Varieties of Faith in the Empire

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by

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This is my best attempt at a listing of the pantheons and associated divine spirits of Tamriel's dominant cultures. This list is by no means complete (the Imperial City of Cyrodiil alone boasts a vast host of saints and holy spirits). It only includes the most important spirits revered by native members of the culture. Other et'Ada, especially Daedra, are often familiar known to many cultures, though specific names are included here only when they possess a particular cultural significance. The omission of any reference to the worships of the Argonians of Black Marsh is a result of my complete inadequacy in reconciling the obscure and contradictory accounts available to me on that subject.

THE EIGHT PANTHEONS

CYRODIIL: Akatosh, Dibella, Arkay, Zenithar, Mara, Stendarr, Kynareth, Julianos, Shezarr, Tiber Septim, Morihaus, Reman

SKYRIM: Alduin, Dibella, Orkey, Tsun, Mara, Stuhn, Kyne, Jhunal, Shor, Ysmir, Herma-Mora, Maloch

ALTMER: Auri-El, Trinimac, Magnus, Syrabane, Y'ffre, Xarxes, Mara, Stendarr, Lorkhan, Phynaster

BOSMER: Auri-El, Y'ffre, Arkay, Z'en, Xarxes, Baan Dar, Mara, Stendarr, Lorkhan, Herma-Mora, Jone, Jode

DUNMER: Almalexia, Vivec, Sotha Sil, Boethiah, Mephala, Azura, Lorkhan, Nerevar, Molag Bal, Malacath, Sheogorath, Mehrunes Dagon

YOKUDA: Satakal, Ruptga, Tu'whacca, Zeht, Morwha, Tava, Malooc, Diagna, Sep, HoonDing, Leki, Onsi,

BRETONY: Akatosh, Magnus, Y'ffre, Dibella, Arkay, Zenithar, Mara, Stendarr, Kynareth, Julianos, Sheor, Phynaster

ELSWEYR: Alkosh, Khenarthi, Riddle'Thar, ja-Kha'jay, Mara, S'rendarr, Lorkhaj, Rajhin, Baan Dar, Azurah, Sheggorath

NOTES ON THE DIVINE SPIRITS OF THE PANTHEONS

Akatosh (Dragon God of Time): Akatosh is the chief deity of the Nine Divines (the major religious cult of Cyrodiil and its provinces), and one of two deities found in every Tamrielic religion (the other is Lorkhan). He is generally considered to be the first of the Gods to form in the Beginning Place; after his establishment, other spirits found the process of being easier and the various pantheons of the world emerged. He is the ultimate God of the Cyrodilic Empire, where he embodies the qualities of endurance, invincibility, and everlasting legitimacy.

Alduin (World Eater): Alduin is the Nordic variation of Akatosh, and only superficially resembles his counterpart in the Nine Divines. For example, Alduin's sobriquet, 'the world eater', comes from myths that depict him as the horrible, ravaging firestorm that destroyed the last world to begin this one. Nords therefore see the god of time as both creator and harbinger of the apocalypse. He is not the chief of the Nordic pantheon (in fact, that pantheon has no chief; see Shor, below) but its wellspring, albeit a grim and frightening one.

Alkosh (Dragon King of Cats): Pre-ri'Datta Dynasty Anaquinine deity. A variation on the Altmeri Auri-El, and thus an Akatosh-as-culture-hero for the earliest Khajiiti. His worship was co-opted during the establishment of the Riddle-T'har, and he still enjoys immense popularity in Elsweyr's wasteland regions. He is depicted as a fearsome dragon, a creature the Khajiit say 'is just a real big cat'. He repelled an early Aldmeri pogrom of Pelinal Whitestrake during mythic times.

Almalexia (Mother Morrowind): Most traces of Akatosh disappeared from ancient Chimer legends during their so-called 'exodus', primarily due to that god's association and esteem with the Altmeri. However, most aspects of Akatosh which seem so important to the mortal races, namely immortality, historicity, and genealogy, have conveniently resurfaced in Almalexia, the most popular of Morrowind's divine Tribunal.

Arkay (God of the Cycle of Life and Death): Member of the Nine Divines pantheon, and popular elsewhere as well. Arkay is often more important in those cultures where his father, Akatosh, is either less related to time or where his time aspects are difficult to comprehend by the layman. He is the god of burials and funeral rites, and is sometimes associated with the seasons. His priests are staunch opponents of necromancy and all forms of the undead. It is said that Arkay did not exist before the world was created by the gods under Lorkhan's supervision/urging/trickery. Therefore, he is sometimes called the Mortals' God.

Auri-El (King of the Aldmer): The Elven Akatosh is Auri-El. Auri-El is the soul of Anui-El, who, in turn, is the soul of Anu the Everything. He is the chief of most Aldmeri pantheons. Most Altmeri and Bosmeri claim direct descent from Auri-El. In his only known moment of weakness, he agreed to take his part in the creation of the mortal plane, that act which forever sundered the Elves from the spirit worlds of eternity. To make up for it, Auri-El led the original Aldmer against the armies of Lorkhan in mythic times, vanquishing that tyrant and establishing the first kingdoms of the Altmer, Altmora and Old Ehlnofey. He then ascended to heaven in full observance of his followers so that they might learn the steps needed to escape the mortal plane.

Azura (Goddess of Dusk and Dawn): Azura was the god-ancestor that taught the Chimer the mysteries needed to be different than the Altmer. Some of her more conventional teachings are sometimes attributed to Boethiah. In the stories, Azura is often more a communal cosmic force for the race as a whole than an ancestor or a god. Also known as the Anticipation of Sotha Sil. In Elsweyr, Azurah is nearly a wholly separate entity, yet she is still tied into the origins of Khajiiti out of Altmeri stock.

Baan Dar (The Bandit God): In most regions, Baan Dar is a marginal diety, a trickster spirit of thieves and beggars. In Elsweyr he is more important, and is regarded as the Pariah. In this aspect, Baan Dar becomes the cleverness or desperate genius of the long-suffering Khajiit, whose last minute plans always upset the machinations of their (Elven or Human) enemies.

Boethiah (Prince of Plots): Heralded by the Prophet Veloth, Boethiah is the original god-ancestor of the Dark Elves. Through his illuminations, the eventual 'Chimer', or Changed Folk, renounced all ties to the Aldmer and founded a new nation based on Daedric principles. All manner of Dark Elven cultural 'advances' are attributed to Boethiah, from philosophy to magic to 'responsible' architecture. Ancient Velothi allegories are uniformly heroic successes of Boethiah over enemies of every type, foundation stories of Chimeri struggle. Also known as the Anticipation of Almalexia.

Diagna (Orichalc God of the Sideways Blade): Hoary thuggish cult of the Redguards. Originated in Yokuda during the Twenty Seven Snake Folk Slaughter. Diagna was an avatar of the HoonDing (the Yokudan God of Make Way, see below) that achieved permanence. He was instrumental to the defeat of the Lefthanded Elves, as he brought orichalc weapons to the Yokudan people to win the fight. In Tamriel, he led a very tight knit group of followers against the Orcs of Orsinium during the height of their ancient power, but then faded into obscurity. He is now little more than a local power spirit of the Dragontail mountains.

Dibella (Goddess of Beauty): Popular god of the Nine Divines. In Cyrodiil, she has nearly a dozen different cults, some devoted to women, some to artists and aesthetics,

and others to erotic instruction.

Herma-Mora (The Woodland Man): Ancient Atmoran demon who, at one time, nearly seduced the Nords into becoming Aldmer. Most Ysgramor myths are about escaping the wiles of old Herma-Mora. Also called the Demon of Knowledge, he is vaguely related to the cult origins of the Morag Tong ('Foresters Guild'), if only by association with his brother/sister, Mephala.

HoonDing (The Make Way God): Yokudan spirit of 'perseverance over infidels'. The HoonDing has historically materialized whenever the Redguards need to 'make way' for their people. In Tamrielic history this has only happened three times -- twice in the first era during the Ra Gada invasion and once during the Tiber War. In this last incarnation, the HoonDing was said to have been either a sword or a crown, or both.

Jhunal (Rune God): The Nordic god of hermetic orders. After falling out of favor with the rest of that pantheon, he became Julianos of the Nine Divines. He is absent in modern Skyrim mythology.

Jode (Big Moon God): Aldmeri god of the Big Moon. Also called Masser or Mara's Tear. In Khajiti religion, Jode is only one aspect of the Lunar Lattice, or ja-Kha'jay.

Jone (Little Moon God): Aldmeri god of the Little Moon. Also called Secunda or Stendarr's Sorrow. In Khajiti religion, Jone is only one aspect of the Lunar Lattice, or ja-Kha'jay.

Julianos (God of Wisdom and Logic): Often associated with Jhunal, the Nordic father of language and mathematics, Julianos is the Cyrodilic god of literature, law, history, and contradiction. Monastic orders founded by Tiber Septim and dedicated to Julianos are the keepers of the Elder Scrolls.

Kyne (Kiss At the End): Nordic Goddess of the Storm. Widow of Shor and favored god of warriors. She is often called the Mother of Men. Her daughters taught the first Nords the use of the thu'um, or Storm Voice.

Kynareth (Goddess of Air): Kynareth is a member of the Nine Divines, the strongest of the Sky spirits. In some legends, she is the first to agree to Lorkhan's plan to invent the mortal plane, and provides the space for its creation in the void. She is also associated with rain, a phenomenon said not to occur before the removal of Lorkhan's divine spark.

Leki (Saint of the Spirit Sword): Goddess daughter of Tall Papa, Leki is the goddess of aberrant swordsmanship. The Na-Totambu of Yokuda warred to a standstill during the mythic era to decide who would lead the charge against the Lefthanded Elves. Their swordmasters, though, were so skilled in the Best Known Cuts as to be matched evenly. Leki introduced the Ephemeral Feint. Afterwards, a victor emerged and the war with the Aldmer began.

Lorkhan (The Missing God): This Creator-Trickster-Tester deity is in every Tamrielic mythic tradition. His most popular name is the Aldmeri 'Lorkhan', or Doom Drum. He convinced or contrived the Original Spirits to bring about the creation of the mortal plane, upsetting the status quo -- much like his father Padomay had introduced instability into the universe in the Beginning Place. After the world is materialized, Lorkhan is separated from his divine center, sometimes involuntarily, and wanders the creation of the et'Ada. He and his metaphysical placement in the 'scheme of things' is interpreted a variety of ways. In Morrowind, for example, he is a being related to the Psijiic Endeavor, a process by which mortals are charged with transcending the gods that created them. To the High Elves, he is the most unholy of all higher powers, as he forever broke their connection to the spirit plane. In the legends, he is almost always an enemy of the Aldmer and, therefore, a hero of early Mankind.

Lorkhaj (Moon Beast): Pre-ri'Datta Dynasty Anaquinine deity, easily identified with the Missing God, Lorkhan.

Magnus (Magus): The god of sorcery, Magnus withdrew from the creation of the world at the last second, though it cost him dearly. What is left of him on the world is felt and controlled by mortals as magic. One story says that, while the idea was thought up by Lorkhan, it was Magnus who created the schematics and diagrams needed to construct the mortal plane. He is sometimes represented by an astrolabe, a telescope, or, more commonly, a staff. Cyrodilic legends say he can inhabit the bodies of powerful magicians and lend them his power. Associated with Zurin Arctus, the Underking.

Malacath (God of Curses): Malacath is the reanimated dung that was Trinimac. A somewhat weak but vengeful Daedra, the Dark Elves say he is also Malak, the god-king of the orcs. He always tests the Dunmer for physical weakness.

Malooc (Horde King): An enemy god of the Ra Gada. Led the goblins against the Redguards during the first era. Fled east when the army of the HoonDing overtook his goblin hordes.

Mauloch (Malacath): An Orcish god, Mauloch troubled the heirs of King Harald for a long time. Fled east after his defeat at the Battle of Dragon Wall, ca. 1E660. His rage was said to fill the sky with his sulphurous hatred, later called the "Year of Winter in Summer".

Mara (Goddess of Love): Nearly universal goddess. Origins started in mythic times as a fertility goddess. In Skyrim, Mara is a handmaiden of Kyne. In the Empire, she is Mother-Goddess. She is sometimes associated with Nir of the 'Anuad', the female principle of the cosmos that gave birth to creation. Depending on the religion, she is either married to Akatosh or Lorkhan, or the concubine of both.

Mehrunes Dagon (God of Destruction): Popular Daedric power. He is associated with natural dangers like fire, earthquakes, and floods. In some cultures, though, Dagon is merely a god of bloodshed and betrayal. He is an especially important deity in Morrowind, where he represents its near-inhospitable terrain.

Mephala (Androgyne): Mephala is the Webspinner, or the Spider God. In Morrowind, he/she was the ancestor that taught the Chimer the skills they would need to evade their enemies or to kill them with secret murder. Enemies were numerous in those days since the Chimer were a small faction. He/she, along with Boethiah, organized the clan systems that eventually became the basis for the Great Houses. He/she founded the Morag Tong. Also called the Anticipation of Vivec.

Molag Bal (God of Schemes, King of Rape): Daedric power of much importance in Morrowind. There, he is always the archenemy of Boethiah, the Prince of Plots. He is the main source of the obstacles to the Dunmer (and preceding Chimer) people. In the legends, Molag Bal always tries to upset the bloodlines of Houses or otherwise ruin Dunmeri 'purity'. A race of supermonsters, said to live in Molag Amur, are the result of his seduction of Vivec during the previous era.

Morihaus (First Breath of Man): Ancient cultural hero god of the Cyro-Nordics. Legend portrays him as the Taker of the Citadel, an act of mythic times that established Human control over the Valley Heartland. He is often associated with the Nordic powers of thu'um, and therefore with Kynareth.

Morwha (Teat God): Yokudan fertility goddess. Fundamental deity in the Yokudan pantheon, and the favorite of Tall Papa's wives. Still worshipped in various areas of Hammerfell, including Stros M'kai. Morwha is always portrayed as four-armed, so that she can 'grab more husbands'.

Nerevar (Godkiller): The Chimeri king of Resdayn, the Golden Age of old Veloth. Slain during the Battle of Red Mountain, Nerevar was the Herald of the Triune Way, and is the foremost of the saints of Dunmeri faith. He is said to have killed Dumac, the Last Dwarven King, and feasted on his heart.

Onsi (Boneshaver): Notable warrior god of the Yokudan Ra Gada, Onsi taught

Mankind how to pull their knives into swords.

Orkey (Old Knocker): A loan-god of the Nords, who seem to have taken up his worship during Aldmeri rule of Atmora. Nords believe they once lived as long as Elves until Orkey appeared; through heathen trickery, he fooled them into a bargain that 'bound them to the count of winters'. At one time, legends say, Nords only had a lifespan of six years due to Orkey's foul magic. Shor showed up, though, and, through unknown means, removed the curse, throwing most of it onto the nearby Orcs.

Phynaster: Hero-god of the Summerset Isles, who taught the Altmer how to naturally live another hundred years by using a shorter walking stride.

Rajhin (Footpad): Thief god of the Khajiiti, who grew up in the Black Kiergo section of Senchal. The most famous burglar in Elsweyr's history, Rajhin is said to have stolen a tattoo from the neck of Empress Kintyra as she slept.

Reman (The Cyrodiil): Culture god-hero of the Second Empire, Reman was the greatest hero of the Akaviri Trouble. Indeed, he convinced the invaders to help him build his own empire, and conquered all of Tamriel except for Morrowind. He instituted the rites of becoming Emperor, which included the ritual geas to the Amulet of Kings, a soulgem of immense power. His Dynasty was ended by the Dunmeri Morag Tong at the end of the first era. Also called the Worldly God.

Riddle'Thar (Two-Moons Dance): The cosmic order deity of the Khajiiti, the Riddle'Thar was revealed to Elsweyr by the prophet Rid-Thar-ri'Datta, the Mane. The Riddle'Thar is more a set of guidelines by which to live than a single entity, but some of his avatars like to appear as humble messengers of the gods. Also known as the Sugar God.

Ruptga (Tall Papa): Chief deity of the Yokudan pantheon. Ruptga, more commonly 'Tall Papa', was the first god to figure out how to survive the Hunger of Satakal. Following

his lead, the other gods learned the 'Walkabout', or a process by which they can persist beyond one lifetime. Tall Papa set the stars in the sky to show lesser spirits how to do this, too. When there were too many spirits to keep track of, though, Ruptga created a helper out the dead skin of past worlds. This helper is Sep (see below), who later creates the world of mortals.

Satakal (The Worldskin): Yokudan god of everything. A fusion of the concepts of Anu and Padomay. Basically, Satakal is much like the Nordic Alduin, who destroys one world to begin the next. In Yokudan mythology, Satakal had done (and still does) this many times over, a cycle which prompted the birth of spirits that could survive the transition. These spirits ultimately become the Yokudan pantheon. Popular god of the Alik'r nomads.

Sheogorath (The Mad God): The fearful obeisance of Sheogorath is widespread, and is found in most Tamrielic quarters. Contemporary sources indicate that his roots are in Aldmeri creation stories; therein, he is 'born' when Lorkhan's divine spark is removed. One crucial myth calls him the 'Sithis-shaped hole' of the world.

Sheor (Bad Man): In Bretony, the Bad Man is the source of all strife. He seems to have started as the god of crop failure, but most modern theologians agree that he is a demonized version of the Nordic Shor, born during the dark years after the fall of Saarthal.

Sep (The Snake): Yokudan version of Lorkhan. Sep is born when Tall Papa creates someone to help him regulate the spirit trade. Sep, though, is driven crazy by the hunger of Satakal, and he convinces some of the gods to help him make an easier alternative to the Walkabout. This, of course, is the world as we know it, and the spirits who followed Sep become trapped here, to live out their lives as mortals. Sep is punished by Tall Papa for his transgressions, but his hunger lives on as a void in the stars, a 'non-space' that tries to upset mortal entry into the Far Shores.

Shezarr (God of Man): Cyrodilic version of Lorkhan, whose importance suffers when

Akatosh comes to the fore of Imperial (really, Alessian) religion. Shezarr was the spirit behind all human undertaking, especially against Aldmeri aggression. He is sometimes associated with the founding of the first Cyrodilic battlemages. In the present age of racial tolerance, Shezarr is all but forgotten.

Shor (God of the Underworld): Nordic version of Lorkhan, who takes sides with Men after the creation of the world. Foreign gods (i.e., Elven ones) conspire against him and bring about his defeat, dooming him to the underworld. Atmoran myths depict him as a bloodthirsty warrior king who leads the Nords to victory over their Aldmeri oppressors time and again. Before his doom, Shor was the chief of the gods. Sometimes also called Children's God (see Orkey, above).

Sotha Sil (Mystery of Morrowind): God of the Dunmer, Sotha Sil is the least known of the divine Tribunal. He is said to be reshaping the world from his hidden, clockwork city.

Stendarr (God of Mercy): God of the Nine Divines, Stendarr has evolved from his Nordic origins into a deity of compassion or, sometimes, righteous rule. He is said to have accompanied Tiber Septim in his later years. In early Altmeri legends, Stendarr is the apologist of Men.

Stuhn (God of Ransom): Nordic precursor to Stendarr, brother of Tsun. Shield-thane of Shor, Stuhn was a warrior god that fought against the Aldmeri pantheon. He showed Men how to take, and the benefits of taking, prisoners of war.

Syrabane (Warlock's God): An Aldmeri god-ancestor of magic, Syrabane aided Bendu Olo in the Fall of the Sload. Through judicious use of his magical ring, Syrabane saved many from the scourge of the Thrassian Plague. He is also called the Apprentices' God, for he is a favorite of the younger members of the Mages Guild.

Tava (Bird God): Yokudan spirit of the air. Tava is most famous for leading the

Yokudans to the isle of Herne after the destruction of their homeland. She has since become assimilated into the mythology of Rynareth. She is still very popular in Hammerfell among sailors, and her shrines can be found in most port cities.

Tiber Septim (Talos, the Dragonborn): Heir to the Seat of Sundered Kings, Tiber Septim is the most important hero-god of Mankind. He conquered all of Tamriel and ushered in the Third Era (and the Third Empire). Also called Ysmir, 'Dragon of the North'.

Trinimac: Strong god of the early Aldmer, in some places more popular than Auri-El. He was a warrior spirit of the original Elven tribes that led armies against the Men. Boethiah is said to have assumed his shape (in some stories, he even eats Trinimac) so that he could convince a throng of Aldmer to listen to him, which led to their eventual Chimeri conversion. He vanishes from the mythic stage after this, to return as the dread Malacath (Altmeri propaganda portrays this as the dangers of Dunmeri influence).

Tsun: Extinct Nordic god of trials against adversity. Died defending Shor from foreign gods.

Tu'whacca (Tricky God): Yokudan god of souls. Tu'whacca, before the creation of the world, was the god of Nobody Really Cares. When Tall Papa undertook the creation of the Walkabout, Tu'whacca found a purpose; he became the caretaker of the Far Shores, and continues to help Redguards find their way into the afterlife. His cult is sometimes associated with Arkay in the more cosmopolitan regions of Hammerfell.

Vivec (Master of Morrowind): Warrior-poet god of the Dunmer. Vivec is the invisible keeper of the holy land, ever vigilant against the dark gods of the Volcano. He/she has saved the Dunmeri people from certain death on numerous occasions, most notably when he/she taught them how to breathe water for a day so that he/she could flood Morrowind and kill the Akaviri invaders, ca. 2E572.

Xarxes: Xarxes is the god of ancestry and secret knowledge. He began as a scribe to Auri-El, and has kept track of all Aldmeri accomplishments, large and small, since the beginning of time. He created his wife, Oghma, from his favorite moments in history.

Y'ffre (God of the Forest): Most important deity of the Bosmeri pantheon. While Auri-El Time Dragon might be the king of the gods, the Bosmer revere Y'ffre as the spirit of 'the now'. According to the Wood Elves, after the creation of the mortal plane everything was in chaos. The first mortals were turning into plants and animals and back again. Then Y'ffre transformed himself into the first of the Ehlnofey, or 'Earth Bones'. After these laws of nature were established, mortals had a semblance of safety in the new world, because they could finally understand it. Y'ffre is sometimes called the Storyteller, for the lessons he taught the first Bosmer. Some Bosmer still possess the knowledge of the chaos times, which they can use to great effect (the Wild Hunt).

Ysmir (Dragon of the North): The Nordic aspect of Talos. He withstood the power of the Greybeards' voices long enough to hear their prophecy. Later, many Nords could not look on him without seeing a dragon.

Z'en (God of Toil): Bosmeri god of payment in kind. Studies indicate origins in both Argonian and Akaviri mythologies, perhaps introduced into Valenwood by Rothringi sailors. Ostensibly an agriculture deity, Z'en sometimes proves to be an entity of a much higher cosmic order. His worship died out shortly after the Knahaten Flu.

Zeht (God of Farms): Yokudan god of agriculture. Renounced his father after the world was created, which is why Tall Papa makes it so hard to grow food.

Zenithar (God of Work and Commerce, Trader God): Member of the Nine Divines, Zenithar is understandably associated with Z'en. In the Empire, however, he is a far more cultivated god of merchants and middle nobility. His worshippers say, despite his mysterious origins, Zenithar is the god 'that will always win'.

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