter written by bishop Ambrosius of Milan in the year 381, which mentions the fact that the Gothic Arian priests wore such arm-rings and that the bishop condemns this practice as a heathen one.

Kettles

The use of symbolic vessels, especially cauldrons or kettles by the Goths also appears to have had a special importance. Such vessels were an indispensable part of the semi-nomadic life-style led by the Goths for many centuries. The steppe peoples in general were known for their vessels of this kind. In Norse mythic literature there is a famous account of a kettle found in the Hymiskviða in the *Poetic Edda*. This kettle is necessary for the brewing of the mead for a religious feast. The myth contained in this poem has been compared to an Indian myth about the god's acquisition of the divine *amṛita* (de Vries 1956-57, II, 132). This would perhaps be of some help in explaining the importance of the Gothic letter name for the *h*-sound, **hvaír*, "kettle" (⊙).

Magic and Divination

Magic and divination are classic categories to be investigated. However, the categories were probably not as neatly separated out from the rest of religion, or from each other, in pre-Christian times. The distinction appears to be a largely political or social one, between pre-establishment and antiestablishment activities which either promote the general welfare and solidarity of the folk, or which detract from general well-being or lead to the disintegration of the folk. In other words, the king, chieftains and heads of families may have conducted rites using the same technologies and methods used by what would be called "witches." The difference was in the perceived aims of the rites— either constructive or destruvtive toward the welfare of the culture.

Magic

Magic is the use of symbolic communication in order to operate within reality, either to cause things to change which usually would not change, or to prevent or preserve from change those things which would ordinarily change. Traditionally magic is marked by its occasional, rather than regular, daily, or seasonal use.

There is no Gothic word recorded for "magic" or "sorcery" *per se*. This is for the most part due to the fact that the passages of the Bible which might have given us these terms have not survived.

Female necromancers — those who were able to call upon the spirits of the dead in order to elicit information — were called *haljarunos*. This term appears to be a common Germanic one, since it also occurs in Old English *hellerune* and Old High German *helliruna* both also indicating a sorceress.

The story of Filimer's distrust of the sorceresses known as the *haljarunos* (Jordanes XXIV, 121ff.) is reflected many centuries later in the Norse *Hávamál* (stanza 155), where we read about Óðinn, god of magic and kings, advising rune-magicians about how to combat practitioners of malevolent sorcery.

Gothic laws such as the *Lex Visigothorum Recessvindana* and the *Leges Burgundionum*, written in Latin and from Roman times, nevertheless testify to the general belief in the malificent acts of witches to harm human health and crops. It must always be assumed that when there are laws against something, it is something which is either practiced by people, or something of which the population has a concrete fear. These nefarious acts include the preparation of magical drinks (*venena*), the tying of knots (*ligamenta*) designed to harm people or plants. In the case of the harm done to people by these magical knots, there is specific mention of the idea that such sorcery could rob

men of their voice. There is also specific mention of the opening of graves and desecrating them (*L.V.R.* XI, 2,2). This activity was probably undertaken by sorcerers to obtain certain body parts for use in specific magical spells. In these same laws there are some reports of *incantationes* for causing bad weather, and the use of *invocatio*, the calling on demons, either in voice or in writing, to make men lose their right senses (Helm 1937, pp. 26-8).

Divination

Typically in the Germanic world divination, that is the obtaining of information from the divine world, or from the fabric of the world itself, took place in three types of operations. One is the direct accessing of the world of the spirits or demigods by a seeress. This is a direct, but subjective operation. This may have been part of the repertoire of the *haljarunos*, as the etymology of the word would seem to suggest this. Another two types of operations fall under a more objective category. These are the observation of signs or omens in the world and the casting of lots (perhaps with the aid of runes).

The taking of omens is indicated by the Gothic word *taikns*, "sign, wonder" which translates Greek σημειον (*sēmeion*) This Germanic root is found in other Germanic languages with similar meanings, e.g. (OE *tācn*, and OHG *zeihhan*). It also seems to have been borrowed into Finnish in Proto-Germanic times as *taika* (Helm 1937, p. 29). Biblical references to a wondrous sign, Greek τερας or σημειον are translated by Gothic *fauratani*, which literally means a foretelling sign. An example of this in pagan times would be the account concerning the Vandals in which an eagle is seen as a bird that provides certain "signs" (Procopius *De bello Vandalico* I,4). Concerning the casting of lots, Jordanes reports (LVI, 283) that the Goths cast lots to determine whether or not to go to war.

Myths and Legends

No myths or legends of the Goths themselves survive in their own language. But their fame and reputation was so great that other Germanic peoples recorded many such legends relating to the Goths. Most of these belong to the heroic cycle of myth as well as to the genre of legends attached to historical figures such as Theodoric the Great.

Some scholars of the early part of the century were of the belief that the Goths were responsible for everything great in the Germanic culture due to their early contact with the Greeks. These scholars thought, for example, that Eddic mythology was of Gothic origin. There is no hard evidence of this, so such a theory must be doubted. Likewise the theory

that the Goths were the inventors of the runes based on Greek models must be abandoned. The runes date from before any Gothic migration to the area near the Greeks. However, it is not unlikely that elements of the runic tradition might have been influenced by the Goths, as it is certainly true that 1) the Goths had great prestige in the North and 2) there was regular and ongoing contact between the Goths and their original homeland in Scandinavia and the Baltic region.

In Germanic heroic mythology there are two great cycles of tales, known as the Nibelungen-Cycle and the Dietrich-Cycle. Epic and poetic literature connected with these cycles survive in Old Norse, Old High German, Middle High German and Old English. Both of these cycles of literature are connected to legendary material which often has ties to the history of East Germanic tribes— especially the Burgundians and the Goths.

The Burgundians were the tribe into which the (Cheruskan?) Sigurd came and which was attacked by the Huns along the Rhine in 436 CE. The latter part of the Nibelungen story is a legendary account of the interactions between the Burgundians and Huns. Literary works which relate to this cycle include the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* and *Klage*, the Old Norse *Völsunga saga*, and various other works in Old Norse and early modern German.

On the other hand, the Dietrich of the second cycle of legends reflects the German form of the name otherwise recorded as *Þiðrekr* or Theodoric, and is mythic account of the heroes at the court of Theodoric the Great in his Ostrogothic Kingdom. Literary sources which relate to this cycle include the Old Norse *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, and several other works. For a convenient survey of this literature see Edward R. Haymes' *Heroic Legends of the North* (Garland, 1996). It should be noted that the *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, although surviving only in Old Norse (having been compiled in Norway around 1200 CE), is actually a translation of an older Old Low German text, which has disappeared.

Gothic culture was significantly influenced by the cultures it encountered in from the Russian steppe to the Balkans. It should be remembered, however, that the influence of some of these non-Germanic peoples on Germanic culture goes right back to the time when the Germanic peoples were first differentiating themselves from other Indo-European groups in northern Europe. The Northern Iranian horse-cultures, the Scythians and Sarmatians, interacted with the Germanic (as well as Slavic and to a lesser extent Celtic) peoples of central and eastern Europe from as early as 700 BCE. The symbiosis between and among these peoples led to confusion on the part of classical authors as to the identity of certain groups. Goths were often confused with "Scythians," and the other way around.

As far as the lasting effects of pre-Christian religion on Gothic culture in general, Helm (1937, p. 64) cites the following:

- 1) Respect for and attention to omens and signs
- 2) Deep feeling of ancestral bond and tribal solidarity
- 3) Importance of the oath (Go. *aips*) and swearing (*sweran*) and swearing falsely *ufarswaran* — with the invocation of fate and an ensuing harsh form of self-cursing in those cases when oaths were broken.

In summary it can be said that the substance of pre-Christian Gothic tradition— their religion and other aspects of their ideological culture differed very little from the other Germanic tribes. Most apparent differences are probably the result of defective or sparse source material. What was unique about the Goths was their extreme sense of identity and group solidarity in the face of hostile surroundings and their ability to succeed in an extraordinary way over several centuries while maintaining their identity and solidarity. It should also be noted that the Goths seem to have had a certain genius for interacting productively with non-Germanic peoples— especially the Northern Iranian peoples. Of the Migration Age Germanic tribes, it is the Goths and the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons who succeeded best while having migrated far outside what had been age-old Germanic territories or areas immediately adjacent to them. The Anglo-Saxons succeeded because they moved into a power vacuum— southern Britain was abandoned by the Romans and the Saxons, Angles and Jutes moved in. The Franks succeeded by making an alliance with Rome and the Roman Christians against the other Germanic tribes. But the Goths moved into the very heart of the old empire, challenged it in its own heartland, and were victorious. It is this level of historically heroic success coupled with the strong Gothic sense of identity (aided by its peculiar religion) which made the Goths the stuff of enduring legend. It is now time to turn our attention more pointedly to the mysteries of the Gothic Church itself.

Gothic Christianity

Christianization of the Goths

From their first contact with the Romans some Goths interacted positively with them and some became Christians when they crossed into the Empire. But early on they remained a small minority and were mostly limited to commoners and slaves as well as the descendants of slaves or captives.

The most important figure in the early history of Christianity among the Germanic peoples is Ulfilas (311-383). His name is also recorded in

Greek as Ουλφιλως. His mother was a Cappadocian captured by the Goths in a raid into the Empire in 214, his father was a Goth. He was raised as a Christian among the Visigoths and went to Constantinople to study Christian doctrine. At that time Christian teachings were dominated by the Arian version of theology and Christology then supported by the Emperor Constantius II. The Arian doctrine itself is named after Arius of Alexandria, who lived in the early part of the 4th century CE. The Arian doctrine mainly contradicted that of the Roman Catholic teachings concerning the dogmas surrounding the Trinity— that God was *One* “in Three persons.” In other words God was one and three at the same time, without in any way compromising his unity. In contrast to the latter, Arianism stated that the Father came before the Son, the Son (logically!) emanated from the Father and that the Holy Spirit was a third term in a triad of divinity. This doctrine was officially declared a heresy in the church following the Council of Nicea (325), but the doctrine lived on sporadically in the East for many decades. In any event, most experts on the religions of the early Christian Goths agree that the form of Christianity practiced by the Goths was not even true Arianism, but rather it had to be an essentially Gothic form of religion and a sort of syncretism between Christian and non-Christian elements in Gothic culture.

Ulfilas was made bishop in 341 and undertook a mission among the Gothic peoples as well as other ancient Germanic folk. By 395 most of the Visigothic realm could be characterized as at least nominally Christian. The genius behind Ulfilas' mission was his translation of the Christian Bible into vernacular Gothic, the apparent use of popular tunes set to Christian words in the liturgy (also performed in Gothic), and the preservation of other Germanic elements in the Gothic church. We will review all of this in somewhat more detail later. The Arian doctrine itself provided the theoretical or doctrinal distinction between the Germanic and Roman cultures which was necessary for the Goths to be able to embrace Christianity at all. At first this was effective, but over time it would prove to be the political downfall of the Goths.

As a result of the mission of Ulfilas, the Ostrogoths were nominally Christianized (between 405 and 450). Earlier, the other major East Germanic tribes, the Vandals and Burgundians, were also nominally converted to Arianism just before 400 CE. Other southern Germanic tribes were also affected by the Gothic mission, e.g. the Alemanni, Bavarians and Thuringians, but it cannot be said they were actually Christianized at that time.

Among the Goths themselves this mission was sometimes met with hostile opposition. Between 368 and 372 the Visigothic king Athanaric tried to drive Christianity — both Roman and Arian — out of his kingdom. Christianity was opposed on two grounds: 1) it was feared that it would destroy folk-solidarity and 2) it was seen as “Roman

religion" and the Goths generally remained suspicious of things Roman. But the Gothic Christian movement was to a large extent successful due to the characteristics instituted by Ulfilas. The religion of the Goths was clearly neither orthodox Christianity, nor doctrinally bound to Arianism. Although on a superficial level they ceased adhering to traditional Germanic religion, it was essential that they maintain their cultural independence from the Romans. They did this by retaining many features of their native traditions.

Tenets of the Gothic Church

Specific beliefs which separated the Goths from other Christians are difficult to rediscover. There must have been many, since the religion of the Goths was so despised by the Roman Catholics. Chief among these differences was the previously mentioned Arian teaching contradicting the dogma of the Trinity. Biblically the doctrine of Arius is well-supported by the clear statement in John 14.28, when the Son actually says: "I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I am." Arianism is further supported by logic and philosophical consistency. The Orthodox position only had the advantage of appearing to solve the problem of "polytheism." The Goths simply continued being polytheists—maintaining a plurality of religious value centers and not persecuting their fellow religionists for having different beliefs and practices from themselves.

Ulfilas left behind a personal *Credo* which was recorded shortly before his death by a certain Auxentius. It reads:

I believe there to be only one God, uncreated and invisible. And (I believe) in his only begotten Son, our Lord and God, the architect and fashioner of all creatures, to whom there is no one who is similar, Therefore there is one God, the Father, who is the God of our God.

This document may at first appear confusing. Is there one god or two? The answer seems to be there are at least two named here. The "one God" (Lat. *unus Deus*) is tantamount to the Platonic or Neo-Platonic concept of the One, the Good, the Light, etc. This entity is the *Absolutum*. This is the God of another God, called the Son—who is clearly cast in the role of the demiurge, the God who fashions all of creation as an intermediary between the Absolute and creation itself. The Absolute, or the Good, or the Light is the God of the Son. The Good is absolute and transcendent. The Son is Creative. The Holy Spirit is the Plan of Creation, the World-Soul.

The tenets of the ancient Gothic Church partook of not only Christian elements, but also of pagan Greek philosophy and pre-

Christian Germanic tradition. The inner teachings of the church can be understood from a thorough understanding of all the subjective elements we have discovered in this study. Some also insist on the idea that the Gothic Church has survived underground to this day. Upon this idea the current Gothic Church of God is founded.

It is likely that the secret teaching of the Gothic church was that Jesus was not co-eternal with God, that God was an abstract principle, and that the Son was a heroic god-man, who became god-like as a result of two things: 1) his noble [semi-divine] ancestry and 2) his own heroic efforts. The function of the church was to further this teaching and continue the tradition founded by the Lord among the Goths. Jesus may or may not have died on the cross—it is more likely that the Goths taught that he survived the ordeal, as Wodans/Gauts might have done, and continued his line of divine ancestry elsewhere.

Ritual of the Gothic Church

The ritual or liturgy of a church is a complex thing. It includes how time is arranged for ritual, the space in which the ritual is conducted, as well as the actual form of the actions and words performed during the rite. Only a few fragments of this information remains to us today. The records of the Gothic Church were largely destroyed by the Roman Catholics over the years.

We know fairly little of the Gothic religious calendar. A fragment of a calendar survives on one leaf of manuscript (Milan, Ambrosiana Codex p. 36 sup. + Turnin Theca F IV 1, Frag X). This fragment covers 23 October to 30 November. November is also called *fruma jiuleis*, fore-yule, in Gothic. This shows a survival of pagan terminology, as Yule is a common Germanic term for the festival which occurred around the winter solstice. We know nothing of the Gothic Church's attitude toward Yule itself, other than the name was still used after the Goths had been nominally Christianized. "Christmas" was not observed by the early Christian church at all. It was only with Germanic influence that this time of year required special celebratory activity. The Gothic calendar shows memorial days not only for well-known early Christian saints, but also for specifically Gothic martyrs to persecution and for the Emperor Constantius II, who had been a friend of the Goths. It should also be noted that the Gothic Church observed the sabbath on Saturday, hence the Old High German weekday name *sabaztac* ("sabbath-day"), which found its way into areas of Germany where the Gothic missionary activity was felt. This is also why one finds *Samstag* for Saturday in southern Germany even today, whereas in the north *Sonnabend* is heard.

Gothic Ritual

In the early church — of all sects — the central activity was that of the liturgy of the holy mass. In orthodox term this was a ritual which in symbolic terms reenacted the sacrifice of Jesus — the Son and Lord (Go. *Frauja*). The central magical act was one in which the body and blood of the Savior was symbolically reproduced in bread and wine and these talismanic substances were then ingested by the faithful, thus making the substance of the Lord and that of themselves closer together, and thus bringing them closer to salvation.

The liturgy itself is the whole set of words and actions which the priest — a man consecrated to do this work — must perform in order that the rite be effected. We know a good deal about the actual Gothic liturgy. This is because fragments of it have survived, as well as the fact that the over all form of the rite was not substantially different from the rite performed in the 4th century in Thrace, from where the liturgy was first taken. It is essentially the Greek rite of Constantinople, *mostly translated into the Gothic language.*

This last point is of tremendous importance because it was most usual in the ancient world for peoples other than Greek or Latin speakers to have to content themselves with hearing the entire rite in a tongue foreign to their own. This included the “sermon” or the homily portion of the rite. Although the people may have understood only their own language, the priests would still “sermonize” to them in Greek or Latin. One of the revolutionary breakthroughs of Ulfilas is that he used the language of the people— not only to translate the Bible, but also in the ritual.

It had also been disdainfully said of the followers of Arius of Alexandria, who had committed his teachings to lyric poems collected in a volume entitled *Thalia* — songs of joy — that they set his words to sailors’ songs and those of millers. There is no evidence that the Gothic Arians did the same thing, but they did use their own language instead of an “international koiné.” There is additional abundant evidence that the Goths did continue to preserve their own heroic national (pagan) songs— not as part of the Eucharistic rite, of course, but as the substance of other ceremonies important to the spiritual lives of the people.

In ancient times one of the most important parts of the mass was when the people chanted “lord have mercy!” — Greek κυριε ελησον! — which in Gothic was *Frauja armai!* Gothic warriors sometimes used this as a battle-cry as they charged into the fray.

At one point in the rite also, the people were to recite the so-called Lord’s Prayer. In Gothic this is:

Atta unsar þu in himinam, weihnái namō þein. qimái þiudinassus þeins. wairþái wilja þeins, swē in himina jah ana aírþái. hláif unsarana þana sinteinan gif uns himma daga. jah aflēt uns þatei skulans sijáima, swaswē jah weis aflētam þáim skulam unsaráim. jah ni briggáis uns in fráistubnjái, ak láusei af þamma ubilin.

To this was also added the formula:

Untē þeina is þiudandardi jah mahts jah wultus in áiwins. amēn.

It should be noted that the word “father” is not the expected *fadar*, but rather the more colloquial *atta*, “pappa” or “daddy.” This is also the Gothic word upon which the name of the Hunnic king Attila — “little daddy” — is based. While in other places the Lord’s Prayer, or Pater Noster, was to be recited in Latin, a mysterious language to most, here it is recited in the people’s own language. This prayer was generally thought to have magical or operative powers. Throughout medieval magic the use of this text is a fairly universal formula for invoking or expressing magical powers.

Ancient Gothic Church Structures

The liturgy is the central activity of the church. The place created for this activity to take place is the church building. The earliest Christians paid little attention to church structures, as they generally met in remote open areas, grave yards and catacombs. The first buildings fashioned exclusively as meeting places were not based on Greek or Roman sacred architectures, as might have been expected, but rather on secular buildings. The wealthy Roman generally had a large all-purpose room in his villa for banquets and so on. This became the basis for most church structures. In the Hellenic east there were some examples of centralized structures and this was often used as the model for Gothic churches.

Only a few examples of Gothic church buildings survive, and none in exactly the form the Goths had them built. Most of them differ very little from structures built for the orthodox sects— whether eastern or western. This is because the artisans who built these early (pre-711 CE) structures were not Goths, and because leaders such as Theodoric the Great wanted to emphasize outward conformity of the Goths to *Romanitas*. But there are some Gothic features worth mentioning.

In Ravenna the best example of Gothic church architecture is the building now called S. Apolinare Nuovo. It was built and consecrated by Theodoric the Great in 504 as his palace church. Originally it was dedicated to the Savior, Jesus Christ. It seems that the Goths, despite their theological position concerning the absolute divinity of Jesus, were far more dedicated to his person than were the orthodox Romans.

This is perhaps because they saw him in the role of the divine hero, or even divine ancestor, whom they were used to worshipping. This church still preserves much of the magnificent mosaic work on its walls that Theodoric had commissioned. The altar was placed in the middle of the basilica by the Goths—not at the far east end of it as the Romans did. On the right, or southern, wall is the image of the enthroned Jesus surrounded by angels. On the opposite wall is the image of Mary and the baby Jesus. The three Magi approach to honor Jesus. It is thought that the Goths had the Magi so placed to emphasize the idea that it was Jesus, and not Mary, who was being honored. As the liturgy was performed, the women would be on one side facing the image of Mary and the baby Jesus, and the men would be on the other, facing the enthroned Jesus. Other original mosaics depicting Gothic martyrs were destroyed after the Goths were ousted and the church was reconsecrated as a Roman Catholic church. Some of the surviving mosaics were also altered. Originally Jesus was shown holding a book, upon which was inscribed: *Ego sum rex gloriae*, “I am the king of glory.” This was changed to show him holding a vessel of holy oil or water.

Other church buildings of the Goths in Ravenna, e.g. the Church of the Resurrection and the Church of St. Andreas (Andrew) were substantially destroyed. The Gothic baptistry remains as does the previously mentioned Tomb of Theodoric. Although the latter structure could be discussed as a holy edifice, it appears clear that its sanctity stems from the ancient court culture of the kings, and not from that of the church.

Other surviving church buildings constructed by or for the Goths in Spain and France include San Pedro de Nave, Santa Cristina de Lena, San Miguel de Escalada, Santa Columba in Bauda (northwestern Spain) and the chapel of Germigny-des-Prés. The Visigothic structures show distinctive traits of the style brought to the west from the east. Remnants of similar structures have been found on the Crimean Peninsula, where some Goths survived until the 16th century. There has also been some speculation concerning the possible influence of these structures on the stave churches of Scandinavia. However, this similarity of structures — a central design rather than a long hall-like one — could also be explained as an inheritance from the North. Then it would simply be that the Gothic churches and the stave churches both derive from the same pre-Christian northern design principles.

The Gothic Bible

The entire Bible was translated by Bishop Ulfilas, or under his supervision, in the 4th century. Only fragments of this translation survive in various manuscripts. Most of what remains is from the New Testament and comes from the magnificent manuscript called the Codex Argenteus—the “silver codex.” It is called this because the

letters are written with a silver ink on parchment which has been dyed purple. Initials and other features also are written with gold ink. Early sources written by Philostorgius and Sozomen suggest that Ulfilas did not translate the Book of Kings because of its “warlike” nature, and Ulfilas was trying to tone down this bellicose tendency among his fellow tribesmen.

This Bible was not prepared to be read directly by lay persons (such as Luther’s Bible of 1534). It was for the education of the Gothic priesthood and for the various readings in the liturgy, which, as we have seen, was performed *in Gothic*. This allowed the Gothic parishioners to hear the biblical material in their own language on a regular basis. This set the average Gothic believer apart from other Christians in western Europe who heard the mass only in Latin—a language which only the clerics could understand clearly.

In order to write the text, Ulfilas invented a new alphabet. This writing system is examined in detail in chapter 3.

The Codex Argenteus is in itself a great cultural treasure. It is now housed in the University Library in Uppsala, Sweden. Only 187 of its original 336 leaves survive. The codex was prepared in northern Italy, probably for Theodoric the Great. At some point it was taken to the monastery of Monte Cassino, whence it was taken by Liudger, a pupil of Alcuin, who founded a new monastery at Werden near Cologne, Germany, in the late 8th century. It is interesting to speculate on just why this manuscript was taken north of the Alps at that time. The codex remained in the monastery at Werden where it was subsequently “discovered” by humanists working in the 16th century. For examples, J. Goropius Becansus published the “Lord’s Prayer” from the codex in 1569. It is noted that by the beginning of the 17th century the manuscript had become quite mangled. The Emperor Rudolf II had the codex brought to Prague, and in 1648 it was sent to Queen Christine of Sweden by Count Königsmarck as a gift. It was bound in silver in 1665, but the designation Codex Argeneus already appears in 1597, so the name refers to the silver letters and not to the silver binding.

The Gothic Bible and the script in which it was written were obviously of extreme cultural importance to the Goths. Perhaps there are secrets concealed in this data, which, if decoded, can yield new information about the esoteric teachings of the Goths.

Chapter Three

Mysteries of the Gothic Alphabet and the Gothic Cabbala

One of the greatest mysteries and cultural treasures of the Goths is encoded in its unique alphabet. The Gothic alphabet is emblematic of the intellectual and spiritual Gothic synthesis of Germanic and Greco-Roman cultures. We know historically that this alphabet was invented by Ulfilas as an aid in completing his translation of the Bible. Clearly on several levels this system synthesized elements from the common Germanic writing system known as the runes and the Greek and Roman letters—perhaps with the customary dash of inspired innovation.

In order to understand the Gothic alphabet thoroughly, we must review what we know of the runic tradition at the time of Ulfilas. The runes constituted an early Germanic writing system which seems to have been directly inspired by the Roman script. However, the ancient Germanic peoples did not slavishly follow the Roman model, but rather innovated an entirely new system suited to their own cultural needs. The runes may go back to as early as 150 BCE, as the oldest possible runic inscriptions, the brooch of Meldorf, dates from the middle of the first century of the common era and, as a general rule of alphabetic development, the date of the actual origin of a system usually antedates the first attestation by between one hundred and two hundred years.

The Germanic *fupark* — so called because the first six sounds of the runes were f, u, þ, a, r, and k — at the time of Ulfilas appeared:

Table 3.1: The Older *Fupark* (150 BCE–800 CE)

ƿ	𐌺	þ	ᚠ	ᚱ	<	X	ƿ
f	u	þ	a	r	k	g	w
h	l	i	z	j	p	z	s
h	n	i	j	ei	p	z	s
ᚏ	ᚋ	ᚓ	ᚖ	ᚗ	᚛	᚞	ᚠ
t	b	e	m	l	ng	d	o

This system indicates certain peculiarities of the *fupark*. It did not follow the usual ABC or ABG order of the Mediterranean scripts. It was divided into three groups of eight, later called *ættir* (“families” in Old Norse). It shows a clear formal relationship to the Roman capital letters as far as the shapes of many individual runes is concerned, ƿ/F,

ƕ/R, H/H, etc. However, it also shows clear signs of autochthonous innovation, þ/th, ƿ/w, ȝ/j, ȝ/z, °/ng, etc. It should be noted that the innovated signs generally stand for sounds not found in Latin or which were not recognized by the Romans as independent sounds or phonemes.

In addition, later tradition indicates that the runes bore distinctive names which had definite meanings in Germanic. Table 3.2 shows these names in their reconstructed Proto-Germanic forms. This is the language which would have been the common ancestor to all of the Germanic dialects.

Table 3.2: Names of the Older Runes

Number	Shape	Phonetic Value	Name	Meaning of Name
1	ᚠ	f	<i>fehu</i>	livestock, wealth
2	ᚢ	u	<i>ūruz</i>	aurochs
3	ᚦ	þ	<i>þurisaz</i>	giant (thurs)
4	ᚨ	a	<i>ansuz</i>	a god
5	ᚱ	r	<i>raiðō</i>	riding, wagon
6	ᚷ	k	<i>kaunaz/kēnaz</i>	sore, ulcer/torch
7	ᚷ	g	<i>gebō</i>	gift
8	ᚹ	w	<i>wunjo</i>	joy
9	ᚻ	h	<i>hagalaz</i>	hail
10	ᚾ	n	<i>naupiz</i>	need, distress
11	ᚿ	i	<i>isa</i>	ice
12	ᚫ	j	<i>jēra</i>	good year, harvest
13	ᚬ	ei	<i>eihwaz</i>	yew
14	ᚭ	p	<i>perðrō</i>	peach-tree (?)
15	ᚮ	z	<i>elhaz</i>	elk
16	ᚯ	s	<i>sowilō</i>	the sun
17	ᚰ	t	<i>tīwaz</i>	sky-god
18	ᚱ	b	<i>berkanō</i>	birch-twigg/goddess
19	ᚳ	e	<i>ehwaz</i>	horse
20	ᚴ	m	<i>mannaz</i>	man, human being
21	ᚵ	l	<i>laguz</i>	water
22	ᚶ	ng	<i>ingwaz</i>	earth-god
23	ᚷ	d	<i>dagaz</i>	day
24	ᚸ	o	<i>ōðila</i>	ancestral property

Ulfilas knew this runic system. His knowledge is demonstrated by his use of runic material in his invention of the Gothic alphabet. By inventing a set of sound-sign symbols Ulfilas was following in the mythic track of other culture-heroes, and even gods, of the past. By

creating an alphabet he could teach a philosophy in ways deeper than any who would come after him who were obliged to use his system of writing. To write is to create, but to create the alphabet with which others write is the consummate creative act in culture.

We know very little *directly* about the runes as they were used in the Germanic world at the time of Ulfilas and before. Fewer than twenty-five inscriptions have survived from the lifetime of Ulfilas and before. These are spread out all over northern and eastern Europe. Almost all of these are on small, moveable objects such as brooches and weapons. The most remarkable of these that seem directly connected to the Goths are discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

The runes held a sacred place in early Germanic culture. The word **rūnō* means "mystery." For example, when Ulfilas translated the passage in Luke 8.10: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God," he did so in Gothic as follows: *izwis atgiban ist kunnan runos þiudisassaus gudis*. The Gothic word for "mystery" is *runa*. When Ulfilas translated the Greek words for letters (of the alphabet), for which there were two, *στοιχίον* and *γράμμα*, he used the Gothic words *stafs* (pl. *stabeis*) and *boka*, respectively. In Germanic these words were also closely connected to the word for "rune." For example, in Old High German we find the word *buohstap*, modern German *Buchstabe* for a letter of the alphabet, while in Old Norse the use of the term *staf* as an alternate for *rún* is well-known.

To understand how Ulfilas understood these words, we can look at the Greek terms he was translating. Obviously the word *runa*, by which he translates the Greek *μυστήριον*, refers to the secret, hidden, or unknown meaning that lies behind the obvious or "literal" meaning of anything—including a letter of the alphabet. Greek *στοιχίον* is the usual word used by the Greeks for a letter of the alphabet. Its meaning in Greek is "element." It is the same word used to denote the universal elements (*στοιχέια*) fire, air, earth and water, for example. For this Ulfilas uses *stabeis*, staves, i.e. "elements." Finally, the Germanic word *boka* was used to indicate the physical appearance of the letter—in Greek a *γράμμα*.

This terminology reveals a shared attitude between the Greeks and Goths along with other rune-using Germanic peoples, as regards the process of writing and reading. It was for them a sacred thing. Our modern sensibilities, often numbed to the presence of actual mystery and holiness, usually fail to recognize this truth today.

The Germanic runes were a sacred script, Ulfilas was familiar with them in Gothic culture. The Greeks at this time also had a sacral — if often philosophized — attitude toward the alphabet. In this cultural mix, Ulfilas could not help but have been shaped by these attitudes and himself imbued his writing system with a similar holy quality and essence.

The Gothic Alphabet

The alphabetic system which, according to church historians Sozomenos and Philostorgius, was created by Ulfilas appears in table 3.3 below. It was used to write the Gothic translation of the Bible made by Ulfilas, but went beyond this to be used in subsequent, now mostly lost, Gothic texts.

Table 3.3: The Gothic Alphabet

ᚦ	ᚷ	ᚹ	ᚰ	ᚱ	ᚴ	ᚷ	ᚹ	ᚰ	ᚱ
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
a	b	g	d	e	q	z	h	þ	
ᚱ	ᚴ	ᚷ	ᚰ	ᚱ	ᚴ	ᚷ	ᚰ	ᚱ	ᚴ
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	
i	k	l	m	n	j	u	p	—	
ᚷ	ᚰ	ᚱ	ᚴ	ᚷ	ᚰ	ᚱ	ᚴ	ᚷ	ᚰ
100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	
r	s	t	w	f	ch	lv	o	—	

As can be seen from the table, the Gothic system accounted for sounds as well as numbers. In this it followed Greek tradition, seen in table 3.4. When Greek letters were meant to be used as numbers, they were followed by a diacritical mark, e.g. $\alpha' = 1$. Similarly, a Gothic letter, when contained within points, e.g. $\cdot\mathfrak{A} = 1$, indicates a number and not a sound. However, the fact that sounds and numbers were both represented with the same system leads to the natural symbolic conclusion that numbers can be sounds, and sounds numbers on an esoteric level.

As far as the origins of the individual Gothic letters are concerned, the majority are clearly based on Greek letter-shapes, e.g. $\mathfrak{A} \leftarrow \Lambda$, $\mathfrak{B} \leftarrow \text{B}$, $\mathfrak{G} \leftarrow \Gamma$, $\mathfrak{D} \leftarrow \delta$. However, a few are based on Roman letters: $\mathfrak{H} \leftarrow \text{h}$, $\mathfrak{K} \leftarrow \text{R}$, $\mathfrak{S} \leftarrow \text{S}$. While some appear derived from old Germanic runes, e.g. $\mathfrak{P} \leftarrow \text{t}$, $\mathfrak{Q} \leftarrow \text{z}$, $\mathfrak{N} \leftarrow \text{n}$, $\mathfrak{F} \leftarrow \text{r}$, $\mathfrak{R} \leftarrow \text{x}$. Also the numeral sign for 900 is the same as the ancient t-rune (\uparrow), which stood for the god *Teiws (ON Týr). $\cdot\mathfrak{T} = 300$, $\uparrow = 3 \times 300 = 900$.

Table 3.4: The Greek Alphabet

$\alpha \text{ A}$	$\beta \text{ B}$	$\gamma \text{ Γ}$	$\delta \text{ Δ}$	$\epsilon \text{ E}$	$\zeta \text{ Z}$	$\eta \text{ H}$	$\theta \text{ Θ}$		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
a	b	g	d	e		z	ē	th	
$\iota \text{ I}$	$\kappa \text{ K}$	$\lambda \text{ Λ}$	$\mu \text{ M}$	$\nu \text{ N}$	$\xi \text{ Ξ}$	$\omicron \text{ O}$	$\pi \text{ Π}$	$\rho \text{ Ρ}$	
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	
i	k	l	m	n	j	o	p	—	
$\rho \text{ P}$	$\sigma \text{ Σ}$	$\tau \text{ T}$	$\upsilon \text{ Υ}$	$\phi \text{ Φ}$	$\chi \text{ X}$	$\psi \text{ Ψ}$	$\omega \text{ Ω}$	\aleph	
100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	
r	s	t	y	ph	ch	ps	o	—	

The admixture of these three cultural monuments, i.e. the three different writing systems — Greek, Roman and runic — tells us something about the spiritual and cultural matrix of Ulfilas' ideas in general. It was a mixture of Germanic (Gothic), Greek and Roman. In this, however, the Greek probably took the dominant conscious role, with Roman material taking a secondary place. The native Gothic substratum, however, must have taken a dominant subcultural and unconscious role.

The Greek alphabetic characters have names, but these are merely sound-formulas based on the Semitic names of the letters, e.g. *alpha* ← *alef*, *beta* ← *beth*, *gamma* ← *gimel*. From a 9th or 10th century manuscript, called the Salzburg-Vienna Alcuin-manuscript, there is a record of the *names* of the Gothic letters— amazingly these reflect for the most part the names of the ancient Germanic *runes*. As this manuscript dates from several centuries after the disappearance of the Gothic language in the west, it is somewhat of a mystery as to how they came to be recorded. This manuscript could have been derived from an older one, which came in the Austrian region from either the Visigothic territory of southern France, or from formerly Ostrogothic Italy.

A complete chart of the Gothic system of numbers, sounds, letter-shapes, names and meanings of the names, appears in table 3.5. It will be noted that the form of the names recorded from the Salzburg-Vienna codex often appear mangled. This is perhaps to be expected in a manuscript written at a time so far removed from the time when Gothic was actually being spoken, and living informants, if they still existed, must have been scarce. The odd spellings are generally explicable in terms of old English and Old High German scribal practices, and since English and German scribes were largely responsible for collecting these manuscripts at the time, this is to be expected.

Table 3.5: The System of the Gothic Alphabet

I No.	II Sound	III Shape	IV Name	V Normalized Name	VI Translation of Name
1	a	𐌰	<i>aza</i>	<i>*ahsa</i>	axel
2	b	𐌲	<i>bercna</i>	<i>*baírkan</i>	birch-twíg
3	g	𐌸	<i>geuua</i>	<i>giba</i>	gift
4	d	𐌳	<i>daaz</i>	<i>dags</i>	day
5	e	𐌸	<i>eyz</i>	<i>*aihus</i>	horse
6	q(u)	𐌹	<i>quertra</i>	<i>*qairpra</i>	bait/bore hole
7	z	𐌺	<i>ezec</i>	<i>*aiz</i>	metal, coin
8	h	𐌿	<i>haal</i>	<i>*hagl</i>	hail
9	þ	𐌿	<i>thyth</i>	<i>þiup</i>	the good
10	i	𐌿	<i>iiz</i>	<i>*eis</i>	ice
20	k	𐌿	<i>chozma</i>	<i>*kusma</i>	sore
30	l	𐌿	<i>laaz</i>	<i>*lagus</i>	water
40	m	𐌿	<i>manna</i>	<i>manna</i>	man, human
50	n	𐌿	<i>noicz</i>	<i>*naups</i>	need
60	j	𐌿	<i>gaar</i>	<i>jer</i>	year
70	u	𐌿	<i>uraz</i>	<i>*urus</i>	aurochs
80	p	𐌿	<i>pertra</i>	<i>*pairpra</i>	pear-tree (?)
90	—	𐌿	—	—	—
100	r	𐌿	<i>reda</i>	<i>*raida</i>	wagon
200	s	𐌿	<i>sugil</i>	<i>sauil</i>	sun
300	t	𐌿	<i>tyz</i>	<i>*teiws</i>	god
400	w	𐌿	<i>uuinne</i>	<i>*winja/wunja</i>	meadow/joy
500	f	𐌿	<i>fe</i>	<i>faihu</i>	riches
600	x (ch)	𐌿	<i>enguz</i>	<i>*iggws</i>	a man
700	h	𐌿	<i>uuaer</i>	<i>*hair</i>	kettle
800	o	𐌿	<i>utal</i>	<i>*opal</i>	ancestral property
900	—	𐌿	—	—	—

The first column of table 3.5 indicates the numerical value of the letter, the second shows the shape of the Gothic letter and the third column indicates the basic phonetic value of conventional transcription of the letter into the Roman alphabet. The fourth column shows the letter-name as recorded in the Salzburg-Vienna manuscript, while the fifth records the Gothic word corresponding to the name either as the word appears in attested texts, or as the word has been linguistically reconstructed. Reconstructed forms are preceded by an asterisk. The last column is a translation of the name.

It is likely, given the contemporaneous learned Greek attitudes toward sound, number and meaning that the fact that the Gothic system provides for a clear and meaningful correspondence between these three categories — sound-number-meaning — that this symbolic opportunity to extract mysterious meanings hermeneutically would not have gone unexploited by the originator or subsequent users of this system. Additionally, such attitudes might have been re-imported into the rune-using culture of the north after the 4th century from this Gothic source.

It should also be noted that Ulfilas must have had a reason for inventing a new system of writing for recording the Gothic language. Gothic could have been written in Greek letters or Roman ones. Either of these two options would have brought the Goths inevitably closer to the Imperial world and the mainstream of Christendom. Therefore it can only be that Ulfilas, from the beginning, and for whatever underlying reason, wanted to create a national (Gothic) tradition. In this he seems to have rejected the basic internationalist and universalistic mission of the church as found in the Greco-Roman world. His mission seems to have been an more mysterious one, even from the beginning.

Certain past attempts to explain the esoteric meanings of the Gothic letters have been rather shallow. It is an obvious error to assume that for the Goths using these letters, the signs were thought of merely as substitutes concealing the ancient rune-lore of the pre-Christian Goths. To do so is to ignore the obvious contribution of Hellenistic lore connected to the *stoicheia* ("elements/letters") of the Greek alphabet. While the names appear to be largely Gothic (Germanic) in origin, the numerical system is primarily Greek. Both have a bearing on the esoteric quality of the Gothic letter.

Before discussing the esoteric meanings of the Gothic letters it should be noted that some of them appear to be intentional re-namings, i.e. **ahsa*, "axle" for **ansuz*, "ancestral god"; *þiup*, "the good" for *þurisaz*, "giant"; and *ezec* (?) apparently for **elhas*, "elk." Krause (1968, p. 66) notes that Old Norse *elgr*, "elk" is used as a byname for Odin (~ Wodans). These would then all appear to be examples of the Christian Ulfilas avoiding what were obviously pagan "religious" references. It is curious to note in this vein that he does not seem to have avoided the use of **teiws*, which might mean that this word had

been revalorized with Christian connotations, although it is not used in the extant portions of the translation of the Gothic Bible. Even more remarkable is the apparent "Christianizing" of the name *iggws (← *ingwaz), which originally meant "the Earth-God," and in the system of Ulfilas seems to have been made to stand for Jesus Christ himself.

The Esoteric Meanings of the Gothic Letters

ǀ 1 A

The reconstructed Gothic letter-name, *ahsa, indicates an axle or axis—a shaft or pole which turns, and around which something, such as a wheel or the vault of heaven, turns. This concept was important all the way back to Indo-European times and the migratory Goths, who often lived in wagons, understood the hidden meaning of the concept very well. The older, pagan, name was *ansus*—ancestral sovereign god. This god is the source of the people and their support. Old Norse *áss* (the corresponding Norse rune-name) could also mean the main roof beam of a house. The One is the source of all things and the support of all. *Ahsa is the One, which is both everything and nothing at once.

B 2 B

*Bairkan, birch-twig, is the letter denoting the concept of nature, the dyad which follows the monad of 1. As the birch was a traditional instrument not only of judicial chastisement, but also an instrument used to raise the natural forces of fecundity—both through flagellation—it can be seen that this the perfect complex symbol of nature in all her guises. The dyad is Nature in motion and dynamic growth.

As a side note this letter can have nothing to do with the bear esoterically. The word "bear" is a euphemism (meaning "brown-one") and is not related to the hidden name of the bear—which would have been related to the Latin *ursus*, e.g. the Old Norse proper name *Yrsa*, "she-bear."

ƿ 3 Γ

Giba is the same word as found in the old rune-name. However, for the Arian Goths it had definite connotations of a divine or spiritual gift which endowed the recipient with spiritual powers or abilities. These can be the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the third person in the triad, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For the Arians, who maintained the logical relationship among these three "persons," the third was the provider of knowledge (γνωσις, *kunþi*) and the mean between all extremes.

𐌳 4 Δ

"Day" is the meaning of the fourth Gothic letter. Its quadratic symbolism is further reinforced by the old runic shape 𐌳. The Old English Rune Poem states that "day is a sending of the lord, dear to men, glorious light of the creator, mirth and hope to the prosperous and to the poor, of benefit to all." This indicates that the concept was one of universal benefit to all men. In the Greek numerical lore of the time it was considered the key of nature and the "nature of change."

𐌸 5 E

The name of this letter, *aihus, means "horse." The Goths became expert horsemen. They learned their skills on the steppe from the Scythians and Sarmatians. The association between the Goths and horses was so strong that the word *goti* in Old Norse could even mean "a horse." In Greek number-lore the pentad is associated with the manifestation of justice and marriage, and it is called "the immortal." In Germanic lore the horse is seen as symbolic of the power which carries the soul from one level of being to the next.

𐌺 6 —

The manuscript form of the name *quertra* has been reconstructed as *qairþra, which some have defined as "bait" (Krause 1968), others as a technical term for the bore-hole in which a fire-producing vertical stick is placed. (Schneider 1956, pp. 142-7) The hexad in Greek symbolic arithmetic indicates the form of forms, order, reconciliation, health and perfection. It is tempting to see fire symbolism in this letter, as the sixth rune in the *fupark* is *kēnaz*, "torch."

𐌶 7 Z

Of all the letter-names this is the most problematic. The manuscript could be read *ezec* or *ezet*. This is difficult to reconstruct as a Gothic word. It seems likely that the first part of the word corresponds to Gothic *aiza, "copper," "bronze" or "brass." It occurs in the words *aiz*, "coin" and *aizasmīþa*, "coppersmith." The seven is the heptad, which carried the meaning of fortune and due measure (Gk. κайρος).