

EDITORIAL NOTE



III 1: *Tors strid med jättarna* (Tor's Fight with the Giants), Mårten Eskil Winge, 1872, oil on canvas. Nationalmuseum, Sweden, NM 1250.
<https://collection.nationalmuseum.se/en/collection/item/18253/>

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The painting *Thor's Fight with the Giants* is undoubtedly the most famous artistic representation of this deity. It epitomizes the 19th-century image of Thor: carrying his hammer in battle against the giants while driving a chariot with his two goats. His standing position raising the hammer to the heavens and ready to bring it down on the heads of his enemies, was a visual tradition already firmly anchored in the visual arts since the end of the 18th century, as with the painting *Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent* (1790) by Swiss artist Henry Fuseli.

In Winge's image the light comes from the hammer, from which lightning bolts and thunderbolts emerge, while the lower part of the painting becomes dark, coinciding with the hair and skin of the giants that contrast with the god's blond and white complexion. The contrast of light creates a moral sense for the representation. Analyses of the painting have always focused on political issues, where it is seen as a reflection of the clashes between liberal and traditional revolutionary forces during the 1860s (Grandien, 2018, pp. 493-494). But is it really only a political metaphor? The racial biological contrast between a god (blond, solar, celestial) and his enemies (dark, situated in the shadows) is quite objective. Concepts of an Aryan race as white and superior had already been entrenched in Europe since the 1850s (Couttenier, 2017, pp. 122-151). Scandinavian intellectuals during the 19th century generally viewed racial mixing in negative terms (Halink, 2025). By the end of the 19th century, the idea that non-Nordic races were "ugly" and "inferior" was common in Sweden, even in school textbooks (Svensson, 2008, pp. 79-100).

But the most controversial element of Winge's painting is located precisely in the centre of the canvas: on the right side of Thor's belt, a swastika is painted. Winge had already used this symbol in illustrations of the same deity during the 1860s – this association between the

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symbol and the god had been present since the early 19th century, popularized by modern academic studies.

Snoldelev's runestone first study, published in 1812, interpreted the swastika as being the symbol of Thor's hammer (Abrahamson; Thorlacius, 1812, p. 289-322). The authors were probably influenced by modern Scandinavian folklore, which called the swastika Thor's hammer – as in the Icelandic case: *Dórshamar* (Árnason, 1862, p. 445) and Swedish: in the 18th century peasant brotherhoods (*Fattigklubba*) used it in their meetings hammers with engraved swastika (Mejborg, 1889, p. 16). Other Scandinavian artists also combined this solar symbol with the god of thunder, as in several illustrations by Lorenz Frølich in the 1880s and the statue *Thor kører sine bukke* in the Carlsberg brewery, executed by Carl Johan Bonnesen in 1901.



III 2: *Left:* Vase, *Tors strid med jättarna* (Tor's Fight with the Giants, NM Gu 3912), 1873, Mårten Eskil Winge, after, Franz Meder, Swedish, Austrian. Nationalmuseum, photographs by Johnni Langer, may 2025. *Right:* enlarged detail.

We have no documentary evidence that Winge executed the swastika in his painting as a symbol of the Aryan race, but since the 1870s German intellectuals had been doing so, from archaeological discoveries to ideological uses of material culture – a famous example is the discovery of artifacts with solar symbols from Troy by Heinrich Schliemann from 1871 onwards (Quinn, 1994, p. 21-61).

Winge's work is a classic example of how Norse myths have been reinterpreted by art and societies throughout history. After the 1990s, the painting *Tor's Fight with the Giants* began to acquire new racial connotations, this time related to immigrants (who became identified with the giants) and the ideological uses of supremacist groups (Hedström, 1992). Its public display at the National Museum has ceased, and in its place, in the 19th-century Norse themes section, now stands a vase made for the Gustavsberg ceramics company in 1873 (Ill. 2). The image on the vase is much more neutral to contemporary eyes than the original, as it lacks the swastika on the god's belt, nor the contrasting light and skin and hair colours of the entities – all racial connotations disappeared, leaving only the mythical combat to the observer's eyes.

This reinterpretation that myths have acquired throughout history is the main axis of the dossier in the current edition of the *Scandia Journal of Medieval Norse Studies*: **Translations: The Literary Reception of Norse Mythology**, with contributions written in Portuguese and Spanish, analysing nine European poetic and literary works written between the 18th and 20th centuries. The dossier is extremely relevant, due to the possibility of resonating and further increasing Ibero-American interest in Norse themes.

The **articles section** received 10 contributions in English, French and Portuguese, covering a wide range of topics from Norse studies, from ancient astronomy, Icelandic sagas, hagiographic literature, medieval Denmark, the *Íslendigabók*, representations of Vikings in Norman sources, connections between the Byzantines and Scandinavians in the Viking Age, the god Odin and the Berserker, Mara folklore, and the connection between Iceland and the writer Jorge Luiz Borges.

The **interviews section** of this edition featured the participation of Professor *Maria Adele Cipolla*, a renowned researcher at the University of Verona, who discussed Nordic studies in Italian.

The **translations section** displays three works, with emphasis on the English translation of *Forræða* and *Guíamars Ljóð*.

Finally, the **reviews section** brings four texts, three of which deal with books published in English on Scandinavian themes.

We invite everyone to enjoy this new edition, while also calling for new contributions for edition 9, which will be published in 2026.

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