

DWARFS' FAMILY RELATIONS AND FEMALE DWARFS IN SOME
MEDIEVAL NORDIC SOURCES
RELAÇÕES FAMILIARES ENTRE ANÃS E MULHERES ANÃS EM ALGUMAS
FONTES NÓRDICAS MEDIEVAIS

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Abstract: In this article, it is argued that the *dvergar* in Old Norse sources, such as skaldic poetry and the *Eddas*, contrary to what has often been claimed by previous research, are hardly an all-male race deprived of family life and the possibility to have children. While it is true that these sources do not contain any explicit references to female dwarfs, they contain relatively many references to familial relations between dwarfs, such as ancestor–descendant, father–son and brother–brother relations. Saga literature, by contrast, contains explicit references to sisters, daughters and wives of dwarfs. This difference between skaldic poetry and the *Eddas*, on the one hand, and saga literature on the other, is explained in terms of relationships of power between acting persons in the different narratives. In skaldic poetry and the *Eddas*, the dwarfs are depicted in interaction with the gods, who have the power to command the dwarfs to produce the objects the gods need; therefore, the gods do not need to manipulate the dwarfs by bringing their families into play. Consequently, the gods do not need to care about dwarf families. In saga literature, the dwarfs interact with human protagonists who do not have the same power over dwarfs. They therefore need to manipulate them, and this manipulation sometimes involves acting in a certain way towards the dwarf's family.

Keywords: Dwarfs, Family, Power, Manipulation.

Resumo: Neste artigo, argumenta-se que o *dvergar* em fontes nórdicas antigas, como a poesia escáldica e as *Eddas*, ao contrário do que muitas vezes foi afirmado por pesquisas anteriores, dificilmente são uma raça masculina privada de vida familiar e da possibilidade de ter crianças. Embora seja verdade que essas fontes não contenham nenhuma referência explícita às anãs, elas contêm relativamente muitas referências às relações familiares entre anões, como ancestrais-descendentes e relações entre filho e pai e irmão com irmão. A literatura de Saga, ao contrário, contém referências explícitas a irmãs, filhas e esposas de anões. Essa diferença entre a poesia escáldica e as *Eddas*, de um lado, e a literatura de Saga, do outro, é explicada em termos de relações de poder entre pessoas atuantes nas diferentes narrativas. Na poesia escáldica e nas *Eddas*, os anões são representados em interação com os deuses, que têm o poder de comandar os anões a produzirem os objetos de que os deuses precisam; portanto, os deuses não precisam manipular os anões trazendo suas famílias para o jogo. Conseqüentemente, os

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deuses não precisam se preocupar com as famílias de anões. Na literatura de Saga, os anões interagem com protagonistas humanos que não têm o mesmo poder sobre os anões. Eles, portanto, precisam manipulá-los, e essa manipulação às vezes envolve agir de uma certa maneira em relação à família do anão.

Palavras-chave: Anões, Família, Poder, Manipulação.

1. Introduction

Many scholars have paid attention to the fact that there are no explicit references to female dwarfs in Old Norse myths and that no female dwarf names are mentioned (e.g. Steinsland, 1983; Motz, 1993; Clunies Ross, 1994; Wanner, 2001; Liberman, 2002b and 2016). Naturally, such a remarkable absence of female dwarfs needs to be accounted for – and gives rise to many further questions. Does it make sense to discuss anything like *dwarf families* or *familial relations between dwarfs*? How do dwarfs procreate if there are no female dwarfs? Are the dwarfs immortal, or is their race doomed to extinction when the old dwarfs die out and no new ones are born? Are the dwarfs able to interbreed with other kinds of beings? Is one *born* as a dwarf or does one *become* a dwarf – even if one has been born as a being of some other race? Does the word *dvergar* ‘dwarfs’ actually denote a specific race of beings, or rather an occupation?

Before we start seeking answers to such questions, something else must be considered, namely, *which dwarfs* one wants to investigate. This question is inseparable from the question of *which sources* the researcher chooses to use. As noted by Schäfke (2015, p. 366), “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”. Similarly, Karen Bek-Pedersen argues that a word denoting supernatural beings in various sources need not always refer to the same race or sort of beings: “[T]he mere fact that the same word is used in different texts – even when not used as *heiti* – does not guarantee that separate occurrences of *nornir* or *dísir* or *valkyrjur* actually refer to the same semantic content” (Bek-Pedersen, 2013).² Consequently, a researcher will arrive at different answers to the questions

² Some scholars have expressed the opposite view regarding the *dvergar*, namely, they have claimed that *dvergar* are essentially the same beings in different texts and genres, cf. “[D]warves appear regularly, in both central and supporting roles, throughout the myths and sagas. In terms of appearance, the dwarves

of whether the Medieval Nordic dwarfs had any family life or whether female dwarfs were believed to exist if he/she a) confines his or her sources to skaldic poetry and the *Eddas*, b) reconstructs hypothetical myths and belief systems, based on e.g. close-readings of the extant texts and/or comparative material, or c) includes as source material in its own right saga literature and/or d) later sources, such as ballads or folklore recorded in post-Medieval or modern times. Each choice leads to a valid path of research, but one must be explicit about which sources one has chosen to investigate. Conversely, conclusions can hardly be convincing when no choice regarding the sources is made. The following example illustrates this problem. In her book *Prolonged Echoes*, Margaret Clunies Ross writes: “There are not, in fact, any female dwarves in the whole of Old Norse myth [...], with the exception of a very late feminine form *dyrgja* in *Þjalar Jóns saga*” (Clunies Ross, 1994, p. 168). It is not clear how, in Clunies Ross’s view, *Þjalar Jóns saga* relates to Old Norse myth. Is the *saga* considered a valid source of our knowledge about Old Norse *mythology*? If so, why is its testimony dismissed, and why are all the other sagas depicting female dwarfs and dwarf families ignored? And if not, why is the *saga* taken into account in the first place?

When it comes to Old Norse dwarfs in saga literature, recent research has demonstrated that – contrary to what some previous scholars have claimed – dwarf families and, specifically, female dwarfs (wives, sisters and daughters of dwarfs), are far from unheard of, although they are admittedly more rarely mentioned than their male counterparts (see especially Schäfke, 2010, pp. 270–275; Schäfke, 2015, p. 350 and p. 372; and Mikučionis 2014, *passim*). But what about sources other than sagas? Is it entirely correct to claim that e.g. runic inscriptions, skaldic

display a remarkably consistent set of characteristics: they are short, misshapen, unattractive, bearded, skilled with their hands, and, *without exception*, male. Equally as striking is the *uniformity which these figures exhibit across the range of Norse literary genres*, something which cannot be said of *jötnar*, for example, who often devolve in the sagas into brutish, uncivilized, and less formidable caricatures of their mythic selves. *Dwarves, on the contrary, appear in the sagas as they do in the myths, with almost no perceptible alteration in their race's essential characteristics, motivations, or powers.*” (Wanner, 2001, p. 204, emphasis added). Such statements are, however, incorrect, as Schäfke (2015) and Ármann Jakobsson (2005 and 2008) clearly demonstrate. For starters, it suffices to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that there is, to the best of this author’s knowledge, not a single Old Norse text describing the dwarfs as bearded – and, on the other hand, there are a few saga texts explicitly mentioning both dwarf families and female dwarfs.

poetry and the *Eddas* do not mention any female dwarfs – and to conclude that mythological dwarfs cannot therefore have any family life (cf. the discussion in Clunies Ross, 1994, pp. 165–167, and references there)?

In this article, we discuss the runic inscription from Ribe in section one, and skaldic poetry and the *Eddas* in section two. Rather than aspiring to achieve one general conclusion regarding all occurrences of dwarfs in different types of sources, as if all accounts of dwarfs and their family relations were representations of one single belief system, conclusions for the two sections are formulated separately. At the same time, it is not claimed that the depictions of dwarfs in the different sources have nothing in common at all; the crucial point here is that they do not necessarily reflect one single, uniform idea of what dwarfs are.

2. Ancient Nordic dwarfs: spirits or virus-like creatures?

The oldest reference to a dwarf in a Nordic language (to the best of this author's knowledge) is found in a runic inscription from Ribe, Denmark, discovered during archaeological excavations in 1973, and dated to 720s or, perhaps, somewhat later (Grønvik, 1999, p. 103; Moriarty, 2015; MacLeod & Mees, 2006, p. 25). The runes are carved on a fragment of human cranium.

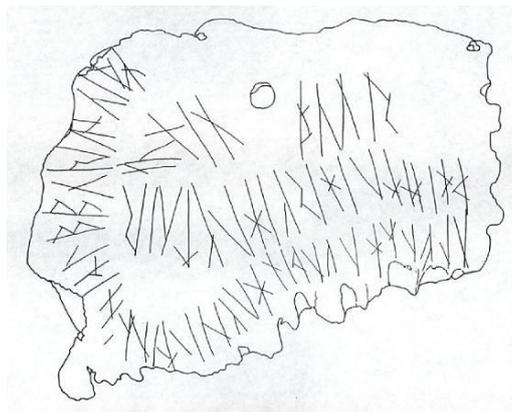


Figure 1. The Ribe cranium inscription, Sjø 39. *Danske runer*, a database, published online by *Nordisk Forskningsinstitut på Københavns Universitet* and *Nationalmuseet i København*, <http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Ribe-hjerneskal>

The text reads, according to one plausible interpretation:

UlfR auk Óðinn
auk HötýR
hialp Buri es
viðr þæima: værki auk dværgynni.
Bur

‘Ulf and Odin
and High-Tyr
is help for Bur
against these: pain and dwarf-stroke.
Bur (carved).’

MacLeod & Mees, 2006, p. 25

On the webpage of the [RuneS-project](#), the text is translated into English as “Ulf/Wolf and Óðinn and HótiwR/High-Týr. The hole/Buri is help against this ache (pain). And the dwarf overcome. Bourr”. For an overview of other possible interpretations of the Ribe-inscription, see Lauvik (2011, pp. 23ff.) and the references therein.

This short text does not provide much information about any aspect of the life of dwarfs – including their family life – as believed or imagined in the Nordic countries in the early eighth century other than that the dwarfs were – or perhaps this particular dwarf was – responsible for causing health problems, cf. “[the text] seems to offer grounds for identifying a dwarf as a disease-agent, one that causes headache, a common accompaniment to fever” (Pettit, 2020, p. 304).

Arguably, the question of whether dwarfs at that time were believed to have any family life may be meaningless and irrelevant. We cannot be sure what sort of beings dwarfs were believed to be, but etymological considerations support the assumption that the most archaic idea of dwarfs was as spirits with no physical, visible body. Anatoly Liberman has proposed an etymology for *dvergr*, where he relates *dvergr* to words meaning ‘breathe’, ‘spirit, ghost’ and ‘stupid; mad; possessed by a spirit’. He wrote:

If we assume the protoroot **dwezg-* [rather than *dverg-*; the consonant *r* is, in this interpretation, the result of rhotacism, UM], everything will fall into place [...] The sound *z* existed in Early Germanic only as the result of the voicing of *s*, so **dwezg-* must have been derived from **dweg-* [...] **Dwezg-* from **dwes-g-* is connected by ablaut with OE *(ge)dwǣs* ‘dull, foolish; clumsy impostor’ (cf. *gedwǣsmann* ‘fool’, *dwǣsnes* ‘folly, stupidity’, *gedwǣsnes* ‘dementia’), MHG *twās* ‘fool’, MHG *getwās* ‘specter, ghost’, Middle Dutch (MDu) *dwaes* ‘foolish’ [...] and *gedwas* (with a short vowel) ‘stupidity, hallucination, ghost’ [...] I suggest that a *dwǣsmann*, a *twās* was someone possessed by a **dwezgaz*, that is, by a dwarf.

Lieberman, 2002a, p. 184

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 *getwās* and Anc. Greek θεός are both members of this family. Now *dvergr* will join them.

Lieberman, 2002a, p. 187

One might add here that the Lithuanian noun *dvasia* ‘ghost, spirit’ also belongs to the family of **dheues* (Pokorny, 1959, p. 269). If Lieberman’s etymology is correct, it is highly probable that the most archaic Nordic – and Germanic – dwarfs were indeed spirits.³ One could argue that the idea of dwarfs as spirits is to a certain degree comparable to modern definitions of viruses or germs. Viruses are infectious agents able to infect various life forms, but it is debatable whether they can be considered living organisms themselves. Viruses have been described as “organisms at the edge of life” (Rybicki, 1990, p. 182), and it has been argued that the question of whether viruses are alive or not is “effectively meaningless because the positive or negative answer fully depends on the definition of life or the state of ‘being alive’, and any such definition is bound to be arbitrary” (Koonin & Starokadomskyy, 2016, pp. 131–132). Thus, viruses *exist* and are *real*, but they do not really *live*. Perhaps, the same could be said about the ancient Germanic and Nordic dwarfs? Of course, it is not claimed that dwarfs were conceptualised as viruses (or that people in the eighth century knew what viruses were; or that viruses are considered spirits by modern scholars), but there is a certain similarity

³ As Simek (1996 [2007], p. 68) acknowledges, “[t]he etymology of ‘dwarf’ is obscure”, most common connections being made to Old Indian *dhvaras* ‘demonic being’, *drova-* ‘weakness, sickness’, Proto-Indo-European **dhuer-* ‘damage’ and **dhreugh-* ‘dream; deception’. This author finds Lieberman’s etymology to be the most convincing.

between a spirit that is able to possess a person and turn him or her into a *gedwæsmann* and a germ, an infectious agent able to cause illness. Furthermore, linguistic considerations point in the direction of dwarfs not being originally perceived as individuals, but as a mass, which is again not unlike viruses. To quote Liberman once more:

Despite the fact that O[ld] I[celandic] *dvergr* is a masculine noun whose plural is *dvergar*, the dwa[r]fs started as a mass, a collective whole. Snorri's tale of their emergence as maggots seems to retain an echo of an ancient myth. The evidence of language points in the same direction. The Old High German cognate of OI *dvergr* was (*gi*)*twer*c. Its gender is impossible to determine from the extant texts, but in Middle High German *twer*c was nearly always neuter. Alongside *twer*c, the prefixed form (*ge*)*twer*c existed; *ge*- more often occurs in nouns denoting groups of people or objects. The situation in Old and Middle High German is the most archaic, for the path from *guð* (n. pl.) to *guð* (m. sg.) and from (*ge*)*twer*c (n. pl.) to *twer*c (n. m. sg.), that is, from an undifferentiated mass to an individual, is natural, whereas the reverse path is out of question.

Liberman, 2016, p. 311

Assuming that dwarfs were originally spirits and a collective whole, we have no way of knowing when this conceptualisation ceased and they became anthropomorphised and individualised. We do not know whether the dwarf in the Ribe-inscription had already acquired an individual identity or a physical body (and a biological sex).⁴ It may well be the case that people at that time did not think of dwarfs as individual beings, just as modern people do not think of an individual virus as a "personality" when they speak of virus-caused diseases. Without comparative material from the same period it is, however, impossible to say anything about individual differences between the dwarfs in any respect, including their sex or family life.

Returning to the question of family life, notions such as 'family', 'parents', 'children', 'siblings', 'marriage', 'spouses', 'male' and 'female' – and even 'life' itself – may be just as inapplicable to the most archaic Nordic dwarfs as they are to viruses.

⁴ Cf. "Dwarfs were invisible spirits millennia ago. We have no way of deciding when they acquired an anthropomorphic form" (Liberman, 2016, p. 315).

2.1 *A different reading of the Ribe-inscription*

Alternatively, the same inscription may be interpreted as a testimony to the fact that individual dwarfs had already begun to emerge from the undifferentiated mass by the time the runes were carved, since the inscription may refer to one single dwarf and the disease caused by this particular, individual dwarf. The case is especially strong if we follow Grønvik (1999) and Marold (2003) in assuming that Bōurr is the name of the dwarf. Over two decades ago Ottar Grønvik suggested the following reading of the Ribe-inscription:

ulfuRAukuþinAukhutiur'hiAlbburiisuiþRþAimauiaRkiAuktuirkuniubuur

According to the author, the text should be read as /ulf^uR auk Óðinn auk Hō-TiuR hjalp buri is viðr þaima wiarke auk dvergynju bōur(r)/, or, in normalised Old Norse, “Ulfr ok Óðinn ok Há-Týr, hjalp buri, es viðr/vinnr þeima verki ok *dvergynju Bōurr!”. Grønnvik interprets this text as meaning “The Wolf and Óðinn and High-Týr, help [my] son, who is struggling against this abscess and against the female-dwarf, Bōurr” (my translation).⁵

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. However, Grønvik seems to be the only scholar who insists the inscription should be interpreted as containing a reference to a **dvergynja* (‘female dwarf’). More recently, Lars Heltoft wrote that Grønvik’s interpretation is not completely convincing (“ikke fuldt overbevisende”, Heltoft, 2017, p. 74), and to this author’s knowledge, Grønvik’s interpretation never gained much support. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that if – and only if – Grønvik’s interpretation is correct, one might argue that dwarfs of *both* sexes were believed to exist: the suffixed feminine form **dvergynja* implies the existence of its masculine counterpart *dvergr*. However, we do not have any other sources from that period that would allow drawing any decisive conclusions about the existence of male and female dwarfs or about their family life.

⁵ “Ulv og Odin og Høye-Tyr, hjælp sønnen (min sønn), som kjemper mot denne verken (verkebyllen) og (mot) dvergvinnen, Bōurr” (Grønvik, 1999, p. 123).

2.2 Conclusion regarding the Ribe inscription dwarf

The lack of comparable material from the same period does not allow us to decide with any degree of certainty whether the Nordic dwarfs were believed to have families or not. However, it seems plausible that the dwarfs were imagined as real and existing, but not necessarily *living* creatures, at least not in the same way as human beings. Consequently, the question of having or not a family life may be irrelevant regarding ancient Nordic dwarfs.

3. Skaldic poetry and the Eddas: dwarfs' family relations and sexual aspirations

Assuming that the most ancient Nordic dwarfs were believed to be spirits, it appears that skaldic poetry and the *Eddas* reflect a change regarding the ideas about what sort of beings the dwarfs were. Dwarfs are no longer spirits in skaldic poetry and the *Eddas*. They are corporeal or, at least, able to manifest as having visible physical bodies (Mikučionis, 2017, p. 62). Dwarfs were, partly, still perceived as a collective whole (cf. Ármann Jakobson's term "generic dwarfs"), but at the same time many individual names of the dwarfs were known, and some individual dwarfs played important roles in mythic narratives. The dwarfs in skaldic verses and the narratives in the two *Eddas* do not bear any resemblance to viruses but may be paralleled to other anthropomorphic beings such as elves and giants. While neither skaldic poetry nor the *Eddas* mention female dwarfs explicitly, there are clear indications in these sources that the dwarfs were believed to have at least some kind of family life. By implication, female dwarfs were probably imagined as existing, though hardly ever noticeable. The remarkable absence of female dwarf names – or any references to female dwarfs – in skaldic poetry and the *Eddas* must, and can, be accounted for.

3.1 Dwarfs as ancestors and descendants in Völuspá and Snorri's Edda

As is well known, two somewhat different myths regarding the origins of dwarfs are preserved in the *Eddas*. These Eddic myths may be reflections of the more ancient idea of dwarfs as a collective mass (see Liberman, 2016, p. 305 and p. 311). The first myth is known from the Codex Regius version of *Völuspá* and tells about dwarfs having been produced by

other dwarfs out of the earth (in its not quite clear how those first dwarfs came into being).⁶ The other myth is known from Snorri's *Edda* and tells about the first dwarfs having emerged as maggots in Ymir's flesh. However, there is more to say about the two myths. This author argues that what has been said about the dwarfs' origins – either being produced by other dwarfs, or emerging spontaneously as maggots – probably only applies to the initial stages of dwarfs' evolution and that the dwarfs later must have acquired the ability to have a “regular” family life and produce children the “regular” way.

We start with a discussion of the *Völuspá* myth. Here it says:

Þá gengo regin ǫll á rǫcstóla,
Ginnheilög goð, oc um þat gættuz,
hverr scyldi dverga dróttin scepia,
ór Brimis blóði oc ór Bláins leggiom.
Þar var Mótsognir mæztr um orðinn
dverga allra, enn Durinn annarr;
þeir manlícon mǫrg um gorðo,
dvergar, ór iorðo, sem Durinn sagði.

Völuspá 9–10, *Edda*, eds. Neckel & Kuhn

Then all the Powers went to the thrones of fate,
the sacrosanct gods, and considered this:
who should create the lord of the dwarfs
out of Brimir's blood and from Blain's limbs?
There Motsognir became most famous of
all dwarfs, and Durin next;
Many manlike figures the dwarfs made,
out of the earth, as Durin recounted.

Seeress's Prophecy 9–10, *the Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington, p. 5

These two verses are followed by *Dvergatal* – the Catalogue of Dwarfs – a long list of dwarf names, all of which are male. This part of *Völuspá* has been interpreted as reflecting a myth about dwarfs producing new dwarfs. Thus, Gro Steinsland suggests that Mótsognir and

⁶ Differences between various versions of *Völuspá* (i.e., *Codex Regius*, *Hauksbók*, quotations in Snorri's *Edda*) are definitely interesting, but they deserve a thorough discussion in a separate study.

Durinn were the only two dwarfs created by the gods and that they afterwards made new dwarfs. The phrase *mannlíkon mǫrg* ‘many manlike figures’ refers, in her analysis, to the dwarfs produced by Mótsognir and Durinn. According to Steinsland, this is the only way for new dwarfs to come into being, as the dwarfs cannot reproduce biologically since they are all male:

[D]e to dvergenes produkter, *manlíkon*, sikter til nye dverger [...] Bare gjennom denne produksjon kan det oppstå flere dverger. Dvergene kan nemlig ikke reprodusere seg biologisk; alle dverger er mannlige, til gjengjeld er de fremragende teknikere og kan “lage” ting.

Steinsland, 1983, pp. 84–85

The products of the two dwarfs, the *manlíkon*, refer to new dwarfs [...] More dwarfs can only come into being through such production. The thing is that dwarfs are incapable of reproducing themselves biologically; all dwarfs are male, in return they are excellent technicians and able “thing-makers”. (My translation.)

Two of the unfinished *mannlíkon* are afterwards found by the gods who then complete Mótsognir’s and Durinn’s undertaking and create the first human people, a man and a woman (Steinsland, 1983, pp. 84–92). Steinsland’s theory was partly contradicted by Margaret Clunies Ross, who argued that the creation of humans was not directly connected to the workshop of dwarfs (Clunies Ross, 1994, pp. 165–168). Both Steinsland and Clunies Ross agreed, however, that dwarfs produced new dwarfs.⁷ A major point in their interpretation of the *Völuspá* myth is that the dwarfs are bound to produce new dwarfs mechanically as this is the only way for new dwarfs to come into existence. Another important point is that the gods do need dwarfs, cf.

The dwarves were the gods’ most successful pseudo-procreative enterprise. By this means they created male progeny who were craftsmen like themselves but who could be relied upon to serve divine interests by working and producing precious objects for them.

Clunies Ross, 1994, p. 168

⁷ 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 *höerr dverga* means ‘who, or which, of the dwarfs’ (*dverga* is thus genitivus partitivus), while *dróttir* refers to ‘people, i.e. human beings’. See Tryggvi Gíslason, 1984, p. 87.

The fact that the list of dwarf names, the *Dvergatal*, contains exclusively male names was (and still is, by some) interpreted as decisive proof that female dwarfs did not exist in Old Norse mythology and that the *Vøluspá* dwarfs by definition could not have any family life in the usual sense of this word. By contrast, this author argues that skaldic poetry and the *Eddas* – including *Vøluspá* – contain allusions to family relations between dwarfs, using words like *niðr*, *burr*, *sonr*, *faðir* and *bróðir*, and the amount of such allusions is too high to be ignored or explained as meaning something else. Thus, the last part of the *Dvergatal* (verses 14 to 16) speaks of an *ancestor–descendant relationship* between dwarfs. Previous scholars have either completely overlooked this fact or explained it involving far-fetched interpretations.

Mál er, dverga í Dvalins liði
líóna kindom til Lofars telia,
þeir er sóttu frá salar steini
Aurvanga siqt til Iorovalla.
Þar var Draupnir oc Dólgþrasir,
Hár, Haugspori, Hlévangr, Glói,
Scirvir, Virvir, Scáfiðr, Ái,
Álfr oc Yngvi, Eikinscialdi,
Fialarr oc Frosti, Finnur oc Ginnarr;
þat mun uppi, meðan öld lifir,
langniðia tal Lofars hafat.

Vølospá 14–16, *Edda*, eds. Neckel & Kuhn

Time it is to tally up the dwarfs in Dvalin's troop,
for the children of men, to trace them back to Lofar;
those who sought out Frar's Hall-stone,
the dwelling of Loam-field on Iorovellir.
There were Draupnir and Dolgthrasir,
Greyhair, Mound-river, Lee-plain, Glow,
Skirvir, Virvir, Skafid, and Great-grandfather.
Elf and Yngvi, Oakenshield,
Fialar and Frosty, Finn and Ginnar;
they'll be remembered while the world endures,
the long list of ancestors, going back to Lofar.

Seeress's Prophecy 14–16, *the Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington, pp. 5–6

Stanza 16 of *Völuspá* explicitly mentions *langniðja tal Lofars*, translated as a ‘long list of ancestors’ by Larrington. Jackson Crawford (2015, p. 5) translates it as ‘descendants of Lofar’. The term *langniðjar* means ‘a descending lineage by the father’s side, pedigree of agnates, counted downwards’, as opposed to *langfeðgar* ‘when counted upwards in time’ (Cleasby & Vigfusson, 1874, p. 373). The use of the word “*langniðjar*” in *Völuspá* implies, in this author’s view, that the Eddic dwarfs always had, or acquired at some point in time, the ability to produce progeny biologically. Lofarr and Dvalinn belonged to the same family lineage, and consequently the dwarfs were after all able to have children.

Snorri’s story about the origins of the dwarfs is slightly different. In his version, the dwarfs appear spontaneously in Ymir’s flesh as maggots, but are “improved” by decision of the gods:

[G]uðin [...] mintusk hvaðan dvergar höfðu kviknat í moldunni ok niðri í jörðunni svá sem maðkar í holdi. Dvergarnir höfðu skipazk fyrst ok tekit kviknun í holdi Ymis ok váru þá maðkar, en af atkvæði guðanna urðu þeir vitandi mannvits ok höfðu manns líki ok búa þó í jörðu ok í steinum. Moðsognir var dvergr ok annarr Durinn.

Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (Gylfaginning), ed. Faulkes, 1982 [2005], p. 15

[T]he gods [...] discussed where the dwarfs had been generated from in the soil and in the earth like maggots in flesh. The dwarfs had taken shape first and acquired life in the flesh of Ymir and where then maggots, but by decision of the gods they became conscious with intelligence and had shape of men though they live in the earth and in rocks. Moðsognir was a dwarf and the second was Durin. [...]

Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes, 1995, p. 16

Snorri goes on quoting from *Völuspá* and distinguishing between three groups of dwarfs: those who live in soil, those who live in rocks, and those who came from Svarinshaug to Aurvangar on Ioruvellir. Snorri specifies that Lofarr is descended from this last group (“from them is descended Lofar”, Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes, 1995, p. 17). It is not completely clear whether Snorri means that all the three groups of dwarfs share their origins. It could perhaps be argued that Lofarr’s line never “acquired life in the flesh of Ymir”, but are instead a completely separate group of dwarfs, whose origins are unknown. Germane to our

discussion is the fact that neither *Völuspá* nor Snorri had any problem with the idea of an ancestor–descendant relationship regarding dwarfs.

Admittedly, scholars who firmly believed that the dwarfs cannot have progeny have suggested alternative interpretations, cf.

The poem *Völuspá* presents dwarfs as a group, “the host of Dvalinn” (st. 14: *Dvalins lið*). Since this group contains no women we may consider it to be a body of professionals. Its members are presented in a genealogy (*langniðjatal*) from Draupnir to Lofarr. Since mythical dwarfs possess no families we might think of the individuals of the assembly as its successive functionaries. [...]

Another set of dwarfs is named “Sons of Ívaldi”, and these provided the god Freyr with his boat (*Grímnismál*, st. 43).

Motz, 1993, p. 92

Thus, Lotte Motz was fully aware of the existence of such phrases as “*langniðja tal*” or “*Ívalda synir*” in the *Poetic Edda* – but interpreted them as referring to a “body of professionals” or “a set of dwarfs” rather than the most straight-forward interpretation: dwarf *families*. The problem with Motz’s interpretation is that there are too many other instances in Eddic and skaldic material where dwarfs are referred to using words denoting *family relations*, something that is discussed in more detail in subsection 3.2. below. Therefore, it seems much more plausible that the Eddic dwarfs acquired the ability to reproduce biologically and that new generations of dwarfs did not differ from other anthropomorphic beings (including humans) in that respect. Being able to produce children is the norm, but some childless individuals do exist – both among dwarfs and among other beings, – so we should not expect each and every dwarf to have had children, but the ability to have children is the rule, not an exception. Such an interpretation fits well into the bigger picture of what we know about the origins of various creatures in the Eddic universe. A well-known example is *Búri*, the ancestor of the gods, who was licked free from salty rime stones by *Auðumbla*, the primordial cow. *Búri* had a son, *Burr*, although “[i]t is not clear how Burr came to be” (Simek, 2007, p. 50) as no mother is mentioned. By *Bestla*, a giantess, *Burr* had three sons, *Óðinn*, *Vili* and *Vé*. *Óðinn* had children by female partners, such as *Frigg* (a goddess) and *Griðr* (a giantess). Thus, the gods had ancestors who came into being without being born by a mother, but later the gods acquired the ability to

reproduce biologically. It is plausible that the evolution of dwarfs followed a similar path. The creators and the audience of the *Eddas* may well have believed that the dwarfs, – perhaps, with the exception of the very first generation, – could have children both by female dwarfs and by other female beings.

Admittedly, Lofarr's pedigree in *Völuspá* only includes the names of male members of his lineage, but this is not unexpected. All-male genealogical trees are far from unprecedented in various written sources, cf. "Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren" (The Bible, Matthew 1:2), but it does not follow therefrom that human females do not exist. Having a family is an important aspect of the dwarfs' life, as shown by the number of references to family relations between dwarfs in skaldic poetry and the *Eddas*. Examples are provided in subsection 3.2 below. Therefore, this author disagrees with claims that absolutely all dwarfs were created without biological reproduction.

3.2 Dwarfs as fathers, sons and brothers

In the previous subsection familial ties between Dvalinn and Lofarr were discussed. It was argued that the Eddic dwarfs either had from the very beginning, or at a certain stage of their development, acquired the ability to produce children. It is not claimed that such an idea is completely new. As early as the mid-1960s, Ólafur M. Ólafsson (1966, p. 96) wrote: "Þótt dyrgjur séu hvergi nefndar með fornum dvergum, hefur sumum dvergum verið gefin sú náttúra að geta börn (Sbr. *dætr Dvalins*, Fáfn. 13.)" ['Although female dwarfs are not mentioned in connection with ancient dwarfs, some of the dwarfs had the ability to produce children (cf. *Dvalinn's daughters*, Fáfnismál, stanza 13)', my translation]. The observation is correct, but the example provided by Ólafur M. Ólafsson is problematic. First, it has been questioned whether Dvalinn's daughters are dwarfs themselves (this problem is discussed in more detail in subsection 3.3.1). Second, Ólafur M. Ólafsson's statement may sound as if Dvalinn was the only dwarf – or one of a very limited number of dwarfs – who had the ability to produce children. One could indeed hypothesise that such an ability was an exception rather than the rule, or that only certain dwarfs – dwarfs of a special kind or status – had progeny, cf. queen bees and ants as opposed to worker bees and ants. The reality is that the sources discussed in this section – i.e., skaldic poetry and the *Eddas* – contain too many references to family relations

between dwarfs (that is, relative to the amount of information about dwarfs' life in general) to make such hypotheses plausible. *Völuspá* contains a long list of dwarf names, but, according to Ármann Jakobsson, there are only seven dwarfs in the *Eddas* who play an active part in a narrative. These seven dwarfs are Alvíss, Litr, Fjalarr, Galarr, Brokkr, Eitri, and Andvari (Ármann Jakobsson, 2005, p. 57 and 2008, p. 184). Ármann Jakobsson (2008, p. 184) classifies them as individual Eddic dwarfs, as opposed to generic dwarfs.⁸ Out of these seven, Litr is the only dwarf of whose family nothing is mentioned in the source text. Fjalarr and Galarr were brothers, as were Brokkr and Eitri. Andvari spoke of his father, Óinn. Alvíss intended to marry Þórr's daughter.⁹ All these facts suggest that being a dwarf and having – or, in Alvíss's case, intending to have – a family are *not* irreconcilable conditions, and dwarf families are the rule, not an exception. We take now a closer look at specific references to family relations between dwarfs. Examples of skaldic *kenningar* referring to such relations are as follows:

- *Austra burr* 'Austri's son' (as a part of the more complex kenning *Austra burar nokkvi* 'boat of Austri's son', in a *lausavísa* by Hallfreðr vandróðaskáld),
- *Norðra niðr* 'Norðri's son or relative' (as a part of the more complex kenning, *Norðra niðbyrði* 'kin-burden of Norðri', in *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar*),
- *Suðra áttuðr* 'Suðri's kinsman or descendant' (in *Þórsdrápa*),
- *Dúrnis niðjar* 'Dúrnir's sons or relatives' (as a part of the more complex kenning, *Dúrnis niðja salvörðuðr* 'hall-guardian of Dúrnir's sons/relatives [i.e., dwarfs]', in *Ynglingatal*)

See Meissner, 1921, p. 259

Thus, it appears that the skalds did not find the idea of family relationships irreconcilable or incompatible with being a dwarf.

⁸ Perhaps one could include a few more dwarfs into the category of individual dwarfs. The anonymous dwarf who lured King Sveigðir into a rock in *Ynglingatal* and *Ynglinga saga* and the sons of Ívaldi might arguably be classified as individual dwarfs as well. One could also consider classifying the four sky-supporting dwarfs (Austri, Vestri, Suðri and Norðri) as individual dwarfs, even though the role they play in the narrative is not active.

⁹ It has also been argued that Sólblindi, known from *Fjolsvinnsmál*, is in all likelihood a dwarf, even though the text does not say so explicitly (Simek, 2007, p. 297). If that assumption is correct, we have yet another dwarf family, as Sólblindi has three sons (*þrír Sólblinda synir*).

The *Prose Edda* says that some of the dwarfs are brothers, and there is nothing to suggest that some untraditional or non-standard meaning should be assigned to the word “brothers” in such cases. One such pair of dwarf brothers is Fjalarr and Galarr in the story about the mead of poetry.

Þá buðu þessir dvergjar til sín jǫtni þeim er Gillingr heitir ok konu hans. Þá buðu dvergarnir Gillingi at róa á sæ með sér. En er þeir fóru fyrir land fram, røru dvergarnir á boða ok hvelfði skipinu. Gillingr var ósýndr ok týndisk hann, en dvergarnir réttu skip sitt ok reru til lands. Þeir sögðu konu hans þenna atburð, en hon kunni illa ok grét hátt. Þá spurði Fjalarr hana ef henni mundi hugléttara ef hon sæi út á sæinn þar er hann hafði týnzk, en hon vildi þat. Þá mælti hann við *Galar bróður sinn* at hann skal fara upp yfir dyrrnar er hon gengi út ok láta kvernstein falla í höfuð henni, ok talði sér leiðask óp hennar, ok svá gerði hann.

Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (Skáldskaparmál), ed. Faulkes, 1998, p. 3 (emphasis added)

Then these dwarfs invited to stay with them a giant called Gilling and his wife. Then the dwarfs invited Gilling to go out to sea in a boat with them. But as they went along the coast the dwarfs rowed on to a shoal and the boat capsized. Gilling could not swim and was drowned, but the dwarfs righted their boat and rowed to land. They told his wife what had happened and she was greatly distressed and wept loudly. Then Fjalarr asked her if it would be some consolation for her if she looked out to the sea where he had drowned, and she agreed. Then he told *his brother Galar* that he was to go up and above the doorway she was going of and drop a millstone on her head, and declared the was weary of her howling; and Galar did so.

Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes, 1995, p. 62 (emphasis added)

In the story of Sif’s golden hair (and other precious items produced by dwarfs) some unnamed dwarfs are referred to as ‘sons of Ívaldi’ (“Ívalda synir”), while Brokkr and Eitri are called brothers.

Loki Laufeyjarson hafði þat gert til lævísí at klippa hár alt af Sif. En er Þórr varð þess varr, tók hann Loka ok mundi lemja hvert bein í honum áðr hann svarði þess at hann skal fá af svartálfum at þeir skulu gera af gulli Sifju hadd þann er svá skal vaxa sem annat hár. Eptir þat fór Loki til þeira dverga er heita *Ívalda synir*, ok gerðu þeir haddinn ok Skíðblaðni ok geirinn er Óðinn átti er Gungnir heitir. Þá veðjaði Loki höfði sínu við þann dverg er Brokkr heitir, hvárt *bróðir hans Eitri* mundi gera jafngóða gripi þrjá sem þessir váru.

Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (Skáldskaparmál), ed. Faulkes, 1998, pp. 41–42 (emphasis added)

Loki Laufeyarson had done this for love of mischief: he had cut off all Sif's hair. And when Thor found out, he caught Loki and was going to break every one of his bones until he swore that he would get black-elves to make Sif a head of hair out of gold that would grow like any other hair. After this Loki went to some dwarfs called *Ivaldi's sons*, and they made the head of hair and Skidbladnir and the spear belonging to Odin called Gungnir. Then Loki wagered his head with a dwarf called Brokk on whether *his brother Eitri* would succeed in making three precious things as good as these were.

Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes, 1995, p. 96 (emphasis added)

Thus, it appears that acting together and cooperating with one's brother is actually typical behaviour among individual Eddic dwarfs, at least in Snorri's *Edda*.

Furthermore, Andvari, who is known both from the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, tells Loki that he had a father whose name was Óinn: "Andvari ek heiti, Óinn hét minn faðir", literally: 'Andvari is my name, Óinn was my father's name'. Although Andvari's mother (or Óinn's wife) is not mentioned, there is nothing to lead the audience to the conclusion that Andvari was *not* born by a mother. Certainly, mythological beings and creatures *may* be born in ways that are completely different from human births. This may be exemplified by Heimdallr, who is a "son of eight mothers plus one", or by Sleipnir, the eight-legged stallion, who is born by Loki. Thus, one could hypothesise that Andvari was also born in a way that did not involve any mother (or, at least, any female dwarf). However, it seems much more plausible that the sources simply do not focus on the identity of the mothers of the dwarfs than to conclude that dwarf births happen in some extraordinary manner.

Thus, we have references to ancestor-descendant, father-son and brother-brother relations in both skaldic poetry and the *Eddas*. Wives, sisters or mothers of dwarfs, by contrast, do not appear in the sources of this group. Some scholars have suggested that even *male* relatives (sons, brothers, and fathers) of known dwarfs need not be dwarfs themselves. For example, it has been claimed by some scholars that it is only by implication that we can assume Ívaldi was a dwarf. In *Skáldskaparmál*, only *Ívalda synir* are explicitly said to have been dwarfs, while nothing is said about the identity of Ívaldi himself. Edgar C. Polomé wrote: "There is no

information about the nature of *Ívaldi*; was he a dwarf himself? His name does not give us any clue [...]" (Polomé, 1997, p. 449, note 2). In this author's view, however, it is most likely that *Ívaldi* was indeed a dwarf, – simply because this is the most straightforward assumption. There are no indications whatsoever in the text that *Ívaldi* was *not* a dwarf. There is no need to complicate the Old Norse world of mythological beings by assuming that the dwarfs *could* be born, but *not* by parents who were dwarfs themselves.

3.2 *A dwarf's bride*

Some words must be said about *Alvíss* the dwarf and his proposal to *Þórr's* daughter, who had been promised to him in *Þórr's* absence. The story is known from *Alvíssmál* in the *Poetic Edda*. As Paul Acker puts it: "Examining this poem as a source of dwarf-lore, the first thing one may notice about this particular dwarf is that he is interested in sex, or the prospect of it. He wants no ordinary bride, but the daughter of a god, *Þórr* [...]" (Acker, 2002, p. 215). Hermann Pálsson, in his review of Margaret Clunies Ross's book *Prolonged Echoes*, focuses on the prospect of *having children* rather than just *sex*. He wrote: "The myth of *Alvíss* who wanted to become *Þórr's* son-in-law certainly indicates that this particular dwarf appreciated female company, and it seems reasonable to assume that *Alvíss* intended his future wife to bear his children" (Pálsson, 2001, pp. 137–138.). Admittedly, *Alvíss's* motivation to marry *Þórr's* daughter may have been more sophisticated than just a wish to have a family. An interesting interpretation is presented by John Lindow in his article on bloodfeud in Scandinavian mythology. Lindow suggests that there was a feud between the gods and dwarfs because of the killing of *Kvasir* by the two dwarf brothers, *Fjalarr* and *Galarr* (Lindow, 1994 [1995], pp. 61–62). According to this interpretation, "the dwarfs must be classified, like the giants, as enemies of the gods"; *Alvíss's* proposal to *Þórr's* daughter could then be understood as "an attempt at reconciliation through marriage", while *Þórr's* actions could be taken "as a rejection of the offer and instead as his side's turn in the feud" (Lindow, 1994 [1995], pp. 62–63). Furthermore, one could perhaps interpret the intention to marry *Þórr's* daughter as *Alvíss's* seeking to increase his own status or gain extra power by creating an alliance with the gods. A more detailed discussion of *Alvíss's* possible motifs are outside the scope of this article, but germane to the argument here are the facts that *Alvíss* thought he could marry *Þórr's* daughter

and, importantly, that the gods, in Þórr's absence, had promised her to Alvíss. It seems therefore that not only Alvíss himself, but also the gods, considered a marriage between a dwarf and a goddess as a possibility. At the same time, this story *could* be interpreted as supporting the idea that female dwarfs did not exist, which would then be the very reason why Alvíss needed to find a bride who was *not* a dwarf. However, the many examples of marriages and sexual intercourse between gods and *jötnar* show that "interbreeding" is a normal thing when it comes to mythological beings. Thus, Alvíss's desire to marry a goddess does not really tell us anything about the existence – or non-existence – of female dwarfs. It tells us, by contrast, that Alvíss intended to start a family, whatever his motifs might have been. Consequently, it may be argued that the author and the audience of *Alvíssmál* did not find the idea of dwarfs' family life remarkable or strange.

3.3 Some desperate attempts to identify female dwarfs

Is it indeed the case that neither skaldic poetry nor the *Eddas* mention any female dwarfs at all? There have been attempts to identify female dwarfs in skaldic poetry and the *Eddas*. It seems, however, that in this category of sources the only female creatures that can in any reasonable sense be claimed to be of dwarfish origin are Dvalinn's daughters, *nornir*. Other than that, all attempts to identify female dwarfs have failed; and even classifying the said *nornir* as dwarfs is problematic. For the sake of completeness, an overview of such attempts is provided below.

3.3.1 Dvalinn's daughters

The closest thing to female dwarfs in *The Poetic Edda* seems to be the *nornir*, some of whom are called *Dvalins dótr* 'Dvalinn's daughters' in *Fáfnismál*. In the *Prose Edda* they are said to be *dverga ættar* 'of the dwarfs' kin'.¹⁰ It seems safe to assume that the norns in question had at least some dwarf-blood in their veins, although it may be debated whether the phrase *Dvalins dótr* is to be understood literally (i.e. so that Dvalinn the dwarf is their father), or more loosely as a synonym for descendants of dwarfs. Either way, we know nothing of the mother

¹⁰ Fáfnir tells Sigurðr that some of the norns "spring from the Æsir, some from the elves, some are daughters of Dvalin" (*Fáfnismál* 13, trans. Larrington, p. 155). For an analysis of the nature of the norns and their threefold origins, see Kragerud (1981, pp. 11–15).

– or mothers, in plural – of these norns. Furthermore, it has been questioned whether Dvalinn's daughters – irrespective of how one interprets the phrase *Dvalins dótr* – are themselves “proper” female dwarfs. It may be argued that family relations may work differently with dwarfs than with humans (or other beings), and that daughters of a dwarf need not be dwarfs themselves. Dvalinn's daughters may have lost their dwarfish identity when they became norns – or they may have never been dwarfs in the first place. In other words, we do not know whether a dwarf's daughters were thought by the medieval audience to be female dwarfs. Thus, Wanner (2001, p. 221, endnote 67) writes:

In *Fáfnismál*, stanza 15, there is a mention of the daughters of Dvalinn, a dwarf. However, this should not necessarily be taken to refer to dwarves of female gender, since the comment directly refers to the existence of norns (who are without exception female) who have been assigned to each mythic race. As such, the dragon is speaking of an order of beings separate from dwarves proper, and so his comment poses no real contradiction to the rule that there were no female dwarves in Norse mythology.

A different view is expressed by Bek-Pedersen (2011):

[T]he impression given by *Fáfnismál* 13 could also be that the term *norn* describes some sort of occupation rather than a separate race of beings, as the *nornir* are said to be of the *æsir*, the *álfar* and the *dvergar*. The stanza could refer to three families of *nornir* [...] so that *dverga-nornir* attend the birth of dwarves, *ása-nornir* those of *æsir* and so on [...]

The fact is that we do not really know how the phrase *Dvalins dótr* was understood by the medieval audience, and the sources do not provide any explicit information about whether dwarf births were attended by norns or not.

3.3.2 *Billigr's girl (Hávamál)*

Hávamál mentions a certain “*Billings mær*”, *Billigr's girl* or *Billigr's maid* (daughter?). We do not know for sure what kind of being this particular *Billigr* was as the source text does not provide sufficient context. As a desperate attempt to identify any female dwarfs in Old Norse mythology, one could argue that this *Billigr* was a dwarf and, consequently, that his “*mær*” must have been a female dwarf. Thus, Lindow (2002, p. 79) wrote:

Billing is listed as a dwarf name in the *Hauksbók* version of *Völuspá* and is found in a kenning for poetry: “cup of the son of *Billing*.” Since both the dwarfs and giants possessed the mead of poetry before Odin retrieved it, this kenning works whether *Billing* is a dwarf or a giant. The problem with understanding *Billing* as a dwarf is not one of sexual congress

between gods and dwarfs, for Freyja slept with three [sic!] dwarfs to obtain the Brísinga men, and the dwarf Alviðss coveted Thor's daughter and even claimed to have affianced himself to her (*Alviðsmál*). However, if Billingr is a dwarf, his "girl" (presumably daughter) would be one of the very few female dwarfs in the mythology.

Rudolf Simek in his *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (Simek, 2007, p. 37) distinguishes between Billingr the dwarf and Billingr the giant, describing them in two separate entries, and associating Billingr's maid with the latter. McKinnel (2014, p. 109) convincingly argues that the Billingr referred to in the phrase "Billings mæR" most likely was a giant, the father of Suttungr. Consequently, "Billings mæR" was in all likelihood a giantess, not a female dwarf.

3.3.3 Reginn's sisters

One interesting case concerns the family of Reginn the smith, the foster-father of Sigurðr the Dragon-Slayer. More than one scholar has stated that Reginn is a dwarf (see e.g. Wilkin, 2006, pp. 71–72; Barndon, 2006, p. 100; Price, 2006, p. 181; Bane, 2013, p. 289), a conclusion that must be based on what the prose in *Reginnsmál* says about Reginn and the fact that *Reginn* is listed among the dwarfs' names in *Völuspá*. Furthermore, it has been suggested that female members of this family "might be the only female *dvergar* that appear on the sources" (Barreiro, 2008, p. 9). This suggestion is based on the assumption that all the siblings of a dwarf must themselves be dwarfs. However, it appears that the picture is more complex than that and deserves a closer attention with a special focus on what the sources actually say.

Reginn is known both from the *Eddas* and from saga literature (*Völsunga saga* and *Norna-Gests þátr*). Details regarding Reginn and his family in the different sources are not in complete agreement. Lotte Hedeager was not completely right when she wrote: "[Reginn's] family was composed of a father (no mother is mentioned) and two brothers (no sisters), and Regin himself was a dwarf." (Hedeager, 2002, p. 9; see also Hedeager, 2011, p. 142). Only the fact that no mother is mentioned is equally correct for each and every source that tells of Reginn and his family; all the other "facts" are correct with respect to some sources, but in other cases they are false.

First, in *Reginismál* Reginn does have two sisters, Lyngheiðr and Lofnheiðr (see *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington, p. 149). It is true that the mother is not mentioned, but at the very least Reginn, Ótr, Fáfnir, Lyngheiðr and Lofnheiðr are all children of the same father, Hreiðmarr. Thus, they are all siblings or, at least, half-siblings.

Second, it is far from obvious that Reginn *was* actually a dwarf. Only one source – and in only one instance – calls him *dvergr*, and even in that case it may be discussed whether the noun *dvergr* refers to the race of beings Reginn belongs to, or whether it is just an epithet describing Reginn's physical appearance or his qualities such as skills, competences or character traits. The source text in question is *Norna-Gests þáttr*, where it says: “Í þeiri ferð var með Sigurði Hámundr, bróðir hans, ok Reginn dvergr”, ‘Hamund, his brother, was with Sigurd on the expedition, and the dwarf Regin’ (trans. Hardman). At another place, the same source says: “Þá var ok kominn til Hjalpreks konungs Reginn, sonr Hreiðmars. Hann var hverjum manni hagari ok dvergr á vøxt, vitr maðr, grimmr ok fjølkunnigr”, ‘At the same time, Regin, son of Hreithmar, had also come to King Hjalprek. He was the most cunning of men, but a dwarf in stature, a wise man, but stern and skilled in magic’ (trans. Hardman). This latter quotation corresponds exactly to what the prose preface to *Reginismál* in the *Poetic Edda* says:

Þá var kominn Reginn til Hjalpreks, sonr Hreiðmars. Hann var hverjum manni hagari ok dvergr of vøxt. Hann var vitr, grimmr ok fjølkunnigr.

Then Regin came to Hjalprek's; he was the son of Hreidmar; he was more skilful in making things than anyone else and a dwarf in height; he was clever, fierce, and knowledgeable about magic.

The Poetic Edda, The Lay of Regin, trans. Larrington, p. 147

It is worth noting that the *Poetic Edda* does not claim Reginn *was* a dwarf. In fact, it is more likely that in some versions of the story the family were *jøtnar*, since Reginn calls his brother Fáfnir “inn aldni jøtunn” in *Fáfnismál* (stanza 29), and Reginn is himself called “inn hrímkaldi jøtunn” by the nuthatches in stanza 38. With all this in mind, it seems that Reginn did not come from an all-dwarf family and was not a dwarf by birth. Rather, he was a smith, and not an ordinary one, but particularly skilled in magic. Mikučionis (2019, p. 98, footnote 14) argues that the author of the *Vølsunga saga* intended to show Reginn as “a being who is

either non-human or, perhaps, only partly human, and who is able to produce smithery comparable to such dwarf-made weapons as Óðinn's spear or Þórr's hammer". Such a combination of characteristics may have led to the conclusion that he also must have been a dwarf, cf. "[t]he slow and not entirely complete transformation of Reginn from dwarf-like smith to dwarf smith shows the strong conceptualization of dwarves as smiths" (Schäfke, 2015, p. 372; see also Schäfke, 2010, pp. 283–285). The source texts provide no grounds to conclude that Reginn's parents and siblings (who were *not* smiths) were also dwarfs, cf. "Reginn has obviously even less dwarf-like kin, who are usually considered humans, and this is otherwise never the case with *dvergar*, who have dwarf women (*dyrgjur*) and dwarf children (*dvergsbörn*) as kin" (Schäfke, 2015, p. 372). Reginn's father Hreiðmarr is called *búandi* 'husbandman, farmer, landowner' in *The Prose Edda* ("En sá búandi er nefndr Hreiðmarr, er þar bjó. Hann var mikill fyrir sér ok mjök fjölkunnigr." Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (Skáldskaparmál), ed. Faulkes, p. 45), but Hreiðmarr is not referred to as a dwarf in any of the sources. Arguably, Hreiðmarr was not an ordinary farmer, – he may have been a great sorcerer and perhaps non-human (or not entirely human) – but it does not make him a dwarf. The appellation of Hreiðmarr as the "dwarf king" or the "king of the dwarf folk" (Guerber, 1919, p. 170, cf. also Bane, 2013, p. 184) is a misunderstanding, although a relatively widespread one even nowadays.

The only source which explicitly calls Reginn *dvergr*, i.e., *Norna-Gests þátrr*, does not mention his sisters at all. Conversely, the source which does mention them, i.e., *Reginismál*, does not state that Reginn or any other member of the family *were* actually dwarfs. Therefore, the suggestion that the daughters of Hreiðmarr (that is, Lyngheiðr and Lofnheiðr, the sisters of Reginn) "might be the only female *dvergar* that appear on the sources" (Barreiro, 2008, p. 9) is unconvincing or, at least, problematic.

3.4 Conclusion regarding Eddic and skaldic dwarfs

To summarise, we do not have any clear references to female dwarfs in skaldic poetry or in the *Eddas*. At the same time, there are relatively many references to family relations (brother–brother, father–son, father–daughters, ancestor–descendant) in these sources. This indicates that the idea of dwarf *families* was *not* an alien concept, but rather an important aspect of the life of dwarfs. Therefore, this author cannot agree completely with statements such as:

“Scandinavian dwarfs lacked female counterparts because they did not need them. Their monofunctionality (they were only indispensable servants) deprived them of family life” (Lieberman, 2002b, p. 261). The dwarfs in skaldic poetry and the *Eddas* are not deprived of *family life*: they do have fathers, sons and brothers – and Dvalinn has daughters, even though his daughters, the *nornir*, perhaps need not be “proper” dwarfs. Of course, one could hypothesise that the dwarfs were thought to reproduce (and have families) without any female counterparts involved, but it may at least be equally well argued that we simply do not have *narratives* featuring female dwarfs in this group of sources – which is something completely different than claiming that female dwarfs *do not exist* in Nordic mythology. The reason why we do not hear anything about female dwarfs is probably that *the gods* (not the male dwarfs themselves!) did not need them. The gods assigned tasks to the dwarfs, often – by sending Loki to Svartálfaheimr to tell the dwarfs what they were required to produce for the gods. Female dwarfs were irrelevant. Assuming that only male dwarfs engaged in activities that were of direct interest to the gods, such as production of weapons or other objects with magic characteristics, suggests the gods did not have any tasks to be carried out by female dwarfs. They did not need to manipulate the male dwarfs by bringing female dwarfs (or dwarf children) into play either, as a direct command was sufficient. The situation is completely different in saga literature, where the dwarfs interact with human beings. Humans do not have the same power over dwarfs as the gods do. Dwarfs are not servants to humans, but human protagonists in sagas may need dwarfs’ help and services just as the gods in the *Eddas* do. Unlike the gods, humans cannot directly command dwarfs, but humans can both coerce and manipulate dwarfs into providing them with products or services. It has been argued previously by Mikučionis (2014) that the family life of the dwarfs is significant for the relationships between dwarfs and humans in saga literature, especially since the human protagonist is able to manipulate the adult dwarf e.g. by giving a present to the dwarf’s child. The present is given to a dwarf’s child rather than directly to the adult dwarf in order to ensure that it is not rejected. At the same time, the dwarf’s fatherly love towards his children is exploited as it appears that saga dwarfs are known as devoted and loving parents (Mikučionis, 2014, pp. 172–174). No negative connotations of the word “to exploit” are intended here,

although in some situations dwarfs may indeed be exploited in the negative sense – both by the gods and by humans. The present given to the dwarf child by the human needs to then be reciprocated by the adult father, and this is exactly what the human’s goal is. The difference in relationships of power between gods and dwarfs in the *Eddas*, and humans and dwarfs in the sagas, is the reason why humans need to manipulate dwarfs in ways the gods do not need to. This explains why we find more explicit references to, and more details about, dwarf families (including female dwarfs) in sagas than in the *Eddas*.

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