



## Roda da Fortuna

Revista Eletrônica sobre Antiguidade e Medieval  
Electronic Journal about Antiquity and Middle Ages

Ugnius Mikučionis<sup>1</sup>

### Recognizing a *dvergr*: Physical Status and External Appearance of *dvergar* in Medieval Nordic Sources (8th-13th century)

Reconocimiento de un *dvergr*: Estado Físico y Apariencia  
Externa de los *dvergar* en Fuentes Nórdicas Medievales  
(del siglo VIII al XIII)

---

#### Abstract:

The article discusses physical status and external appearance of *dvergar* of pre-Christian Nordic folk belief, mythology and literature. Sources in focus of the research include a runic inscription, a skaldic poem, three Eddic lays and carvings on a runic stone.

#### Keywords:

*Dvergar*, Medieval Scandinavia; appearance.

#### Resumen:

El artículo discute el estado físico y la apariencia externa de los *dvergar* en la creencia popular, mitología y literatura nórdica pre-cristiana. Las fuentes en las que se centra la investigación incluyen una inscripción rúnica, un poema escáldico, tres poemas eddicos y tallas en una piedra rúnica.

#### Palabras-clave:

*Dvergar*, Escandinavia medieval; apariencia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Humanities - University of Bergen, Norway. E-mail: [Ugnius.Mikucionis@uib.no](mailto:Ugnius.Mikucionis@uib.no)

## 1. Introduction

What does a medieval Nordic dwarf (Old Norse *dverg*) look like? The question may sound ridiculously easy, especially for those who have read *The Hobbit* by Prof. J. R. R. Tolkien. In his novel, Tolkien describes the external appearance of the dwarfs, or the *dwarves*, which is his spelling of the plural form, mentioning their short size, their beards and their colorful cloaks. Is it not the case that all these features apply to the medieval Nordic dwarfs as well? The short answer is *no*. One could expect, at least, that the external appearance of medieval Nordic dwarfs must have been studied in minute detail by previous scholars. As early as in 1839, Grenville Piggot wrote: “They are represented as deformed, little men, with huge oblong heads and flat noses” (Piggot 1839: 221). Is it not the case that this is a true rendition of how medieval Nordic dwarfs are represented in the source texts? The answer is again *no*. It may in principle be impossible to provide a single, short answer to the question what the dwarfs look like. The point of departure for this research is the assumption that one cannot expect all the medieval Nordic dwarfs to have looked the same, just as one cannot expect them to have had the same features in other respects, or to have played identical roles in different narratives. It has been registered in scholarship that there are significant differences between dwarfs in various medieval Nordic sources, such as skaldic poetry, the *Eddas* and the sagas. Werner Schäfke wrote that “literary dwarves, i.e., saga dwarves, have little in common with the mythic dwarves that feature in Eddic lays and the *Prose Edda*, and do not show any resemblance to Ancient Nordic dwarves” (Schäfke 2015: 365). Admittedly, the opposite view – namely, that the image of dwarfs in various sources is basically the same – has also been expressed, cf.: “The concept of dwarfs originates in Germanic folklore. The dwarfs of mythology bear a basic resemblance to the dwarfs of fairy tales: they are small creatures that dwell within the earth and have skill in working metals” (Anderson 2016). A prominent expert on Germanic mythology and folklore, Lotte Motz wrote:

“[...] the image of the dwarfs does not essentially alter throughout the texts; they thus show similar characteristics in those works which have frankly been composed for entertainment (Heroic and Romantic sagas) and in those which have been considered documents of faith (the religious poems of the *Edda* and to some extent Snorri’s treatise). Dwarfs thus hold the same position before human heroes as they have assumed before the gods.” (Motz 1977: 48)

Lotte Motz did not claim, however, that the external appearance of Nordic dwarfs remained unchanged throughout the time. In another article, she wrote:

“[...] the myths say nothing about the size of the archaic force who rowed a giant out to sea to watch him drown, who killed a man to obtain his blood and who moreover managed to support the sky. The external features of the dwarf have reached us through medieval tales or through modern folklore. That the size of a being may change in the course of the centuries is demonstrated by the fate of the ‘trolls’, who from giants developed into pygmies.” (Motz 1973: 111)

The image of the dwarfs in Old Norse source texts is complex and heterogenous, both in terms of external appearance and in terms of roles the dwarfs play. One of the main differences eddic dwarfs and saga dwarfs is that the dwarfs mainly interact with the gods or other supernatural beings in the *Eddas*, while interaction between the dwarfs and the humans is prominent in saga literature. In the *Eddas*, the dwarfs play important roles in mythological events, such as creation of the mead of poetry and production of various valuable objects that later come into possession of gods, as well as it is the dwarfs Austri, Vestri, Norðri and Suðri who hold up the sky. In the sagas, dwarfs are producers and donors of weapons or other objects, but also healers, helpers, advisors, foster-fathers, friends and have different other roles in interactions with human heroes. The relationships between dwarfs and humans are much more nuanced and the emotional life of the dwarfs is much richer in saga literature than some of the previous scholarship has registered. Among other things, the relationship between the dwarf and the human hero is in more than one saga characterized as *vinátta mikil* ‘great friendship’, which is never the case in relationships between dwarfs and gods (see Mikučionis 2014 for a more thorough discussion of dwarf–human relationships in saga literature). When it comes to the external appearance of the Nordic dwarfs, it is the sagas that provide most detailed descriptions. Lotte Motz wrote:

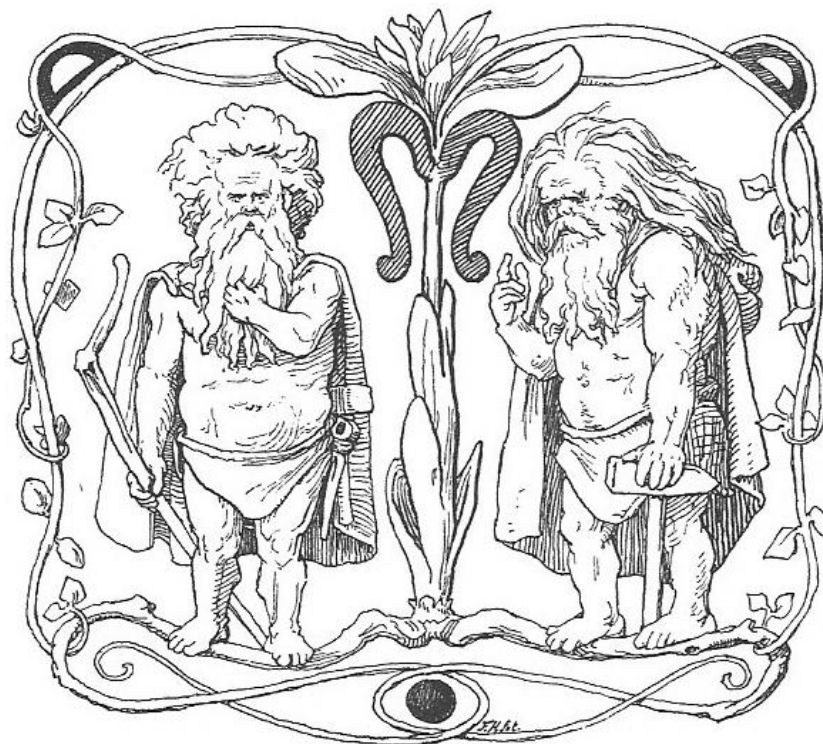
“For information concerning the external aspect of the mountain smith, we must turn to the Sagas. [...] Less productive is the search for clues to the dwarfs’ external form in the older sources in which the spirits are still more closely part of mythology.” (Motz 1983: 115f.)

A thorough analysis of the external appearance of saga dwarfs is provided by Schäfke (2010: 207–220). In this article, I will attempt to perform the search characterized by Motz as “less productive”, namely, the search for clues to the dwarfs’ appearance in sources dating from 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century AD. I choose to concentrate first and foremost on sources that may be characterized as “documents of faith”, to use Motz’s own words (Motz 1977: 48). The Prose Edda is mostly in the periphery of the scope of this research, partly for the reasons of space, and partly because the relationship between Snorri Sturluson’s treatise and the pre-Christian mythology is not straightforward. At the same time, I am fully aware that

it is not possible to give a definite answer to the question what the early medieval Nordic dwarfs looked like, let alone an answer that would suite equally well for all the dwarfs in the different sources. Terry Gunnell wrote the following about the *álfar*:

“[...] we should be wary about taking all the various early references to the *álfar* referring to one and the same concept, over and above the idea that these entities are clearly powerful ‘others’, commonly seen as having the potential to harm at a distance [...] [E]verything about these references suggests that they stem from a variety of different belief systems originating in different times and different environments, though this does not eliminate the possibility that all of these different beliefs could have lived side by side in a multicultural settlement such as Iceland [...]” (Gunnell 2007: 129)

The same is true of the dwarfs. Different references to *dvergar* may have originated from different belief systems, which may have continued to live side by side through centuries. One should, then, be prepared to find differences with respect to various aspects of the dwarfs in different sources, including dwarfs’ external appearance. This will be examined in what follows. For the aims of this article we will concentrate on the following sources: a runic inscription (the Ribe cranium), a skaldic poem (*Ynglingatal*), three Eddic lays (*Völuspá*, *Reginsmál*, and *Alvíssmál*) and carvings on a runic stone (the Sigurd stone Sö 101 in Sweden). As already mentioned above, the *Prose Edda* and sagas are, in principle, in the periphery of the scope of this article, but will occasionally be used as additional sources of information on dwarfs.



**Figure 1.** An illustration of two dwarfs for *Völuspá* by Lorenz Frølich. Published in Gjellerup, Karl. 1895. *Den ældre Eddas Gudesange*. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two\\_V%C3%B6lusp%C3%A1\\_Dwarves\\_by\\_Fr%C3%B8lich.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two_V%C3%B6lusp%C3%A1_Dwarves_by_Fr%C3%B8lich.jpg)

## 2. An ancient (female?) dwarf in a runic inscription (8<sup>th</sup> century)

The oldest (to the best of my knowledge) reference to a dwarf in a Nordic language is in a runic inscription from Ribe, found under archaeological excavations on July 24<sup>th</sup> 1973, and dated to 720-ties or, perhaps, somewhat later (Grønvik 1999: 103). The runes are carved on a fragment of a cranium, and the text reads:

**ulfuRAukupinAukhutiur'hiAlbburiisuiþRpAimauiaRkiAuktuirkun  
iubuur**

According to Ottar Grønvik, the text should be read as

**ulfr auk Óðinn auk Hō-TiuR hjalp buri is wiðr þaima wiarke auk  
dwegynju bōur(r)**

or, in normalized Old Norse,



**Ulfur ok Óðinn ok Há-Týr, hjalp buri, es viðr (=vinnr) þeima verki ok  
 \*dvergynju Bóurr!**

The asterisk in front of the noun *dvergynju* (nom.sg. *dvergynja*) indicates that such a form is not attested in any other text in Old Scandinavian languages. Grønvik translates this text as “Ulv og Odin og Høye-Tyr, hjelp sønnen (min sønn), som kjemper mot denne verken (verkebyllen) og (mot) dvergkvinnen, Bóurr” (Grønvik 1999: 123), that is, “The Wolf and Óðinn and High-Týr, help [my] son, who is struggling against this abscess and against the female-dwarf, Bóurr” (my translation).

If Grønvik’s interpretation is correct, this inscription is not only the most ancient written reference to a dwarf in Scandinavia, but also one of the few references to a female dwarf ever. Even if Grønvik’s interpretation is wrong, and there is no *\*dvergynja* (‘female dwarf’) in the runic inscription from Ribe, the sequence of runes /tuirk/ is still most likely to be interpreted as /dverg/, that is, a dwarf.<sup>2</sup> See Lauvik (2011: 23ff.) for an overview of possible interpretations of the Ribe-inscription that do not include the reading *\*dvergynja* ‘female dwarf’.

This inscription does not provide sufficient information as to whether ancient dwarfs were perceived as physical beings (and, if so, whether they were thought to be human-like, or not), or whether dwarfs were perceived as spirits. Grønvik’s interpretation may actually point in the direction that the latter assumption is the most plausible. The author interpreted the name Bóurr as meaning “han/hun som forsvarer eller har tilhold i sitt bo” (Grønvik 1999: 119), that is “he/she who protects or abode in their dwelling place”, and pointed out that “dette ordet i vår tekst betegnet vættet (dvergkvinnen) som bodde i verkebyllen, som hadde verkebyllen som sitt bosted” (Grønvik 1999: 116), that is “this word in our text denotes the wight (the female dwarf) who lived in the abscess, who had the abscess as its dwelling place”. The idea of a wight living in an abscess is, arguably, more compatible with the image of a spirit than a physical being. Anatoly Liberman wrote: “Originally, the gods and the giants must have been spirits, the embodiment of natural forces rather than anthropomorphic beings” (Liberman 2002a: 258). Arguably, the ancient Nordic dwarfs were spirits as well, although it is not easy to find out when the dwarfs ceased to be spirits if that is what they originally were, cf. “[d]warfs were invisible spirits millennia ago. We have no way of deciding when they acquired an anthropomorphic form” (Liberman 2016: 315). Two things seem, however, clear. First, the Ribe-inscription shows that dwarfs were thought to be able to engender illnesses, cf. “[j]udging by the etymology of *dvergr*, the most ancient dwarfs were also natural forces, or spirits, capable, like the gods and the elves, of causing disease” (Liberman 2002a: 259). Second, people prayed to Óðinn for help

<sup>2</sup> Erik Moltke (1973) meant that *TverkunR Eggbor* was a personal name. Jens Juhl Jensen (1974) meant likewise that the name was *Tuirkunur*. Later researchers seem to be unanimous in that /tuirk/ must in one or another way be related to the word *dvergr* ‘a dwarf’ (see Grønvik 1999).

against such dwarf-caused illnesses. It seems therefore clear that dwarfs undoubtedly were perceived as *real* beings in 8<sup>th</sup> century's Denmark, although it is rather difficult to decide whether they were (still) perceived as spirits or (already) as physical beings by that time. Provided that Grønvik's interpretation is correct, it is most likely that dwarfs were perceived as spirits, or at least that this particular dwarf was a spirit dwelling in an abscess. Again, if Grønvik's reading and interpretation of the inscription is correct, one can argue that dwarfs of both sexes were believed to exist: the suffixed feminine form *\*dvergynja* implies the existence of the masculine counterpart *dvergr*. (Here it is important to stress that I do not claim Grønvik's interpretation necessarily *is* correct.)

Additional support in favor of the assumption that the most archaic idea of dwarfs was as of spirits with no physical, visible body, is found in etymological considerations. Liberman has proposed an etymology for *dvergr*, where he relates *dvergr* to words meaning 'breathe', 'spirit, ghost' and 'stupid; mad; possessed by a spirit'. Liberman wrote:

"[I]f we assume the protoroot *\*dwezg-* rather than *\*dverg-*, everything will fall into place. In early Germanic, *z* existed only as the result of the voicing of *s*, so that *\*dwezg-* must have been derived from *\*dwesg*; later, *z* was rhotacized (hence *dwergr*). *\*Dwezg-*, from *\*dwes-g-* is related by ablaut to OE *(ge)dwæ̃s* 'dull, foolish; clumsy impostor' (the same root as in OE *gedwæ̃smann* 'fool', *dwæ̃snes* 'folly, stupidity', *gedwæ̃snes* 'dementia'), MHG *twâs* 'fool', MHG *getwâs* 'specter, ghost', MDu. *dwaes* 'foolish' [...] and *gedwas* (with a short vowel) 'stupidity, hallucination, ghost' [...] A *gedwæ̃smann* and a *twâs* seem to have been people possessed by a *\*dwezgaz*, that is, by a dwarf." (Liberman 2016: 312)

The author wrote also:

"In Germanic *\*dwezg-*, *-g-* is a suffix, and the root is that of numerous words gathered under *\*dheues* 'breathe' in Pokorny (268–71). OHG *getwâs* and Anc. Greek *θεός* are both members of this family. Now *dvergr* will join them." (Liberman 2002b: 187)

One might add here that Lithuanian *dvasia* 'ghost, spirit' also belongs to the family of *\*dheues* (Pokorny 1959: 269). If Liberman's etymology is correct, it is highly probable that the most archaic dwarfs indeed were spirits. And if Grønvik's interpretation of the Ribe-inscription is correct, it is probable that Nordic dwarfs were still perceived as spirits as late as around 720 AD. Furthermore, one could ask oneself whether a creature's status as *a spirit vs. a physical being* necessarily are mutually exclusive conditions. Could it not rather be the case that dwarfs were perceived as

spirits, that is, invisible beings, at the same time as they were believed to be able to *manifest* themselves (and *be seen* by humans) as anthropomorphic beings? Finally, due to the lack of other contemporary sources (the 8<sup>th</sup> century), it is impossible to find out whether there were individual differences between Nordic dwarfs regarding their physical status and appearance.

### 3. The anonymous dwarf in *Ynglingatal* (9<sup>th</sup> century)

Starting from the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, the appearance of the dwarfs becomes somewhat more tangible. The poem *Ynglingatal* by Þjóðólfr inn hvinverski (most probably, created in late 9<sup>th</sup> century, cf. Sundqvist 2009: 15f. and Lindow 1995: 9) has the following:

En dagskjarr	And the day-shy
Dúrnir niðja	doorkeeper
salvörðuðr	of Durnir's tribe
Sveigði véltri,	tricked Sveigðir,
þás í stein	when into the stone
enn stórgeði	the spirited
Dusla konr	kinsman of Dusli
ept dvergi hljóp,	ran after a dwarf,
ok salr bjartr	and the bright hall
þeira Sökmímis	of Sökmímir's band,
jötunbyggðr	settled by giants,
við jöfri gein.	swallowed the king.

*Ynglingatal*

*Ynglingatal* in *Ynglinga saga*, trans. Finley and Faulkes

These lines from *Ynglingatal* serve as the evidence that the dwarfs were, by the time the poem was composed, unambiguously perceived as visible beings; or, at least, as beings capable of manifesting themselves as visible ones. The kinsman of Dusli, that is, king Sveigðir, would not have been able to run after the dwarf if he had not seen him. Returning to our hypothesis in the previous section, we do not know whether king Sveigðir really saw *the* dwarf, or only the dwarf's physical, visible manifestation. Unfortunately, the poem does not provide more details about the appearance of the creature king Sveigðir saw. Strictly speaking, we do not know even whether the dwarf (or – the dwarf's manifestation) was anthropomorphic or not, although it may be a reasonable assumption that he was.

Furthermore, it may be argued that the physical appearance of the dwarfs made them distinguishable from other beings. It seems reasonable to assume that



king Sveigðir was able not only to see the dwarf (or his manifestation) and to run after him, but also to identify him as a dwarf. While the dwarf in the Ribe inscription needed not to be seen by humans and was probably recognized and identified as a dwarf by his (her?) ill-doing (that is, causing the illness), the dwarf encountered by king Sveigðir probably just looked like a dwarf – whatever the distinguishing features of a dwarf could have been. Could it be the dwarf's color? The kenning for a dwarf, *Dúrnir niðja salvorðuðr* 'doorkeeper of Dúrnir's tribe', is modified by the adjective *dagskjarr* 'day-shy'. Although it is a mere speculation, we can hypothesize that the day-shy dwarf, spending most of his life in darkness, must be pale, black or colorless. Alternatively, one can argue that king Sveigðir was not aware of what kind of being he was pursuing, or that Sveigðir (or some other people) realized it was a dwarf only *after* the creature had vanished into the rock – together with the king himself. In this interpretation, the distinctive feature of the dwarf would be his connection to rocks and stones rather than his external appearance.

The prose text of the much later *Ynglinga saga* provides stronger reasons to believe that this particular dwarf was anthropomorphic (and, arguably, all dwarfs in general were so as well):

“Sveigðir fór enn at leita Goðheims. Ok í austanverðri Svíþjóð heitir bór mikill at Steini, þar er steinn svá mikill sem stór hús. Um kveldit eptir sólarfall, þá er Sveigðir gekk frá drykkju til svefnbúrs, sá hann til steinsins, at dvergr sat undir steininum. Sveigðir ok hans menn váru mjök druknir ok runnu til steinsins. Dvergrinn stóð í durum ok kallaði á Sveigði, bað hann þar inn ganga, ef hann vildi Óðin hitta. Sveigðir hljóp í steininn; en steinninn lausks þegar aptr, ok kom Sveigðir eigi aptr.”  
 (*Ynglinga saga*, chapter 12)

“Sveigðir went to look for Goðheimr again. And in the eastern part of Svíþjóð there was a large farm called Steinn ('at the Stone'). There is a stone there as big as a large house. In the evening after sunset, when Sveigðir left the drinking to go to his sleeping chamber, he looked towards the stone and saw a dwarf sitting under it. Sveigðir and his men were very drunk, and ran towards the stone. The dwarf stood in the doorway and called to Sveigðir, telling him to go in there if he wanted to meet Óðinn. Sveigðir ran in, and the stone immediately closed behind him, and Sveigðir never came out.” (*Ynglinga saga*, chapter 12, trans. Finley and Faulkes)

Although the text of *Ynglinga saga* does not say explicitly that the dwarf resembled a human, the dwarf's ability to sit (*dvergr sat undir steininum*), to stand (*dvergrinn stóð í durum*) and to speak (*ok kallaði á Sveigði*) makes any other interpretation improbable. We cannot be sure whether the author of *Ynglinga saga* (in all likelihood, Snorri

Sturluson) meant that Sveigðir could identify the dwarf as such just by judging from his appearance, or the close proximity to the stone (*undir steininum*) was the decisive factor. It is not unlikely that dwarfs, though anthropomorphic, were in some way or another different from human people. What exactly made them different and distinguishable from other beings is, however, not clear. Arguably, it was not the size. Liberman (2002b: 176) wrote: “All three races – the gods, the dwarves, and the giants – were anthropomorphic, and their place in the universe, not their size, distinguished them [...]”. The focus in skaldic poetry (and in the *Eddas*) is on the dwarfs’ *role* in mythological events (such as the creation of the mead of poetry), not their physical appearance. Motz wrote the following with regard to the image of the dwarfs in skaldic poetry:

“Skaldic poetry shows dwarfs above all as those who created and lost the mead, and also as the pillars of the sky, and does not evoke an image of their size. This poetry thus allows us to understand that the spirits can be adequately characterized without reference to their stature. It seems, from what has so far been observed, that appearance does not matter greatly with the dwarfs of the Eddic and the skaldic poems.” (Motz 1983: 116)

Thus, the anonymous dwarf in *Ynglingatal* and in *Ynglinga saga* either *is* a physical, visible, and most likely anthropomorphic creature, or is, at least, *capable of manifesting* himself as such. He may have been distinguishable from humans, and the adjective *dagskjarr* ‘day-shy’ used in *Ynglingatal* (but not in the prose text of *Ynglinga saga*) may point into the direction that he may have had a specific color (e.g., he may have been pale, black or colorless). The dwarf’s size and shape is unspecified.

#### 4. Austri, Vestri, Norðri and Suðri

A 10<sup>th</sup> century object, Heysham hogback, may be the earliest visual representation of Old Norse dwarfs. It has been argued that the four figures on the Heysham hogback, Face A, represent Austri, Vestri, Norðri and Suðri, the four dwarfs whose task was to hold the sky (see quotations and references below). The story is best known from Snorri’s *Edda*. According to Snorri, the gods created the sky of Ýmir’s skull, placed the newly created sky over the earth and set a dwarf under each corner:

“Tóku þeir ok haus hans ok gerðu þar af himin ok settu hann upp yfir jörðina með fjórum skautum, ok undir hvert horn settu þeir dverg. Þeir heita svá: Austri, Vestri, Norðri, Suðri.” (*Gylfaginning*, p. 12)

“They also took his skull and made out of it the sky and set it up over the earth with four points, and under each corner they set a dwarf. Their names are Austri, Vestri, Nordri, Sudri.” (*Gylfaginning*, trans. Anthony Faulkes, p. 12)

In *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri Sturluson mentions the following kennings of the sky: “Hvernig skal kenna himin? Svá, at kalla hann [...] erfiði eða byrði dverganna eða hjálm Vestra ok Austra, Suðra, Norðra [...]” (p. 33), “How shall the sky be referred to? By calling it [...] toil or burden of the dwarfs or helmet of Vestri and Austri, Sudri, Nordri [...]” (trans. Anthony Faulkes, p. 88). As one of the examples of such kennings, Snorri quotes the following stanza by Arnórr jarlaskáld (11<sup>th</sup> century):

Björt verður sól at svartri,  
 sökkr fold í mar dökkvan,  
 brestr erfiði Austra,  
 allr glymr sjár á fjöllum.

*Skáldskaparmál*, pp. 33f.

The bright sun will become a black one,  
 earth will sink into dark sea,  
 Austri's toil will split,  
 all the sea will crash on the fells.

*Skáldskaparmál*, trans. Anthony Faulkes, p. 88



**Figure 2.** Face A of the Heysham hogback. Image copyright Humphrey Bolton (geograph.org.uk/p/439385), licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Let us assume the four figures indeed represent the four sky supporting dwarfs. They are clearly anthropomorphic, big-headed, and they reach up to the sky. Could this mean the dwarfs were envisaged as giants? At any rate, they can hardly have been weak. As an additional argument in favor of the assumption that Austri, Vestri, Norðri and Suðri must have been strong and, most likely, full-sized, Lotte Motz wrote that “[t]he task of holding up the sky is in non-Germanic myth, as in the Greek, not entrusted to a stunted being” (Motz 1983: 117). At the same time, one can imagine the sky reaching down to the earth in the horizon, in which case the dwarfs could actually have been short. It is also difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the size of the dwarfs by comparing them to the animals on the same carving, because the carver was certainly limited by the physical size of the object on which the carvings are made.

The appearance of the dwarfs has been characterized as “bestial”. One scholar, Henry Colley March, paid attention to the huge heads and the small limbs and bodies of the dwarfs, pictured on the Heysham hogback:

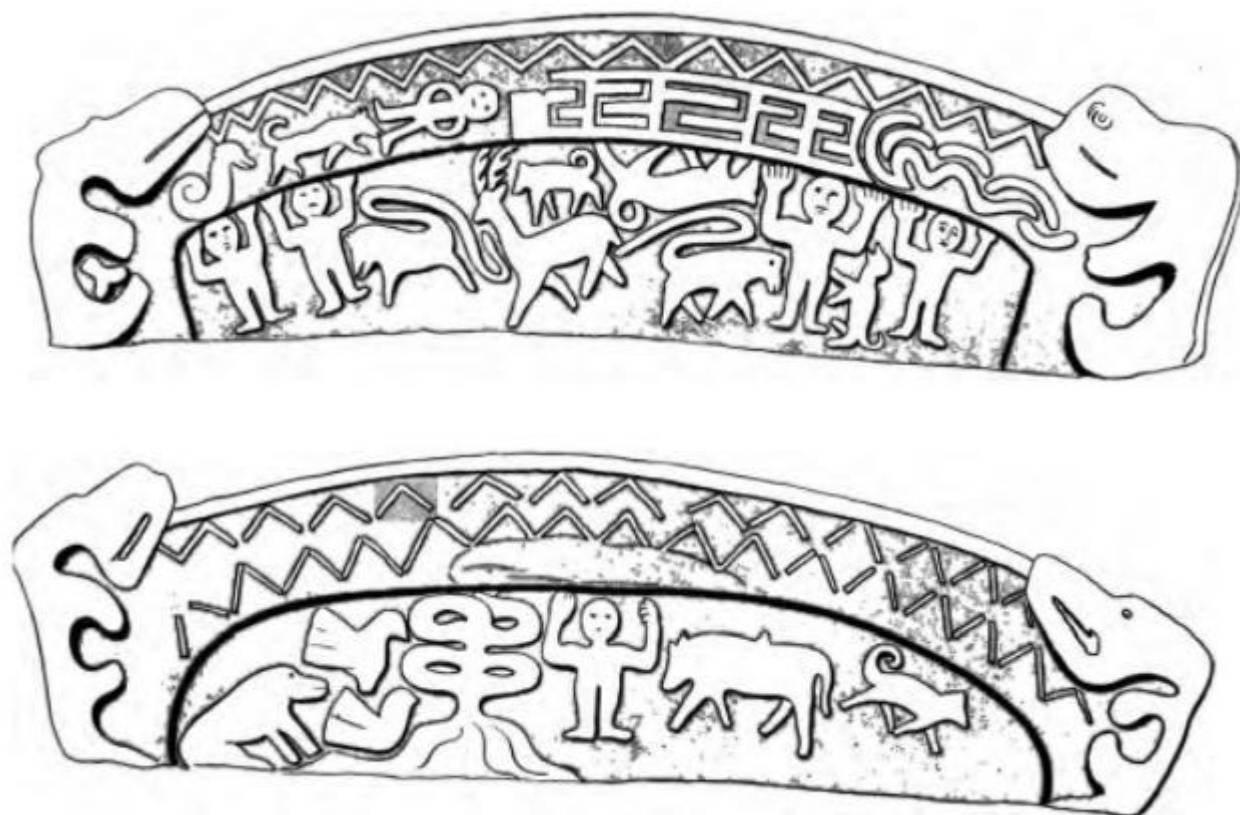
“From the skull of the cosmogonic giant Ými was made the vaulted firmament, and a dwarf was set at each corner to support it, north and south, east and west. ‘The heavens are their burden.’ [...] The dwarves were usually of human shape. [...] The Christian sculptor of the Heysham Hog-back has given the dwarves that support the universe a bestial appearance. [...] [D]warves [...] are aptly indicated by creatures with huge heads and diminutive limbs and bodies, and which carry their burden on their chest and shoulders [...] [B]ut between the legs of Vestri, the dwarf of the west, is a well-carved triskele. This [...] was intended by the Heysham artist to show that it was, in truth, not the bestial dwarves, but the Christian Trinity by whom all thing (*sic*) were upheld.” (March 1892: 71f.)

However, a comparison of the figures of the four dwarfs on face A of the Heysham hogback with the human figure on face B of the same hogback, reveals an astonishing similarity. The dwarfs are in no way more “bestial” than the human, who has been identified as Sigmundr or his son Sigurðr (see Ewing 2003). The head of the human figure is also huge, while his body and his limbs are diminutive, to use March’s words. Even the position of the arms is the same, making it impossible to conclude that the carver ever intended to show the dwarfs as distinguishable from human beings. Actually, we cannot even be sure that the figures on face A indeed represent the dwarfs, Austri, Vestri, Norðri and Suðri. As a matter of fact, other interpretations have been proposed. Thus, Thor Ewing wrote:

“The four figures on the first side have been seen as the dwarfs, North, South East and West, who hold up the sky in Norse cosmology (Davidson 1969 p116, 1988 p174; this view is widely followed in popular literature on mythology). [...] The four figures in the lower panel may represent Sigmundr’s nine ill-fated brothers, attacked by the wolves which were their death; they might also represent the three sons, sent by his sister Signý to Sigmundr in the woods. The inconsistencies in numbers may be explained as alternative traditions, or on artistic grounds for reasons of space and symmetry. A small panel of ornament (above and to the right) perhaps supports the possibility that they are Signý’s sons, as it appears to show a coiled snake – Sigmundr tested the boys by making them knead a poisonous snake into a loaf. Alternatively, the four figures could represent Sigmundr and Sinfjötli his son, and the two kings’ sons whom they steal wolfskins from.” (Ewing 2003)

If Ewing is right, the carving is simply irrelevant for any discussion of medieval ideas about the external appearance of dwarfs. If Ewing is wrong, and the four figures do represent Austri, Vestri, Norðri and Suðri, the only conclusion we can make is that the dwarfs are anthropomorphic. The carving does not show any differences between dwarfs and humans, which probably means that the carver either did not think of any such differences, or that the external appearance of the dwarfs did not matter for him.





**Figure 3.** A diagrammatic restoration of the Heysham hogback, faces A and B (March 1892, plate XI). Not in copyright. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/transactionslan00socigoog#page/n175/mode/2up>

## 5. The dwarfs in the Poetic Edda

Dwarfs figure in more than one poem of the *Poetic Edda*. Given the focus of our research, only occurrences of the dwarfs that allow drawing conclusions about their physical status and external appearance will be discussed in what follows. Hence, there will be no discussion of Þjóðrórir the dwarf known from *Hávamál*, nor of the norns who, according to Fáfnir's words in *Fáfnismál*, were Dvalinn's daughters, *Dvalins dótr*. Instead, we will concentrate on the physical status and external appearance of the dwarfs appearing in *Völuspá*, *Reginismál* and *Alvíssmál*. Ideally, a chronological study would be desirable. Unfortunately, an absolute dating of the poems is hardly achievable. Terry Gunnell wrote:

“The discussion of age and origin [of the eddic poems – my remark] may well go on forever. [...] [T]he only certainty is that the extant poems



were recorded in Iceland in ca. 1270. Everything concerning their history before that date is a matter of speculation.” (Gunnell 2005: 94)

Even a relative dating is a problematic task. Arguably, *Alvíssmál* is the youngest of the three poems. Gade wrote, concerning the age of *Völuspá* and some other eddic poems:

“The dating of the eddic poetry is notoriously difficult and has sparked considerable debate among scholars [...]. The date of Codex Regius (1270) ensures a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the poems contained in that collection, and the eddic poems in *Snorra Edda* cannot be later than from around 1230, but there are echoes of eddic lines in skaldic poetry that suggest a familiarity with such poems as *Hávamál*, *Völuspá*, and *Fáfnismál* going back as far as the tenth and eleventh centuries.” (Gade 2000: 66)

We start with a discussion of the dwarfs in *Völuspá*, then we move on to the dwarfs in *Reginismál* and finally to *Alvíssmál*.

## 5.1 The dwarfs in *Völuspá* (10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> century)

Arguably, *Völuspá* (or a “proto-*Völuspá*”, one could say) was originally composed between ca. 960 and ca. 1065 (McKinnell 2008, 7).<sup>3</sup> The poem does not contain information about dwarfs as individual figures. Scholars have classified dwarfs in *Völuspá*, together with other non-individualized dwarfs in both Eddas, as generic dwarfs (Jakobsson 2008: 184). In what follows, we will discuss two aspects related to the generic dwarfs: the account of the creation of the dwarfs, and dwarf names.

### 5.1.1 The origin of the dwarfs

The reading of *Völuspá*, as well of the other eddic poems, depends on the edition of the Poetic Edda one chooses, while the text in each edition depends first and foremost on the editor’s choice of the manuscript to be used as a primary source – or the only source. The main extant versions of *Völuspá* are preserved in *Codex Regius*, *Hauksbók* and quite a few verses are also found in the different manuscripts

---

<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, there are scholars who disagree with such an early dating of the poem, cf. “[...] *Völuspá* seems rather to be a creation of the learned Middle Ages than a product of the late Viking Age, with a probable dating of closer to 1150 than to 1000.” (Steinsland 2009: 100).

of Snorri's Prose Edda. We will not discuss the differences between the extant text versions in minute detail, nor which of the versions of *Völuspá* might be closest to a "proto-*Völuspá*", but focus instead on one particular aspect of the account of the creation of dwarfs which is directly relevant for our discussion of the external appearance of the dwarfs. This aspect is the use of the noun *mannlíkun* (sg. *mannlíkan*) 'human likenesses', cf. "mann-líkan, n. [...] *beings in human shape*, Vsp. 10" (Cleasby; Vigfusson 1874: 411). According to the version of *Völuspá* quoted (and thus preserved) in the Prose Edda, *dverga drótt* 'a troop of dwarfs' was made *ór brimi blóðgu* 'from bloody surf' or 'from the waves of blood' and *ór Bláins leggjum* 'from Bláins bones' or 'limbs'. A crucial point for our discussion here is the middle voice form of the verb *gerðusk* 'were made, appeared, emerged'. In this version of the myth, the dwarfs are created (or, perhaps, appear spontaneously) as *mannlíkun*. In other words, the dwarfs are clearly anthropomorphic.

<p>Þá gengu regin öll          á røkstóla,          ginnheilug goð,          ok of þat gættusk          at skyldi dverga          drótt of skepja          ór brimi blóðgu          ok ór Bláins leggjum.          Þar mannlíkun          mǫrg of gerðusk,          dvergar í jörðu,          sem Durinn sagði.</p>	<p>Then went all the powers          to their judgment seats,          most holy gods,          and deliberated upon this,          that a troop of dwarfs          should be created          from bloody surf          and from Blain's bones.          There man-forms          many were made,          dwarfs in the earth          as Durin said.</p>
---	---

*Gylfaginning*, pp. 15f

*Gylfaginning*, trans. Faulkes, p. 16

In the *Codex Regius* version of *Völuspá* (and in the Uppsala manuscript of Snorri's *Edda*), the active voice form *gerðu* 'made, created' is used. This difference is significant, as dwarfs in this version are not described as having been created or having emerged as *mannlíkun* themselves, but are instead told to have created *mannlíkun*.

Mikučionis, Ugnius  
 Recognizing a *dvergr*: Physical Status and External Appearance of *dvergar* in  
 Medieval Nordic Sources (8th-13th century)  
[www.revistarodadafortuna.com](http://www.revistarodadafortuna.com)

Þá gengu regin öll á rökstóla, ginnheilug goð, ok um þat gættusk, hverr skyldi dverga dróttir skepja ór Brimís blóði ok ór Bláins leggjum. Þar var Móðsognir mæztr of orðinn dverga allra, en Durinn annarr; þeir mannlíkun mǫrg of gerðu dvergar í jörðu, sem Durinn sagði.	Then gathered together the gods for counsel, the holy hosts, and held converse: who the deep-dwelling dwarfs was to make of Brimir's blood and Bláins bones. Mótsognir rose, mightiest ruler of the kin of dwarfs, but Durin next; molded many manlike bodies the dwarfs under earth, as Durin bade them.	Then all the Powers went to the thrones of fate, the sacrosanct gods, and considered this: who should form the lord of the dwarfs out of Brimir's blood and from Blain's limbs? Then Motsognir became the greatest of all the dwarfs, and Durin another; Many manlike figures they made, dwarfs from the earth, as Durin recounted.
---	--	--

Völuspá, verses 9 and 10

The Catalogue of Dwarfs from  
 “Völuspá”, trans. Hollander

Seeress's Prophecy,  
 trans. Larrington

The question is then whom the subject and the object of the verb *gerðu* refer to, or, to put it in a simpler way: who made whom? Syntactically, the subject is the pronoun *þeir* ‘they’ and the object is *mannlíkun mǫrg* ‘many human likenesses’, but who exactly are ‘they’ and who are these ‘human likenesses’ in this version of the myth? Gro Steinsland suggested that the pronoun *þeir* ‘they’ (the subject) refers to Móðsognir and Durinn, who according to her theory were the only two dwarfs created (presumably, by the gods) originally, and who afterwards produced the *mannlíkun mǫrg* ‘many human likenesses’, viz. new dwarfs (the object). According to Steinsland, this is the only way for new dwarfs to come into being, as the dwarfs cannot reproduce biologically because they are all male.<sup>4</sup> Two of the unfinished *mannlíkun* are afterwards found by the gods who then complete Móðsognir’s and Durinn’s undertaking and create the first human people, a man and a woman (Steinsland 1983: 84–92). Steinsland’s theory was criticized by Margaret Clunies Ross, who did not believe the creation of humans was directly connected to the workshop of dwarfs (Clunies Ross 1994, 165–168). Both Steinsland and Clunies Ross agreed though that dwarfs produced new dwarfs. Essential for our discussion is that *mannlíkun* refers to the dwarfs (excluding Móðsognir and Durinn, the two

<sup>4</sup> A discussion of whether the dwarfs really are an all-male category of supernatural beings is, strictly speaking, outside the scope of this article and must be developed elsewhere. Here it suffices to say that it is hardly the case that female dwarfs had no place in pre-Christian Nordic mythology, although it is true that the Eddas and skaldic poetry only mention male dwarfs explicitly. (Consequently, we have no descriptions of the external appearance of female dwarfs in the Eddas and in skaldic poetry.) There are, however, indirect indications, both in the Eddas and in skaldic poetry, that dwarfs were believed to have families and, by implication, that female dwarfs ought to have been believed to exist. Cf. Andvari’s words “Andvari is my name, Oin is my father’s name” (*The Lay of Regin*, trans. Larrington). Andvari had a father and, presumably, ought to have had a mother as well, although nothing is explicitly told of the mother in the extant text of *Reginsmál*. Several sagas, by contrast, mention female dwarfs explicitly.

first dwarfs, the creators of the *mannlíkun*), who consequently must have been envisaged as anthropomorphic.

An alternative interpretation has been proposed by Tryggvi Gíslason, who meant that it was *humans* whom the dwarfs created from Brimir's blood and Bláinn's bones. According to the author's interpretation, the phrase *hverr dverga* means 'who, or which, of the dwarfs' (*dverga* is thus genitivus partitivus), while *dróttir* refers to 'people, i.e. human beings'.

“De høyhellige guder drøfter hvem av de gode smedene, dvergene, skal skape menneskebildene av jord («ór Brimis blóði ok ór Bláins leggjom»). Deretter finner de tre mektige æser Ask og Embla på stranden, kraftløse og uten lagnad, og de gir dem ånde og tanke, livskraft og gode leter. Dvergene og de høyhellige gudene har fullført sin felles oppgave: å skape mennesket av jord og ved siden å gi det den guddommelige livskraft.” (Gíslason 1984: 87)

“The sacrosanct gods consider who of the good smiths, the dwarfs, shall produce human images out of earth («ór Brimis blóði ok ór Bláins leggjom»). Thereafter, the three mighty Æsir find Ask and Embla on the seashore, helpless and fate-less, and give them the ability to breathe and to think, the strength of life and a good appearance. The dwarfs and the sacrosanct gods have completed their common task: to produce the man out of earth and, in addition, to provide him with the divine strength of life.” (My translation)

Unfortunately for our research, verse 10 of *Völuspá* interpreted the way Gíslason proposed, cannot be used as a positive and decisive proof in favor for the anthropomorphic appearance of the dwarfs, as *mannlíkun* is no longer believed to mean 'human likenesses, human-shaped beings' (referring to dwarfs), but rather 'human figures, i.e., humans'. Still, if the dwarfs were able to create human figures, they arguably were anthropomorphic themselves. Creation of *mannlíkun* by the dwarfs is more compatible with the idea of dwarfs as anthropomorphic beings (able to use hands and tools), than with the idea of dwarfs as non-anthropomorphic beings or as spirits. This impression is further strengthened by verse 48 in *Völuspá*: [...] *stynja dvergar / fyr steindurum, / veggbergs vísir* ('At the gates of their grots / the wise dwarfs groan / in their fell fastnesses', trans. Hollander; 'The dwarfs howl / before their rocky doors, / the princes of the mountain wall', trans. Larrington). Again, the image of dwarfs, groaning or howling in front of stone doors, is most compatible with the idea of anthropomorphic beings. Whether the *Völuspá*-dwarfs, though anthropomorphic, were distinguishable from human people, is not easy to tell.

### 5.1.2 Dwarf names and other considerations

We turn now to a discussion about dwarf names which might shed some light on the appearance of these creatures. Use of dwarf names for such purposes is not unproblematic, but attempts to read some information in the names are justified by the lack of explicit descriptions of dwarfs' appearance. Cf., on one hand, "Sweeping conclusions regarding dwarfs' nature cannot be drawn from their names, which have often been classified and analyzed. Many are obscure, and few contain references to the dwarfs' small size. [...] [T]he names of dwarfs and giants provide little information on the nature of their bearers" (Lieberman 2016: 306), and, on the other hand, "Even though taken in their entirety names tell us next to nothing about the nature of the dwarfs, every now and then they should perhaps be taken into consideration" (Lieberman 2016: 314).

Though fully aware of the problems related to any attempt to gather information on dwarfs' appearance from their names, I would still like to point to some (arguably, significant) facts. Firstly, there are some dwarf names which may point into the direction that some of the dwarfs were tall. This goes for names like *Fullangr* 'long enough' and *Hár* 'high' (cf. Gould 1929: 948 and 961). However, I am not inclined to draw any resolute conclusions from this evidence. The name *Fullangr* is, arguably, not specific enough for a modern reader to know whether the dwarf by this name was indeed tall ('long'), that is, taller than average human height, or just *sufficiently* tall (whatever "sufficiently" might mean). One can be relatively short, but nevertheless sufficiently tall ('long enough') in a given context. The adjective *hár* means not only 'high, tall', but also 'high, sublime, glorious', 'at the highest pitch', 'loud' (Cleasby; Vigfússon 1874: 243f.), and *Hár* (or *Hávi*) is also Óðinn's name. It is not obvious that such a name necessarily describes the dwarf's (or Óðinn's, for that matter) physical appearance. Finally, the name *Hár* has been interpreted as meaning 'with gray hair' (Polomé 1997: 446), and *Hárr* as 'one-eyed; blind' (Polomé 1997: 446f.), which is definitely relevant for a discussion of the dwarfs' appearance, but one can hardly be sure that this is *the* correct interpretation of these particular names.

Another dwarf name, *Bumburr* (and its variants *Bómburr* and *Bömbor*), should probably be interpreted as referring to the stoutness of the dwarf. Chester Nathan Gould interpreted *Bumburr* as "[t]he swollen one. Cp. *bumba* 'drum', MnN *bumba*, 'pregnant female with swollen figure'" (Gould 1929: 943). The author connected this dwarf name with the realm of the dead: "The dead man is *Bumburr*, 'a swollen thing'" (Gould 1929: 959). However, *Bumburr* may simply have been the name of a particularly corpulent dwarf. Edgar C. Polomé wrote that "*Bömbor* is probably a heavy-set person [cf. Icel. *bambur* 'fat barrel, massive horse', also ON *bumba* 'drum' [...]]" (Polomé 1997: 444), without associating the name with the dead. According to

Lotte Motz, the name *Bumburr* means ‘drummer’ and belongs to “[d]warf-names referring to musical or non-musical sound or riotous behavior” (Motz 1973: 103) rather than to the dwarf’s appearance.

Some dwarf names have been interpreted as the evidence for the short stature of dwarfs. Gould wrote:

“When people thought of the small size of dwarves they gave them names suitable to new-born infants; *Fundinn* ‘found’, *Nabbi* ‘little nub’, *Nóri* ‘tiny’, *Nýr* ‘new’, *Patti* ‘little shaver’, a name for a boy baby like Swedish *Putte*, *Qlni* ‘the one on the forearm’, a pat name for a new-born child, given by someone who had noticed how women carry a tiny infant on the forearm.” (Gould 1929: 960f.)

It is hardly convincing that *Fundinn* ‘found’ or *Nýr* ‘new’ necessarily have to invoke associations with “new-born infants”. We do not know why exactly *Fundinn* was called *Fundinn*. Even if it is the case that this particular dwarf was a foundling, the name *Fundinn* can hardly tell anything about his size as an adult. If he was given the name *Fundinn* at the time he was found by someone as a baby-dwarf, he would probably have grown up later, and it is impossible to know to what size he would have grown up. *Nýr* has been associated with the new moon (cf. Gould 1929: 952 and 963; Polomé 1997: 443), and so could *Nýr* have been. The real meanings of *Patti* and *Qlni* are far from evident. The name *Patti* does not occur in the sources that are in focus of this article, so it is rather irrelevant for our current discussion. As to the name *Qlni*, the feminine noun *qln* means ‘fore-arm’ indeed (Cleasb; Vigfusson 1874: 764), but does it follow therefrom that *Qlni* was ‘the one on the forearm’? Finally, the name *Qlni* (or *Qlnir*) may perhaps be related to the proto-root *\*alu-*, meaning ‘protection, luck; ale’ rather than to the noun *qln*. Even if there were strong, independent reasons to believe that (some of) the mythic dwarfs were perceived as short/small, it would still be highly problematic to use names as *Fundinn*, *Nýr*, *Patti* or *Qlni* as further testimony to the case.

Nóri and Nabbi, on the other hand, may indeed have been short, cf.:

“Judging by Mod. Icel. *nóri* ‘something very small; small part of something; small lump; little boy; seal’s cub; narrow creek’, the dwarf Nóri was tiny. Also *nabbi* means ‘pimple, lump; blemish’ in Modern Icelandic, which suggests that the eddic dwarf Nabbi resembled Nóri [...]” (Lieberman 2016: 306)



However, the author's observation that "the common names *nóri* and *nabbi* were first recorded in the seventeenth century" (Liberman 2016: 306) provides good reasons for refraining from any firm conclusions regarding the stature of the mythic dwarfs *Nóri* and *Nabbi*. Again, one has to agree with Liberman, who wrote:

"We have arrived at the conclusion that the eddic dwarves were the gods' most important servants, even culture heroes, and that they were not 'small in stature', at least as a general rule." (Liberman 2002b: 177)

Rather intriguing are the dwarf names referring to colors and brightness. Gould wrote:

"Though dwarves fear the light of the sun, they have, strange to say, names meaning 'bright colored, shining': *Blǫvurr* 'the shining one', *Brísingr* 'flame', *Dellingr* 'the gleaming one', *Fáinn*, *Fár* 'shining', *Glói*, *Glóinn*, *Glóni* 'glowing', *Litr* 'color, [colo]red', *Ljómi* 'gleam', *Mjǫklituðr* 'much-colored'. There are no tales that account for these names; they might refer to the forge fires of the dwarf smiths, but it is more likely that they point to the *hangaeldar*, the mysterious fires which in Icelandic tradition glow on grave mounds, the places where howe-dwellers are found." (Gould 1929: 961)

Furthermore, Gould connects the names *Brúni* and *Bláinn* with the appearance of dead bodies: "[...] as decomposition progresses he (= the dead man, – my remark) becomes *Brúni* 'dark brown', *Bláinn* 'black'." (Gould 1929: 959). The name *Brúni* can, however, mean not only 'brown', but also 'having bushy eyebrows' (Liberman 2002b: 175). John Lindow tentatively connects *Bláinn*, which is not only a *heiti* for a dwarf in the *pulur*, but also an alternate name for Ymir, with the blue color of the sky: "Containing as it does the adjective 'blue', the name might refer to the blue sky. It is, however, also found in the *thulur* as a dwarf name" (Lindow 2001: 82). It seems probable that the color was an important feature of the dwarfs' external appearance; arguably, to a higher degree so than their size was. Snorri Sturluson's connection between *dvergar* and *svartálfar* in the Prose Edda – and his description of the appearance of *dökkálfar* – may also be relevant here.

"Sá er einn staðr þar er kallaðr er Álfheimr. Þar byggvir fólk þat er ljósálfar heita, en dökkálfar búa niðri í jörðu, ok eru þeir ólíkir þeim sýnum en myklu ólíkari reyndum. Ljósálfar eru fegri en sól sýnum, en dökkálfar eru svartari en bik." (*Gylfaginning*, p. 19)

"There is one place that is called Alfheim. There live the folk called light-elves, but dark-elves live down in the ground, and they are unlike them

in appearance, and even more unlike them in nature. Light-elves are fairer than the sun to look at, but dark-elves are blacker than pitch.” (*Gylfaginning*, trans. Anthony Faulkes, p. 19)

The categorical distinctions between *álfar* and *dvergar* deserve a more thorough analysis than it is possible to give here.<sup>5</sup> Some general observations are, however, relevant for the discussion of dwarfs’ appearance. Since *dökkálfar* are described as “blackier than pitch”, it seems reasonable to assume that Snorri did not really distinguish between *dökkálfar* and *svartálfar*. Furthermore, the fact that the realm of dwarfs is repeatedly called *Svartálfaheimr* in the Prose Edda, may be interpreted as a proof that *svartálfar* are not a group of elves, but a different name for dwarfs. The classification of *álfar* into categories *ljósálfar* and *svartálfar* (and *dökkálfar*?) in the Prose Edda may have been Snorri’s own invention, perhaps influenced by Christian doctrines and in particular by *Elucidarius* (Holtsmark 1964: 37f.). Nevertheless, the fact that Snorri identified *svartálfar* with dwarfs (Shippey 2004: 4) or, at least, that the distinction between *svartálfar* and dwarfs for him was blurred (Lindow 2007: 101) may still support the assumption that the color was a distinguishing feature of the dwarfs – probably, also in the more archaic heathen myths. At the same time, we cannot be sure whether Snorri meant that *all* dwarfs were black. There is a possibility that what Snorri said about the appearance of *dökkálfar* was only meant to apply to a certain group of dwarfs.

It remains unknown what exactly made the *dökkálfar* “blackier than pitch”. E.g., was black the natural color of the skin or the hair of the *dökkálfar*, or were they covered with black mud or soot? Either way, the color seems to be an important aspect of the appearance of the dwarfs, making them distinguishable from other beings, such as elves and, arguably, also humans.

Gould may have gone too far proposing that the names *Brúni* and *Bláinn* should be interpreted as a proof that dwarfs were perceived as having a corpse-like appearance (and connecting the other color-related dwarf names with *haugældr*). However, some of the dwarf names do indeed show a connection between the dwarfs and the dead, especially *Nár* ‘corpse’, *Náinn* ‘like a corpse’, *Dáinn* and *Dáni* ‘like one dead’ (cf. Gould 1929: 959). Polomé wrote, almost seven decades after Gould:

“*Nár* means ‘corpse’ in Old Norse and would therefore designate a chthonian being whose cadaverous complexion would reflect his living underground;

<sup>5</sup> Relationship between *álfar* and *dvergar* is discussed in Barreiro 2014. For a semantic field diagram of Old Norse words for beings, see Hall 2007, 32, Figure 2. A discussion of the *álfar* as a category is provided in Shippey 2005 and in Gunnell 2007.

*Náinn* is the ON adjective for ‘near’ (< \**nahwinaR*; [...]), but being coupled with *Nár*, the dwarf-name presumably is synonymous with it; [...] *Dáinn* is an old participial form meaning ‘deceased’ [the long unconscious winter sleep (= ON *dâ*) has been compared, but a relation with *deyja* ‘die’ is more plausible [...]] (Polomé 1997, 443f.)

Thus, we cannot reject the possibility that some dwarfs looked like corpses or even were ones (the “living dead”).<sup>6</sup> Including as many dwarf names into this category as Gould did (1929: 959f., 965), is arguably too far-fetched.

Finally, any discussion of dwarfs’ names and their physical appearance would be incomplete without a reference to Lotte Motz’s publication “New Thoughts on Dwarf-Names in Old Icelandic” (Motz 1973). In this paper, Motz argued that the dwarf-names were closely related to Yule celebrations and traditions, the Carnival season, play acting and masquerading. To put it simply, the dwarf names referred to masks that were used by people during the Yule carnival. Motz’s conclusions, though, have little to do with actual Old Norse sources. The author noted also that “there is little which could not be presented by a mask” (Motz 1973: 112). That is a sad observation, because it means that absolutely no conclusions about the actual appearance of the dwarfs may be drawn from their names, given that Motz’s overall idea about the origins of dwarf names is accepted.

One has to admit, thus, that the name material alone does not provide firm grounds to draw any certain conclusions about the physical appearance of the mythic dwarfs. As Polomé wrote, “[...] the nomenclature of appellations rather suggests fairly complex entities, and the etymology of their names is not of much help” (Polomé 1997: 448).

To sum up the argument so far. Our discussion has shown that it is likely that the dwarfs in skaldic and Eddic poetry were anthropomorphic (or that they were, at least, capable of manifesting themselves as such). The question whether the dwarfs were in some way distinguishable from human people cannot be given a definite answer. Considerations regarding the appearance of the mythic dwarfs must be based on indirect evidence, such as name material and close-reading of the texts where the dwarfs are mentioned. One (negative) observation is that the mythic dwarves need not have been particularly short or small. Arguably, the size of the mythic dwarfs was not decisive in the times when skaldic poetry and the Eddas were created. Anatoly Liberman wrote: “[...] when the dwarves were called \**dwezgōz* or \**dwezgō* (pl.), they were of the same size as the gods and the elves” (Liberman 2002b: 187). Judging from skaldic poetry and the Poetic Edda, the dwarfs’ size is

<sup>6</sup> That *Alíus* and *Olíus*, the sword-producing smiths, are referred to as *dvergar dauðir* ‘dead dwarfs’ in the verses pronounced by dying Hildibrandr in *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, may also be relevant here.

unspecified rather than small even in later times, when Proto-Germanic *\*dwezzgōz* or *\*dwezzgō* had already become Old Norse *dvergar*.

Admittedly, some scholars have argued in favor of the assumption that the dwarfs must have been shorter than the gods and the humans, cf.

“The giants and dwarfs associate with the Aces rather than with each other. One important distinguishing feature is height (i.e. giants and dwarfs are taller or shorter than the deities or humans). This accounts perhaps for a peculiar balance in the narratives of the Aces’ adventures: Aces always confront one giant but two dwarfs, the giants are more often challenged by two or three Aces (Thor or Odin with their associates), while Loki alone confronts the dwarfs.” (Meletinskij 1977)

Such claims are not entirely correct, though. Narratives involving physical contact between *asir*, *jötnar* and *dvergar* suit especially well for a discussion of the relative size of these beings, whether the story is about fighting or about sexual intercourse. Þórr is told to have dealt single-handed with multiple *jötnar* and *tröll* on more than one occasion in the Eddas. Both *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna* mention that Þórr had been in the east, where he apparently was fighting against *jötnar*: *Þórr fór ór Austrvegi* (*Hárbarðsljóð*), ‘Thor was travelling from the east’ (*Harbard’s song*, trans. Larrington); *Þórr kom eigi, því at hann var í Austrvegi* (*Lokasenna*), ‘Thor did not come, because he was away in the east’ (*Loki’s quarrel*, trans. Larrington). Snorri in his *Prose Edda* is even more explicit:

[...] *jötnum* þótti ekki tryggt at vera með Ásum griðalaust, ef Þórr kvæmi heim, en þá var hann farinn í Austrveg at berja tröll. (*Gylfaginning*, chapter 42)

[...] the giants did not think it safe to be among the Æsir without a guarantee of safety if Thor were to return home, but at that time he was gone away into eastern parts to thrash trolls. (trans. Faulkes).

[...] the giant did not think it safe to be without a truce among the Æsir if Thor should return. At that time Thor was away in the east hammering on trolls. (trans. Byock)

In a footnote to his translation, Jesse L. Byock wrote:

The verb used is *berja*, meaning to strike, to beat, with the idea of hammering on something. The medieval author is humorously playing

on words. Rather than fighting with trolls, which requires the verb *berjast* (the ‘-s’ ending changing the meaning of the verb to indicate that two or more people are fighting among themselves), Thor, alone, is hammering on the trolls. (Snorri Sturluson, *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Byock, p. 144, notes to chapter 42, note 1)

*Skírnismál* has a story about the god Freyr falling in love with Gerðr, the daughter of Gymir, who was a *jötunn*. The goddess Freyja was lusted both by *jötnar* and *dvergar* (cf. *Drymskviða* and *Sǫrla þáttr*). In *Alvíssmál*, Alvið the dwarf came alone to Þórr in order to propose to his daughter, contrary to Meletinskij’s statement that the Æsir always confront two dwarfs. Furthermore, the fact that the dwarfs are frequently mentioned in the sources as pairs or groups (of brothers, in many cases) may be an indication of how co-operation was essential for the dwarfs rather than of their small size. It is therefore difficult to accept Meletinskij’s arguments in favor of the view that the dwarfs must generally have been shorter than the gods and the humans.

## 5.2 Dwarfs in *Reginismál*

*Reginismál* tells of one dwarf (Andvari) and one dwarf-like figure (Reginn the smith). The latter plays also a role in *Fáfnismál*. As a matter of fact, *Reginismál* and *Fáfnismál* are not distinguished as two separate poems in *Codex Regius*, the main manuscript of the Poetic Edda. It is rather impossible to establish a precise date of composition of the original poem, or poems, out of which *Reginismál* and *Fáfnismál* as we know them evolved.

“*Reginismál* and *Fáfnismál* (“The Speech of Reginn” and “The Speech of Fáfnir”) are the titles given by editors to a section of text in the *Codex Regius* of the *Poetic Edda* that follows *Grípissþá*. The division of this material into two separate texts is entirely the work of the editors and based solely on evidence from late paper MSS [...] Scholars can do no more than speculate on the date and form of the original texts. In their present form, the texts date from the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the *Codex Regius* was written.” (Grimstad 1993: 520)

As already noted above, skalds of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries must have been familiar with a text we could call “proto-*Fáfnismál*” (Gade 2000: 66). Whether a “proto-*Reginismál*” ever existed as a separate poem, and if so, when it was composed, is hardly possible to tell.

### 5.2.1 Andvari, the shapeshifting dwarf

One of the most noteworthy dwarfs when it comes to a discussion of external appearance, is Andvari. He spends most of the time in water – in a pike’s shape.

“Einn dvergr hét Andvari. Hann var löngum í forsinum í geddu líki  
 ok fekk sér þar matar. [...]

Andvari ek heiti,  
 Óinn hét minn faðir,  
 margan hef ek fors of farit;  
 aumlig norn  
 skóp oss í árdaga,  
 at ek skylda í vatni vaða.” (*Reginsmál*)

“There was a dwarf, called Andvari; he had spent a long time in the falls  
 in the form of a pike and got himself food in that way. [...]

Andvari is my name,  
 Oin is my father’s name,  
 I have spent much time in the falls;  
 A norn of misfortune  
 shaped my fate in the early days  
 so that I have to spend my time in the water.”

(*The Lay of Regin*, trans. Larrington)

In his article about the identity of Litr in the myth about Baldr’s death, Sebastian Cöllen argued that dwarfs were generally known as shape-shifters.<sup>7</sup> Also Lotte Motz wrote that “dwarfs are able to change their form (they assume in the *Reginsmál* animal shape)” (Motz 1973: 110). The name Litr is identical with the noun *litr* ‘color’, which has led some scholars to the conclusion that the fire must have acquired its color after Þórr having kicked Litr into Baldr’s funeral pyre (Williams 2003). The crucial moment in Cöllen’s argumentation is that ‘color’ is not the only meaning of *litr*. Another meaning of this noun is ‘shape’, as in the phrase *skipta litum* ‘to shift one’s shape’. In Cöllen’s view, it is more likely that the dwarf name Litr is related to this latter meaning; an assumption which, according to the author, is supported by the fact that dwarfs were generally able to shift their shape. Rejecting Williams’s theory, Cöllen wrote:

<sup>7</sup> According to Snorri Sturluson’s account in his Prose Edda, Litr is a dwarf. Cöllen argued that in the original heathen myth it was Loki who was referred to as Litr, and that Snorri had misunderstood the original myth.



“Om dvärgarnas *färg* vet vi inte mycket. Att utifrån en hypotetisk ursprungsmyt anta att det är eldens (guldets) färg som åsyftas måste framstå som ganska vågat i förhållande till den mer solida bakgrund vi har till dvärgarnas hamnskifte. Namnet *Litr* finns alltså enligt min mening med i dvärglistan på grund av dvärgarnas förmåga att *skipta litum*.” (Cöllen 2004: 140)

“We do not know much about *the color* of the dwarfs. To assume that it is the color of the fire (or the gold) it is referred to, based on a hypothetical aitiological myth, must be rather risky in comparison with the more solid background we have for the dwarfs’ ability to change their shape. In my view, thus, the name *Litr* is included in the enumeration of the dwarfs because of the dwarfs’ ability to *skipta litum*.” (My translation)

However, it is not obvious that shapeshifting was a general ability of dwarfs. Andvari is the clearest, if not the only, instance of a shapeshifting dwarf in Nordic pre-Christian mythology. Actually, even Andvari is not a shapeshifter *par excellence*, but rather a creature suffering from a curse by an evil norn. What was exactly Andvari’s external appearance when he did not change into a pike, is not totally clear. Most probably, he was anthropomorphic. The case is even clearer in the *Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson, but also *Reginsmál* has “Dvergrinn gekk inn í steininn” ‘The dwarf walked into the rock’, indicating that Andvari the dwarf had legs and could walk when he was not in the shape of a pike. What the size of Andvari was, whether his shape was distinct from a usual human’s shape, and whether Andvari had a prominent color (skin color, hair color, eye color and so on), is unknown.

In addition to the source texts, we have medieval representations of a figure that arguably could be Andvari, in form of carvings on runestones, the Årsunda runestone (Gs 9 in Årsunda, Sandviken) and the Drävle runestone (U 1163 in Drävle, Uppland). If the figures here indeed show Andvari, we can at least observe that both carvers saw the dwarf as an unambiguously anthropomorphic being.



**Figure 4.** A fragment of the Årsunda runestone  
Image credit: Berig, via [Wikipedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Årsunda_runestone_fragment.jpg)



**Figure 5.** A fragment of the Drävle runestone  
Image credit: Berig, via [Wikipedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Drävle_runestone_fragment.jpg)

One could perhaps argue that the carvings on the two runestones show Andvari as a short creature, especially if we assume that Andvaranaut, the ring he carries in his hand, is of the same size as ordinary rings.<sup>8</sup> On the Årsunda runestone, the ring is bigger than the dwarf's head. On the Drävle runestone, the ring is approximately half the height of the dwarf himself; in other words, the dwarf is only twice as high as the diameter of the ring.

It seems, however, more likely that the carvers have made the ring excessively large in order for it to be clearly visible and prominent. The size of the ring may also underline the importance of the ring for Sigurðr's fate and for the story in general. If we compare the size of Andvari with the size of Sigurðr on the Drävle carving, there is no significant difference. Arguably, the figures on the carving were never intended to represent exact proportions of the individual figures relative to each other. The figure with the ring on the Drävle carving has actually been interpreted as Sigurðr himself, cf.:

“The male carries a ring and the female a drinking horn. These figures can be identified in light of the stories from the *Völsung cycle* as Sigurðr presenting the ring Andvaranaut to the valkyrie Brynhildr (or Sigdrífa) who offers him a drink and shares various kinds of wisdom with him.” (Stern 2013: 45).

Of course, this does not lead to the conclusion that Sigurðr, the great hero, was only twice as high as the diameter of the ring.

### 5.2.2 Reginn the foster-father of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani

Reginn the foster-father of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani is known not only from the *Poetic Edda* (*Reginismál* and *Fáfnismál*), but also from the *Prose Edda*, *Völsunga saga* and *Norna-Gests þáttur*.

The figure of Reginn is highly relevant to any discussion about the external appearance of dwarfs, as Reginn is one of the few dwarfs of whom we have visual representations in form of medieval carvings. Admittedly, it is not quite clear whether Reginn was a “proper” dwarf. He is explicitly called *Reginn dverg* ‘Reginn the dwarf’ once in *Norna-Gests þáttur* (*Í þeirri ferð var með Sigurði Hámundr, bróðir hans, ok*

---

<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, the text of the *Prose Edda* has *baugr* ‘ring, worn on the wrist’, and not, say, *finger* ‘finger-ring’. A typical *baugr* must have been bigger than a *finger*. Nevertheless, the diameter of a *baugr* should not exceed the diameter of a man's head if the picture in question was to give correct proportions of the figures depicted.

*Reginn dvergr*, “Hamund, his brother, was with Sigurd on the expedition, and the dwarf Regin”, trans. Hardman). Furthermore, Reginn is described as being *dvergr of vøxt* in the prose introduction of *Reginsmál* and as *dvergr á vøxt* at one other place in *Norna-Gests þáttr*. The other poems of *The Poetic Edda* do not call Reginn a dwarf,<sup>9</sup> as neither *Völunga saga* nor *The Prose Edda* do. Thus, we have to accept the fact that in some versions of the story about Sigurðr Fáfnisbani Reginn was called a dwarf or, at least, his dwarfish appearance was mentioned, while it was not the case in other versions.

The question whether Reginn *was* a dwarf or just *looked* like one may actually pose a smaller problem to our research than it seems at a first glance. Even if Reginn was not a real dwarf, but looked like one, we can still use the description of his appearance in order to get an idea of what real, proper dwarfs looked like. Bigger problems arise when we take into account versions of the story where Reginn is *neither* called a dwarf, *nor* his dwarfish appearance is mentioned.

It is not quite clear what *vøxtr* refers to, exactly. The phrase *dvergr of vøxt* is often translated as ‘a dwarf in stature’ by translators of *The Poetic Edda* and the story of Norna-Gest into English.<sup>10</sup> Santiago Barreiro suggests that *vøxtr* may be interpreted as ‘condition, state’ rather than ‘(physical) stature’. In Barreiro’s view, there is a discrepancy between being “a dwarf in stature” and being of the same height as ordinary human men, which, the author assumes, is a proven fact that the dwarfs were.

“[...] problems arise with the following poem, *Reginsmál*. In the prose introduction to the poem, it is said that Reginn ‘*var hverjum manni bagari ok dvergr of vøxt*’. He is called both a man (in fact, the most skillful of men) and a *dvergr of vøxt*. While this is usually translated as meaning ‘a *dvergr* in stature’, we already know that *dvergar* seem to have had the same size that men do. So there happens to be a possible solution to this contradiction: either we imagine this to be a late interference from medieval beliefs about the small size of all ‘dwarfs’ or we translate the word by its meaning ‘condition, state’ so we can still hold to a man-sized Reginn with a ‘*the condition of a dvergr*’, whatever that could mean.” (Barreiro 2008: 8)

I find it rather improbable that *vøxtr* could have been used with the meaning ‘condition, state’ with a reference to a person. One of the meanings of *vøxtr*

<sup>9</sup> Admittedly, the name Reginn is mentioned among the many other dwarf names in *Völuspá*. It is not clear whether – and rather unlikely that – the two Reginns are identical.

<sup>10</sup> The phrase “a dwarf in stature” is, for example, used in translations by Patricia Terry (1969), Henry Adams Bellows (1926), and Nora Kershaw (1921). Carolyne Larrington (2014) translated the phrase as ‘a dwarf in height’.

supplied in Cleasby and Vigfússon's dictionary indeed is 'standing, state, the circumstance of a case' (Cleasby; Vigfússon 1874: 723), but all the examples illustrating this particular meaning refer to a state of affairs rather than to a living being or a physical object. The most plausible meanings of *vøxtr* in the description of Reginn are, thus, 'size, height, stature' – or, perhaps, 'shape'. The fact that *vøxtr* can mean 'shape' may be illustrated by a short quotation from the *First Grammatical Treatise* (Benediktsson 1972: 210f.). When the First Grammarian wrote “*E̅ er ritinn með lykkju as, en með ǫllum vexti es [...]*” (“*E̅ is written with the loop of a, but with the full shape of e [...]*”, trans. Benediktsson), he referred not to the size, but to the shape of the letter *e̅*. If one assumes this latter meaning (i.e., ‘shape’) was intended in the description of Reginn, the solution to the discrepancy proposed by Barreiro may not be necessary at all. Arguably, there is no contradiction between being *dvergr* of *vøxt* and being man-sized. Reginn may have been as tall, or approximately as tall, as Sigurðr.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Reginn may have differed from Sigurðr not in terms of height, but in terms of width or breadth. In what follows, we will examine this possibility. To a great delight of any researcher interested in the external appearance of dwarfs, there is a rune carving, known as the Sigurd runestone at Ramsundsberget, or Sö 101, in Södermanland, Sweden.



**Figure 6.** The carving on the Sigurd runestone (Sö 101). Public domain via Wikipedia Commons  
<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4f/Sigurd.svg/2000px-Sigurd.svg.png>

The carving is dated ca. 1030 (Symons 2015: 88). It represents Sigurðr (two figures, the one killing the dragon and the other steaking its heart, number 5 resp. 1 in the

<sup>11</sup> In the text of *Reginsmál*, the size of Reginn is unspecified. But see the discussion of carvings depicting Reginn and Sigurðr in what follows.



picture), Fáfnir (no number), Grani (number 4), birds in a tree (number 2), Otr (number 6) and Reginn (number 3).

Neil Price wrote: “[...] Reginn is a dwarf, so *this* is what a dwarf looks like, although with a head attached. In other words, apparently no different from any other male figure (though perhaps he was coloured distinctively?)” (Price 2006: 181). The author’s suggestion that Reginn might have been colored distinctively is very interesting. We do not know, of course, whether the figure of Reginn had a distinct color in the carving originally, but if it did, the carver may have had the idea that it was the color (as opposed to the size and the shape) that distinguished dwarfs from other beings. But is Price’s statement about there being no differences between Reginn and the other male figures (viz., the two Sigurðr-figures) in the carving, correct? The figure, representing Reginn, ought to be scrutinized, with special focus on peculiarities that are uniquely characteristic of Reginn (that is, *not* shared by Reginn and Sigurðr). There may be certain differences between the figures of Reginn and Sigurðr in terms of size and shape.

Lena Liepe (1989: 4) noticed Reginn’s round eye, expressed nose, pointed beard, crooked small legs and rough arms in the carving. However, these features do not make the shape of Reginn distinguishable from humans. Reginn’s legs seem indeed to be disproportionally short, but the same goes for Sigurðr’s own legs. Reginn’s hands look too large in proportion to the rest of his body, but again so do Sigurðr’s hands at least on the one of the figures, the one depicting a man steaking the dragon’s heart (number 1). This is especially clear when one compares the size of Sigurðr’s hands with the size of his head. Describing the appearance of Sigurðr, Liepe (1989: 4) noticed virtually the same features as in Reginn’s case, i.e. a round eye, a forceful nose, and strong arms and hands, which contrast with small and thin legs. What in my view can be seen in the picture, and what could make Reginn different from Sigurðr, is Reginn’s broad shoulders and his brawny arms. Sigurðr’s shoulders seem noticeably narrower than Reginn’s. Is this what makes Reginn *dvergr of vǫxt*? Reginn looks neither particularly thick nor thin, but robust and athletic. A sturdy smith, that is what he is. Therefore, I propose that the dwarfish *vǫxtr* ‘shape’ refers to sturdiness and especially to the breadth of the shoulders and muscularity of the arms.

We can unfortunately draw no certain conclusions about the relative size of Reginn judging just by the carving. Reginn is more or less of same size as Sigurðr himself, but the carving need not have been intended to provide exact proportions of the individual figures relative to each other. In particular, the birds on the tree (number 2) look excessively big to be nuthatches (*igður*), small birds of the genus *Sitta*, as they are identified as in *Fáfnismál*, *Völsunga saga* and *The Prose Edda*. Therefore, the carving cannot be used as a proof that Reginn was equally tall as Sigurðr; neither the opposite can be claimed with assurance. (Alternatively, we can

assume that the carver knew a version of the story where birds were not specifically called *igður* ‘nuthatches’; this is the case in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, to mention an example.) Reginn seems thus to have been recognizable as a dwarf or a creature reminiscent of the dwarfs, but it is not obvious that it was his size, his short legs or his big hands that made him notably different from Sigurðr or other people. Reginn’s broad shoulders, muscular arms and his sturdiness in general may have been the most important distinctive features in terms of shape.

Apparently, Reginn has a pointed beard in the Sö 101 carving (unless it is his misshapen chin, which seems less probable). This is interesting because the beard is not mentioned in the texts; in fact, no Old Norse sources describe dwarfs as bearded.<sup>12</sup> The woodcarvings in the doorway of Hylestad stave church in Norway (dated ca. 1200–1250, Magerøy 1993: 734) unmistakably show Reginn as a bearded man. In addition, the Hylestad-carvings provide stronger arguments in favor of the assumption that Reginn and Sigurðr were imagined as equally tall since the two figures are here (as opposed to Sö 101) placed next to each other. The problem is apparently that there is nothing at all, in terms of appearance, what could enable us to identify the one figure as Reginn, let alone as a dwarf. It is only the roles in the narrative that allow us to see who is Reginn, and who is Sigurðr in the Hylestad-carvings (Reginn is killed by Sigurðr, not vice versa). It is therefore possible that the carver did not think of any noteworthy differences between the appearance of dwarfs and the appearance of ordinary human men. It is also possible that the carver knew a version of the story about Sigurðr Fáfnisbani where neither Reginn’s identity as a dwarf nor his dwarf-like appearance were alluded to. Either way, the Hylestad-carvings do not shed light on differences between dwarfs and humans in terms of appearance.

---

<sup>12</sup> In one Faroese tale, dwarfs are explicitly told to have been beardless: “Dvörgar eru lágir og tjúkkir, skeggleysir, men tó ikki ljótir á at lita” (Hammershaimb 1891: 326), ‘Dwarfs are short and thick, beardless, but not ugly to be looked at’ (my translation).





**Figure 7.** «Sigurd Portal (Sigurd kills Regin)» av Haldrik at the English language Wikipedia. Licensed under Creative Commons licence BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sigurd\\_Portal\\_\(Sigurd\\_kills\\_Regin\).png#/media/File:Sigurd\\_Portal\\_\(Sigurd\\_kills\\_Regin\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sigurd_Portal_(Sigurd_kills_Regin).png#/media/File:Sigurd_Portal_(Sigurd_kills_Regin).png)

Both in *Reginismál* and in *Norna-Gests þáttur* Reginn is said to have been *grimmr*, but the use of this adjective raises several questions. Firstly, it is not obvious whether dwarfs were generally *grimmir* in the same way as Reginn was, or he was rather unlike dwarfs in this particular respect. In other words, it is not obvious that being *grimmr* is part of being *dvergr of vǫxt*; being *grimmr* may just as well contrast with being *dvergr of vǫxt*. Secondly, it is not clear whether *grimmr* in this case characterizes Reginn's temperament or his appearance (or, perhaps, both at the same time). The adjective *grimmr* was used in both meanings, though more commonly in the first one:

- a. 'stern', 'savage', as in *ákafamaðr mikill í skapi, grimmr, úþýðr ok fátálr*;
- b. with the notion of 'ugly', 'hideous', as in *ljótt andlit ok grímt ok andstygt mannligu kyni*

Cf. also compounds *grimmbugaðr* 'in a grim, fierce humour' vs. *grimmleitr* 'grim, stern-looking' (Cleasby; Vigfússon 1874: 215).

To sum up: the formulation *hann var [...] dvergr of vøxt* indicates that there were certain specific features in terms of the physical appearance that made dwarfs distinguishable from human men and other beings. Dwarfs may have been imagined as markedly broad-shouldered, muscular, sturdy, bearded (judging by the Ramsundberget-carving Sö 101), ugly (*grimmir*, judging by the source texts) and maybe (?) their specific color was prominent. It is rather uncertain in what ways exactly dwarfs were thought to have looked different from ordinary humans. Reginn's size is unspecified rather than necessarily smaller than, or necessarily equal to, Sigurðr's size.

### 5.3 Alvíss, the eponymous hero of *Alvíssmál*

One of the few dwarfs, whose physical appearance is explicitly alluded to in *The Poetic Edda*, is Alvíss, the unsuccessful suitor for Þórr's daughter in *Alvíssmál*. It is unknown when the poem was composed originally, but ca. 1200 has been suggested (Acker 2002, 213). Þórr addresses him with the following words, referring both to the color and to the shape:

Hvat er þat fira?  
 Hví ertu svá fölr um nasar?  
 Vartu í nótt með ná?  
 Þursa líki  
 Þykki mér á þér vera;  
 ert-at-tu til brúðar borinn.

*Alvíssmál*, verse 2

What sort of man is that,  
 why so pale about the nostrils,  
 did you spend a night with a corpse?  
 The image of an ogre  
 you seem to be to me,  
 you are not meant for a bride.

*All-Wise's Sayings*, trans. Larrington

The unfriendly welcome shows Alvíss as anything else but attractive. It seems that Alvíss looked clearly different than the gods and the humans. The phrase *þursa líki* shows him as monstrous – at least, in Þórr's view. Alvíss is a “pale, corpse-like ogre of a husband” (Acker 2002: 213). Why Alvíss was “pale about the nostrils” (*fölr um nasar*) may be accounted for in more than one way:

“Thor's question concerning the paleness of Alviss may be taken a number of ways. If the statement was to fit the fact that dwarves are black, it might be said that Alviss was pale with *fear* at the anticipation of Thor's retribution. But such an interpretation seems rather stretched given that (highly uncharacteristically) Thor does not respond to Alviss violently. It is far more probable that the description of Alviss as pale was used to emphasise the way in which dwarves stay out of the sun, a

pertinent fact to highlight given the ending of the story.” (Wilkin 2006: 69)

But why is Alvíss depicted as ogre-like (*þursa líki*)? Alvíss’s monstrous appearance may, in fact, be indirectly connected with the dwarf’s wisdom. Generalizing about dwarfs’ appearance and their skills, Motz wrote:

“It is therefore possible to assume that the deviation of the dwarfs from human beauty had served in archaic time [...] to mark their sacred ‘otherness’, or the price paid for the attainment of their wisdom and their magic skills, or their belonging to an older generation of gods who had not acquired human shape. [...] If the word *dvergr* is indeed traceable to an Indo-European root meaning ‘damage’ we may understand it to reflect the physical deformity which had marked dwarfs as the ‘damaged ones’, those who paid the price for their magical endowment.” (Motz 1983: 118)

Admittedly, *Alvíssmál* is not exactly a text from archaic time, if it indeed was created around year 1200. Nevertheless, Motz’s ideas may be applied to Alvíss as well. Alvíss is the omniscient dwarf, ‘All-wise’. If there is a dwarf who became monstrous in exchange for his wisdom, who else would it be if not Alvíss?

Although both the color (pale) and the shape (ogre-like) have been referred to, the poem says nothing about the dwarf’s size. The phrase *þursa líki* does not imply that Alvíss was small and short. On the contrary, we may assume that he was not noticeably smaller than Þórr’s daughter (and, by implication, than Þórr himself), since he wanted to marry her – or, at least, that the size was not of decisive importance. Paul Acker hypothesizes that Alvíss may have been Dvalinn in disguise:

“Since Dvalinn and Alvíss are the *only* dwarves for whom a deadly delay can be asserted with any degree of confidence, might we go one step further and suggest that in fact Alvíss *is* Dvalinn, travelling – as Óðinn often did – under an assumed name? In any case the term *Dvalins leica* as the dwarves’ name for the sun neatly forecasts the appearance of the sun at the poem’s close, bringing with it the demise of Alvíss: the dwarf who knew all, even (perhaps) his own fate.” (Acker 2002: 220)

Unfortunately, Dvalinn’s appearance is also unknown, so we have no firm grounds to theorize further about the appearance of Alvíss based on Acker’s hypothesis.

## 6. Summing up and conclusions

We know almost nothing about the physical appearance of the ancient, pre-literary dwarfs of Nordic mythology and folk-belief. The dwarf referred to in the runic inscription from Ribe may well have been an invisible being, a bodiless spirit. This assumption is supported by the etymology of the noun *dvergr*. Due to the lack of comparative material, we cannot know whether there were any individual differences between the dwarfs at that time, either in terms of appearance, or in any other aspect. Both male and female dwarfs may have been believed to exist as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century, especially if Grønvik's interpretation of the Ribe inscription is correct.

The dwarf in *Ynglingatal* is unambiguously physical and visible – or, at least, he is capable of *manifesting* as such. There are no reasons not to believe he was anthropomorphic, although the text does not describe the external appearance of the dwarf. Therefore, his shape is, strictly speaking, unspecified.

It has been argued by some scholars that the Heysham hogback represents the sky supporting dwarfs, Austri, Vestri, Norðri, and Suðri. Assuming this is correct, the carvings do not provide sufficient grounds to identify any specific features of the external appearance of the dwarfs, making them distinguishable from ordinary humans. The dwarfs are, however, undoubtedly anthropomorphic.

Mythic dwarfs in the *Poetic Edda* are rather unambiguously anthropomorphic creatures. There is no evidence that all the mythic dwarfs were small, although some of them may have been, cf. especially dwarf names like Nóri and Nabbi. Some of the dwarfs may actually have been tall (Fullangr, Hár) or corpulent (Bumburr). It seems likely that dwarfs were, as a rule, distinguishable from other anthropomorphic beings, including humans, in terms of appearance. Arguably, the color was a distinguishing feature of the physical appearance of the dwarfs to a higher degree than the size, cf. especially names like Littr, Mjòklituðr, Bláinn and Brúni, and Snorri's depiction of the *dökkálfar*. Some dwarfs may have resembled corpses – or even been “living dead”, cf. the names Nár, Náinn, Dáinn and Dáni.

The three individual eddic dwarfs we have discussed in this article, Andvari, Reginn, and Alvíss, are unique in their own way. Andvari the dwarf spends a lot of time in a pike's shape, as he is cursed by a *norn*. He is however able to turn back to his original anthropomorphic shape occasionally. Whether he is in any respect distinguishable from ordinary humans when he does turn back to his human form, is not known. Reginn was most probably distinguishable from ordinary humans, as indicated by the phrase *dvergr of vǫxt* ‘a dwarf in stature (height? shape?)’, although it is impossible to decide what exactly made him different from other people judging

by the extant texts. The carvings on the Sigurd runestone do not depict him as significantly different from Sigurðr himself, which has led some scholars to conclude that Reginn (and, by extension, dwarfs in general) looked just the same as other male figures. In my view, if there is anything special about Reginn in the carving, it must be his broad shoulders and general muscularity. Interestingly enough, both the carvings on the Sigurd runestone and the Hylestad-carvings show Reginn as a bearded figure. This is curious because there are no Old Norse texts explicitly describing the dwarfs as bearded, which, of course, does not necessarily mean that the dwarfs were envisaged as beardless. Alvíss is pale, ogre-like and, in terms of size, he is arguably not significantly different from the gods. Sunshine is fatal to Alvíss.

At a first glance, it is tempting to propose the conclusion that there is a clear tendency in the chronological development of the external appearance of dwarfs, namely from the vaguest to more and more detailed. The earliest reference to a dwarf, the Ribe-inscription is so vague that we cannot even decide whether the dwarf in question was a spirit or a physical being. The second earliest attestation of a dwarf, *Ynglingatal*, shows the dwarf (or his manifestation) as a visible being, probably anthropomorphic and perhaps distinguishable from human people. With increasing degree of confidence, we can state that the dwarfs of the Poetic Edda were anthropomorphic and (in some cases, at least) distinguishable from human people, but what exactly made them different from humans and other anthropomorphic beings may have differed from dwarf to dwarf: some dwarfs may have been tall, some may have been short, quite a few may have had a prominent color and more than one may have looked like corpses. However, I would refrain from firmly claiming that the development from totally vague to increasingly more detailed, necessarily is chronological. Firstly, we have too little source material from the period in question to make any such claims. Secondly, different belief systems involving dwarfs may well have lived side by side in the Nordic countries through centuries. There may have existed stories depicting dwarfs as spirits at the same time as other stories showed them as physical beings. Arguably there were significant differences in terms of appearance, as well as in other aspects, between the individual dwarfs even in stories originating from the same period of time. We cannot, for example, claim that all dwarfs, contemporary to Andvari, must have been cursed by norns and turned into non-anthropomorphic beings. Likewise, it would be directly wrong to claim that sunshine is fatal to all dwarfs, who are contemporary to Alvíss (see Acker 2002: 219). One should also avoid overgeneralization discussing physical status and external appearance of the dwarfs. Different dwarfs are... well, different.



## References

### Primary sources

- All-Wise's Sayings. (2014). In: *The Poetic Edda*. Trans. Carolyne Larrington. Revised edition. Oxford World's Classics (pp. 105-109). Oxford University Press.
- Alvíssmál. (1954). In: Jónsson, G. (ed.). *Eddukvæði (Samundar Edda)*, fyrri hluti (pp. 175-184). Akureyri: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.
- Ásmundar saga kappabana. (1943). In: Jónsson, G.; Vilhjálmsson, B. (eds.). *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, Vol. 1. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan forni.
- Hammershaimb, V. U. (ed.) (1891). *Farøsk anthologi*. Vol. 1. København: Møller & Thomsen.
- Norna-Gests þáttur. (1943). In: Jónsson, G; Vilhjálmsson, B. (eds.). *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, Vol. 1 (pp. 167-187). Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan forni.
- Reginismál. (1954). In: Jónsson, G. (ed.). *Eddukvæði (Samundar Edda)*, fyrri hluti (pp. 279-288). Akureyri: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.
- Seeress's Prophecy. (2014). In: *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington. Revised edition. Oxford World's Classics (pp. 3-12). Oxford University Press.
- Snorri Sturluson. (1911). Ynglinga saga. In: Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla. Noregs konunga sögur*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson (pp. 04-35). Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag.
- Snorri Sturluson. (1987). *Edda*. Trans. Anthony Faulkes. Everyman's Library. London and Melbourne: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.
- Snorri Sturluson. (2005a). *The Prose Edda*. Trans. Jesse L. Byock. Penguin Classics. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Snorri Sturluson. (2005b). *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, edited by Anthony Faulkes. Second edition. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London. Online <http://www.vsnrweb-publications.org.uk/Edda-1.pdf> [accessed 13-11-2015].
- Snorri Sturluson. (2011). Ynglinga saga. In: Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*. Volume 1. The beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason. Translated by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London. Online

<http://www.vsnrweb-publications.org.uk/Heimskringla%20I.pdf> [accessed 13-11-2015].

The Catalogue of Dwarfs from “*Völuspá*”. (1962). In: *Poetic Edda*, trans. Lee M. Hollander. Second edition, revised (pp. 322-323). Austin: University of Texas Press.

The Lay of Regin. (2014). In: *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington. Revised edition. Oxford World's Classics (pp. 147-152). Oxford University Press.

*The Story of Norna-Gest*. (2005). Trans. George L. Hardman. The Northvegr Foundation. Online <http://www.northvegr.org/> [accessed 13-11-2015].

*Völuspá*. (1954). In: Jónsson, G. (ed.). *Eddukvæði (Sæmundar Edda)*, fyrri hluti (pp. 01-22). Akureyri: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan

Þjóðólfr inn hvinverski. (1911). Ynglingatal. In: Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla. Noregs konunga sögur*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson (p. 11). Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag.

## Bibliography

Acker, P. (2002). Dwarf-Lore in *Alvíssmál*. In: Acker, P.; Larrington, C. (eds.). *The Poetic Edda. Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (pp. 213-227). New York & London: Routledge.

Anderson, J. (2016.) Dwarf. *Lexiculture: Papers on English Words and Culture*, vol. 2, article 2. Online: <https://glossographia.wordpress.com/2016/04/06/lexiculture-dwarf/> (accessed 09-06-2017).

Barreiro, S. (2008). Dverg and the Dead. *Brathair – Revista de Estudos Celtas e Germânicos* 8 (1), 03-16.

Barreiro, S. (2014). Religion, Álfar and Dverg. *Brathair – Revista de Estudos Celtas e Germânicos* 14 (1), 29-49.

Benediktsson, H. (ed. and trans.) (1972). *The First Grammatical Treatise: Introduction, Text, Notes, Translation, Vocabulary, Facsimiles*. Reykjavík: Institute of Nordic Linguistics.

Cleasby, R.; Vigfusson, G. (1874). *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon press.

- Clunies Ross, M. (1994). *Prolonged echoes*. Volume 1. Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society. Odense: Odense University Press.
- Cöllen, S. (2004). Dvärgen som hamnskiftare: Till förståelsen av det fornvästnordiska dvärghamnet Litr. *Saga och sed: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademiens årsbok*, 137-144.
- Ewing, Th. (2003). Understanding the Heysham hogback: A tenth-century sculpted stone monument and its context. *Transactions of the The Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire*, 152, 01-20. Online: [https://www.academia.edu/333993/Understanding\\_the\\_Heysham\\_Hogback\\_a\\_Tenth-Century\\_Sculpted\\_Stone\\_Monument\\_and\\_its\\_Context](https://www.academia.edu/333993/Understanding_the_Heysham_Hogback_a_Tenth-Century_Sculpted_Stone_Monument_and_its_Context) [accessed 27-05-2017]
- Gade, K. E. (2000). Poetry and its changing importance in medieval Icelandic culture. In: Clunies Ross, M. (ed.). *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (pp. 61-95). Cambridge, New York etc.: Cambridge University Press.
- Gíslason, T. (1984). “hverr skyldi dverga dróttir skepja...” In: *Festskrift til Ludvig Holm-Olsen på hans 70-årsdag den 9. juni 1984*. Øvre Ervik: Alvheim & Eide, Akademisk forlag, 84-88.
- Gould, C. N. (1929). Dwarf-Names: A Study in Old Icelandic Religion. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 44 (4), 939-967.
- Grimstad, K. (1993). Reginsmál and Fáfnismál. In: Pulsiano, P.; Wolf, K. et als. (eds.). *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*. Garland Encyclopedias of the Middle Ages (pp. 520-521). New York & London: Garland Publishing.
- Grønvik, O. (1999). Runeinnskriften fra Ribe. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 114, 103-127.
- Gunnell, T. (2005). Eddic Poetry. In: McTurk, R. (ed.). *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (pp. 82-100). Oxford etc.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Gunnell, T. (2007). How Elvish Are the *Álfar*? In: Wawn, A; Johnson, G; Walter, J. (eds.). *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of T.A. Shippey* (pp. 111-130). Turnhout: Brepols.
- Hall, A. (2007). *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity*, Anglo-Saxon Studies, 8. Woodbridge: Boydell.

- Holtsmark, A. (1964). *Studier i Snorres mytologi*. Skrifter utgitt av det Norske Videnskaps-akademi i Oslo II. Historisk-filosofisk klasse, ny serie, 4. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Jakobsson, Á. (2008). Enabling Love: Dwarfs in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances. In: Wolf, K.; Denzin, J. (eds.). *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland. Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*. Islandica 54 (pp. 183-206). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library.
- Lauvik, H. T. B. (2011). *Helse, sykdom og helbredelse i det norrøne førkristne samfunn i et religionsvitenskapelig perspektiv*. Masteroppgave i religionsvitenskap. Institutt for arkeologi, historie, kultur- og religionsvitenskap Universitetet i Bergen. Online: <https://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/5720/87653816.pdf?sequence=1> [accessed 13-11-2015]
- Liberman, A. (2002a). What Happened to Female Dwarfs? In: Simek, R.; Heizmann, W. (eds.). *Mythological Women. Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz (1922–1997)*. Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia 7 (pp. 257-263). Wien: Fassbaender.
- Liberman, A. (2002b). A Cobweb of Dwarves and Dweebs. In: Anderson, L.; Lull, J. (eds.). *"A Certain Text". Close Readings and Textual Studies on Shakespeare and Others, in Honor of Thomas Clayton* (pp. 173-192). Newark: University of Delaware Press/London: Associated University Press.
- Liberman, A. (2016). *In Prayer and Laughter. Essays on Medieval Scandinavian and Germanic Mythology, Literature, and Culture*. Moscow: Paleograph Press.
- Liepe, L. (1989). Sigurdssagan i bild. (Illustrations of the Sigurd saga.) *Fornvännen* 84, 01-11.
- Lindow, J. (1995). Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millenium of World View. *Scandinavian Studies*, 67 (1), 08-31.
- Lindow, J. (2007). *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press.
- Magerøy, E. M. (1993). Wood carving. In: Pulsiano, P; Wolf, K. *et als.* (eds.). *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*. Garland Encyclopedias of the Middle Ages (pp. 727-734). New York & London: Garland Publishing.
- March, H. C. (1892). The Pagan-Christian Overlap in the North. *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 9, 49-89.

- McKinnell, J. (2008). *Völuspá* and the Feast of Easter. *Alvíssmál* 12, 03-28.
- Meletinskij, E. (1977). Scandinavian Mythology as a System of Oppositions. In: Jason, H./Segal, D. (eds.). *Patterns in Oral Literature*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton Publishers, 251-260.
- Mikučionis, U. (2014). The Family life of the Dwarfs and its Significance for Relationships between Dwarfs and Humans in the Sagas. *Maal og Minne*, 106 (2), 155-191.
- Motz, L. (1973). New Thoughts on Dwarf-Names in Old Icelandic. *Frühmittelalterliche Studien. Jahrbuch des Instituts für Frühmittelalterforschung der Universität Münster*. 7. Band, 100-117.
- Motz, L. (1977). The Craftsman in the Mound. *Folklore*, 88 (1), 46-60.
- Motz, L. (1983). *The Wise One of the Mountain. Form, Function and Significance of the Subterranean Smith. A Study in Folklore*. Göttingen: Kümmerle Verlag.
- Piggot, G. (1839). *A Manual of Scandinavian Mythology, Containing a Popular Account of the Two Eddas and of the Religion of Odin. Illustrated by Translations from Oehlenschläger's Danish Poem The Gods of the North*. London: William Pickering.
- Polomé, E. C. (1997). Notes on the dwarfs in Germanic tradition. In: Eliasson, S; Jahr, E. H. (eds.). *Language and its Ecology. Essays in Memory of Einar Haugen* (pp. 441-450). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Pokorny, J. (1959). *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. I band. Bern & München: Francke Verlag.
- Price, N. (2006). What's in a name? An archaeological identity crisis for the Norse gods (and some of their friends). In: Andrén, A.; Jennbert, K; Raudvere, C. (eds.). *Old Norse Religion in Long-term Perspectives – Origins, Changes, and Interactions* (pp. 179-183). Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Shippey, T. (2004). Light-Elves, Dark-Elves, and Others: Tolkien's Elvish Problem. *Tolkien Studies*, 1, 01-15. Online [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tolkien\\_studies/v001/1.1shippey.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tolkien_studies/v001/1.1shippey.pdf) [accessed 13-11-2015].
- Shippey, T. (2005). *Alias Oves Habeo: The Elves as a Category Problem*. In: Shippey, T. (ed.). *The Shadow Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous* (pp. 157-187). Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.



Schäfer, W. (2010). Was ist eigentlich ein Zwerg? Eine prototypensemantische Figurenanalyse der *dvergar* in der Sagaliteratur. *Mediaevistik* 23, 197-299.

Schäfer, W. (2015). Dwarfs, Trolls, Ogres, and Giants. In: Classen, A. (ed.). *Medieval Culture: A Handbook Fundamental Aspects and Conditions of the European Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (pp. 347-383). Berlin/New York: de Gruyter.

Steinsland, G. (1983). Antropogonimyten i *Völuspá*. En tekst- og tradisjonskritisk analyse. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 98, 80-107. Online <http://journals.lub.lu.se/index.php/anf/issue/viewIssue/1853/170> [accessed 13-11-2015].

Steinsland, G. (2009). *Völuspá* – a Source to Norse Pagan Mythology or a Christian Revelation in Disguise of a Classical Sibylline Oracle? In: Østreng, W. (ed.). *Confluence. Interdisciplinary Communications 2007/2008*, Centre for Advanced Study, Oslo, February 98-101. Online: [http://www.cas.uio.no/Publications/Seminar/Confluence\\_Steinsland.pdf](http://www.cas.uio.no/Publications/Seminar/Confluence_Steinsland.pdf) [accessed 16-11-2015].

Stern, M. (2013). *Runestone images and visual communication in Viking Age Scandinavia*. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham. Online: [http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/14291/1/M\\_Stern\\_Thesis\\_without\\_images\\_new.pdf](http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/14291/1/M_Stern_Thesis_without_images_new.pdf) [accessed 07-05-2017].

Sundqvist, O. (2009). Aspects of Rulership Ideology in Early Scandinavia with particular references to the Skaldic Poem *Ynglingatal*. In: Østreng, W. (ed.). *Confluence. Interdisciplinary Communications 2007/2008*, Centre for Advanced Study, Oslo, 15-19. Online: [http://www.cas.uio.no/Publications/Seminar/Confluence\\_Sundqvist.pdf](http://www.cas.uio.no/Publications/Seminar/Confluence_Sundqvist.pdf) [accessed 13-11-2015].

Symons, V. (2015). *Wreopenhilt ond nyrmfab*: Confronting Serpents in *Beowulf* and Beyond. In: Bintley, M. D. J.; Williams, T. J. T. (eds.). *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia* (pp. 73-92). Woolbridge: The Boydell Press.

Wilkin, P. (2006). Norse Influences on Tolkien's Elves and Dwarves. In: Di Lauro, F. (ed.). *Through a Glass Darkly – Reflections on the Sacred* (pp. 61-80). Sydney: Sydney University Press.

Williams, H. (2003). "... ok brann hann": Varför sparkade Tor in dvärgen Lit i Balders bål? *Saga och Sed. Kungl. Gustav Adolfs akademis årsbok*, 83-95. Online

Mikučionis, Ugnius  
Recognizing a *dvergr*: Physical Status and External Appearance of *dvergar* in  
Medieval Nordic Sources (8th-13th century)  
[www.revistarodadafortuna.com](http://www.revistarodadafortuna.com)

<http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:46856/FULLTEXT01.pdf> [accessed  
13-11-2015].

**Recibido:** 30 de abril de 2017  
**Aprobado:** 26 de mayo de 2017