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Snake Rings in *Deor* and *Vǫlundarkviða*

Robert Cox

The troubles of Welund, alluded to in the first section of *Deor*, are relatively well-understood, given fuller versions of the legend in *Vǫlundarkviða* and *Þiðriks saga*, and thanks to graphic corroboration of the story on the Franks casket and elsewhere.¹

Welund him be wurman wræces cunnade,
anhydig eorl, earfoða dreag,
hæfde him to gesiþþe sorge ond longaþ,
wintercealde wræce, wean oft onfond
siþþan hine Niþhad on nede legde,
swoncre seonobende, on syllan monn.²
[Welund 'among snakes' endured torment,
the resolute hero, endured troubles,
had for company sorrow and frustration,
wintercold wretchedness, often felt woe
after Niþhad laid fetters on him,
supple sinew-bonds, upon the good man.]³

Yet the phrase 'be wurman' in the opening verse leaves editors and translators, like Welund, in some difficulty. My purpose in this paper is to explore the nature and extent of the difficulty and to offer evidence in support of a reading originally suggested by Kemp Malone, but not widely adopted by subsequent editors or translators.

Even the preposition 'be' in 'be wurman' is troublesome. 'Be' cannot have instrumental meaning ('by means of, using') in this context, but its meaning can be broadly locative ('near, in the presence of'), circumstantial ('in the matter of'), or

causative ('from, because of, on account of, subject to').⁴ Furthermore, 'wurman', understood literally as a dative plural of *wyrm*, does not make good sense with any of these, primarily because the troubles of Wayland the Smith, as we know of them, were not endured 'near', 'with reference to', or 'because of' literal 'snakes'.⁵ If we are going to make better sense of the passage on the basis of information that we have, 'wurman' has to mean something else. It would seem that our choice is either to argue, or to emend. Therefore the phrase has been, as Malone says in the introduction to his edition, 'much discussed and much emended'. He himself will not emend, 'even though we cannot be sure just what the poet had in mind' (p. 7).

Malone's suggested reading of 'be wurman' is tentative, but not timid. He thinks the phrase is correct for two reasons. First, he notes the presence of snake images in *Völundarkviða*:

Now in the Eddic poem *Welund* is said to be good at putting snake rings together (5), while the Queen likens his eyes to those of a snake and commands that he be hamstrung, presumably by way of precaution (17).⁶

Second, he reminds us that in skaldic poems swords and spears can be referred to as 'snakes', and that Egill Skallagrimsson carried a sword called *Naðr* into the Battle of *Vinheiði* (i.e. *Brunanburh*). He surmises that this figurative use may have arisen from 'the serpentine decoration (damascening) with which the Germanic smiths adorned the swords they made'. He mentions that A. H. Smith suggested to him that 'be wurman' 'might then have the ironical sense "by means of his own swords"'.⁷

Malone's reasoning at this point supports taking *wyrm* as a weapon, a sword or a spear, but in the ensuing discussion he combines it with his earlier remarks to imply that a ring is also possible:

. . . perhaps the poet thought of *Weland* as undergoing persecution by (i.e. amid) the very weapons with serpentine tracings and the rings and other ornaments in serpentine form which he had made, and which were the finest and most highly esteemed expressions of the smith's art.⁸

Pausing for a moment over the conjunction of 'the very weapons with serpentine

tracings' and 'the rings and other ornaments in serpentine form', let us recall that Malone's reasoning for accepting 'be wurman' actually depends on two separate arguments, and note that here it leads to distinct and not particularly compatible propositions: *wyrm* might refer to an article made by the legendary smith into a snake-like form (e.g. a snake ring), or to one made with wavy marks on its surface, a thing that can 'bite' like a snake (e.g. a sword or a spear). Taking *wyrm* as 'ring' seems to depend at this point on the statement quoted above that the hero is 'good at putting snake rings together'. Whether or not this is a justifiable translation of *Vkv.*, 5. 5-6, is a question to which I will return. In any case, this is how 'snake rings' first get introduced into the discussion of *Deor*, 1a.⁹ Malone does not seem to distinguish between the alternative (and competing) claims of 'swords' and/or 'rings'. Since Malone's readings are only tentative, he is entitled to hedge. But since he does not explain how 'be wurman' can mean both swords and rings at the same time, his readers are right to wonder which, if either, they should choose.

Malone feels his reading is similar to one by R. E. Kaske, who discovered in the thirteenth century Middle High German poem *Virginâl* that the banner of Witege displays not only a golden hammer and tongs, the familiar icons of his father Wielandt, but also a silver snake.¹⁰

ein hamer und zang von golde rô
ein nater, diu ist von silber wîz,
 alz im sîn vater Wielandt gebôt.¹¹
[a hammer and tongs of red gold,
a snake of white silver,
 such as his father Wielandt gave him.]

But Kaske actually makes a different sort of claim from Malone's, by suggesting that the snake, along with hammer and tongs, may be part of a complex icon for Wayland's work.

If we can admit that the *nater* may have been part of a device traditionally associated with the work of Weland, the phrase *be wurman* can perhaps be understood as a synecdoche to be rendered, 'among the [products of his craft, all marked with] serpents'; or just possibly, with reference to the motive underlying his capture and constraint by Niðhad, 'because of the

[products of his craft, all distinguished by being marked with] serpents'.¹²

Kaske's repetition of the phrase 'marked with' suggests that he may have damascening in mind, therefore weapons, but it could be other forms of surface ornament on other items. In theory, these items could certainly include rings, but there is nothing in his article to suggest that Kaske endorses the idea of including rings in serpentine form, 'snake rings', among the products of Wayland's craft.

It would appear that the bond that Malone tried to forge between his two suggestions, rings and swords, has not held for his readers. In practice, most editors of 'derived' editions have glossed 'wurman' as 'swords', and most translators of *Deor* have omitted the phrase entirely.¹³

But did the suggestion that 'wurman' might refer to 'rings' have no merit? I believe it did. It was a good idea that should not be forgotten, and in the remainder of this paper I will show why. First I will re-examine the evidence that Malone referred to, – in particular the claim that *Vǫlundr* was 'good at putting snake rings together' – and then I will introduce evidence of a different sort – English and Scandinavian arm rings and finger rings from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. I will show that rings in spiral form, as well as open circle ('C') form, and closed circle form, could and did in varying ways refer to snakes. My aim is not to show that 'wurman' must refer to 'rings', but that it could, in part because the rings themselves seem persistently to have reminded their wearers and their makers of snakes, and in part because this reading is consistent with our overall understanding of the poem *Deor*. On the basis of extant remains, 'snake ring' was possibly a functioning notional category in Anglo-Saxon England, even if we know no terms for it. It was certainly a notional category in Scandinavia, where there was at least one term for it: *armlinnr* 'arm snake' = armlet.¹⁴ In *Vǫlundarkviða* there seems to be still another term, as I will explain below.

In *Vǫlundarkviða* *Vǫlundr*'s troubles, as well as his revenge, are more closely associated with his rings than with his swords. The ring he made for *Hervor*, his valkyrie-wife, is stolen from him by *Níðuðr*'s men (stanza 8). He is seeking it among seven hundred others in his hall (stanza 10), when he falls asleep and is captured by *Níðuðr* (stanza 11). We can infer that he wakes confronted by his captors 'near' or 'in the presence of' these rings; we might also infer that he is captured because *Níðuðr* desired the ring, or even because *Níðuðr* obtained the ring. *Níðuðr* gives the stolen ring to his daughter *Boðvildr* (stanza 17). *Vǫlundr* sees

Níðuðr wearing his sword and Bǫðvildr wearing the ring (stanza 18). Seeing his captor's daughter wearing his wife's ring provokes the bitter remark (stanza 19), 'Nú berr Bǫðvildr brúðar minnar/ – biðca ec þess bót – bauga rauða' ['Now Bǫðvildr wears my wife's red rings – I will not await compensation for that'].¹⁵ Völundr is confined to an island where he labours without sleep to make things for Níðuðr, whose sons wish to see the rings in the treasury at Völundr's smithy (stanza 23). Völundr kills them as they gaze into the chest. When the stolen ring is broken, Bǫðvildr comes secretly to Völundr's smithy to have it mended (stanza 26). He promises to mend it (stanza 27), but as another aspect in his revenge, he seduces her and flies away. We are not told what happens to the ring. Tantalizing questions remain. Is he able to fly after he ravishes Bǫðvildr because he recovers the ring from her? Does the ring have 'powers'?¹⁶ Is he captured in the first place only because the ring is stolen? Probably these questions are unanswerable. But returning to *Deor* for a moment, we can see that if 'wurman' refers to 'rings', then we can also say of the preposition 'be' that Welund endures torment both 'near' his rings and 'because of' their appropriation by Níðuðr. We might even speak of his trouble circumstantially, 'in the matter of rings'.

But what is the connection between Völundr's rings and snakes, *wurmas*? What sort of rings does Völundr make? The answer lies in how one reads four verses of *Völundarkviða*. Early in the poem, after the swan-maidens fly away and Völundr's two brothers depart to seek their wives, Völundr himself remains alone in the Wulf-dales (stanza 5). He is making rings.

Hann sló gull rautt við gimfastan,
lucþi han alla lindbauga vel.

(*Vkv.* 5. 3-6)

[He hammered red gold against the anvil,
he coiled together all the snake rings well.]

Both 'gimfastan' and 'lindbauga' involve conjectures – earlier editions had asterisks before the words – and can be read in several ways. In his gloss for 'gimfastan' Kuhn considers both **gim* 'feuer' [fire] and **gimr* 'gemme', 'edelstein' [gem, precious stone]. He construes the former in a substantival circumlocution for an anvil: **gim-fastr* 'feuerfest, gemeint ist der amboss?' [fire-resistant thing; does this refer to an anvil?]. The latter might be construed in a noun phrase referring to a jewel: **gimr fástr* 'den sehr bunten edelstein' [the highly coloured jewel]. For this

possibility Kuhn takes 'fastan' as superlative of *fár* 'bunt' [coloured], in which case the first two verses might mean 'He beat red gold against brightest gem'.¹⁷ Given a choice between an anvil (a 'fire-resistant thing') and a bright gem, few translators have chosen the anvil.¹⁸ Yet Kuhn seems to prefer it, as did Neckel before him. Stylistically the circumlocution is acceptable, and, besides, Kuhn has another kind of ornament in mind: a gold ring in the form of a coiled snake.

Kuhn glosses *lind-baugr* as 'schlangenförmig gebogener arming(?)' [arming in the shape of a coiled snake].¹⁹ Kuhn's question mark is warranted because the common simplex *lind* refers to the linden tree, or to some part of it, such as the wood, which could be made into a shield, or to the inner bark (i.e. bast), which could be twisted into twine or rope. A derived form *lindi* means 'belt, girdle' because in Iceland people wore belts of woven bast. When Niðuðr's men enter Völundr's hall, they see seven hundred rings tied together with bast (stanza 7. 5). When Völundr sees Niðuðr wearing his sword, it is secured by a *lindi* (stanza 18. 2). But Kuhn regards this particular instance of *lind-* as a reference to serpentine form, cognate with Old High German *lint*, Middle High German *lintwurm*. Compounds with Old Norse *linnr* and *linni* occur in the poetry.²⁰ The most striking of these is *armlinnr* 'serpent of the arm' = 'armlet'.²¹ The word is rare; Cleasby-Vigfusson does not lemmatize *armlinnr*, but glosses *linnr* as 'a serpent, only in poetry' and refers to the *Lexicon Poëticum*. Cleasby-Vigfusson also does not recognize *lind-baugr* as a form, but under *lind* says '*bauga lind* . . . is dubious, perhaps = lime bast, on which the rings were strung'.²² Cleasby-Vigfusson's entry has determined how most translators turn *Völundarkviða* into Modern English.

But is this a case of *lectio faciliior*? Is selecting 'bast' instead of 'snake' simply choosing the easier word over the rarer one? Kuhn's text and gloss implies that *lind-* is an acceptable form for *linn-*.²³ It seems possible that *lind-* was simply substituted for *linn-* at some point in the poem's transmission. Proto-Germanic *-nþ* assimilates to *-nn* in Old Norse between 700-950 A.D.²⁴ *Völundarkviða* is generally agreed to have been composed within that period. If the original word was **linþbauga*, then, given the conservatism of poetic language, *-nþ* in a rare word could be both retained and misunderstood for a common one instead of being assimilated. A further speculation complements this. The Wayland story is said to come from northern Germany.²⁵ A plausible term in Old Saxon for 'snake rings' would have been **lint bauga*. Wayland's rings are clearly important in the story, so would the word have come with the story, but be misunderstood later? Guesses aside, in the 1927 edition of his glossary to *Edda*, Kuhn's predecessor Neckel wrote

'*ling-baugr könnte "schlangenring" (ring in form einer sich in den schwanz beissenden schlange) bedeuten' [*ling-baugr could refer to "snake ring" (a ring in the form of a coiled snake)].²⁶ Apparently that is why Malone said that Völundr was 'good at putting snake rings together'.

Rings that wrap around the finger or the arm have reminded people of snakes from early times. For example, in the Victoria and Albert Museum there are Roman gold finger rings in loop and spiral form fashioned into naturalistic representations of snakes.²⁷ A Belgic spiral armlet (fourth century?) combining a snake's body and a ram's head was found in Cambridgeshire in 1954.²⁸ Coiled armlets are well attested among the Germanic people, underlying the reference to *wunden gold* in *Beowulf*, 1193, and probably also at lines 1382 and 3134. Hildebrand 'unwinds' a 'wuntane bauga' from his arm to give to Hadubrand in *Hiltibrantslied*, 33-35.

Want her do ar arme wuntane bauga,
cheirsuringu gitan, so imo se der chuning gap,
Huneo truhtin: 'dat ih dir it nu bi huldi gibu.'
[Then he wound off (his) arm the spiral ring,
royally fashioned, which (Attila) the king gave him,
lord of the Huns: '(so) that I now give it to you for affection.']*²⁹

What evidence do we have that the coiled or spiral form of an armlet suggested a snake to its wearers and makers? In addition to Old Norse phrases with *linnr* discussed earlier, we have more explicit reference on the rings themselves. While a full naturalistic representation of a snake is unusual (Appendix, figure 3), snake motifs, such as stylized snake heads on one or both ends of the ring, and hatching, stamping, or scoring to suggest the skin of the snake, are common.³⁰ A splendid representative of the former type is the Tuna ring, from the early fourth century (figure 2b); among many examples of the latter type are rings from the Asarve hoard (figure 2a). Spiral finger rings, apparently a woman's article in the early finds, are also common (figure 7), as are finger rings with a coiled bezel (figure 10). These rings, too, are found with surface decoration that might represent the skin of a snake (figure 8). Again, a full naturalistic representation of a snake is unusual, but does occur in a gold ring of later (ninth century?) Anglo-Saxon provenance (figure 11).

To our eyes, armlets and rings made in the shape of a circle seem less serpentine than the spiral rings. Yet a fragment of an armlet decorated to represent a snake swallowing its own tail has been found near Stamford Bridge (figure 4), and a

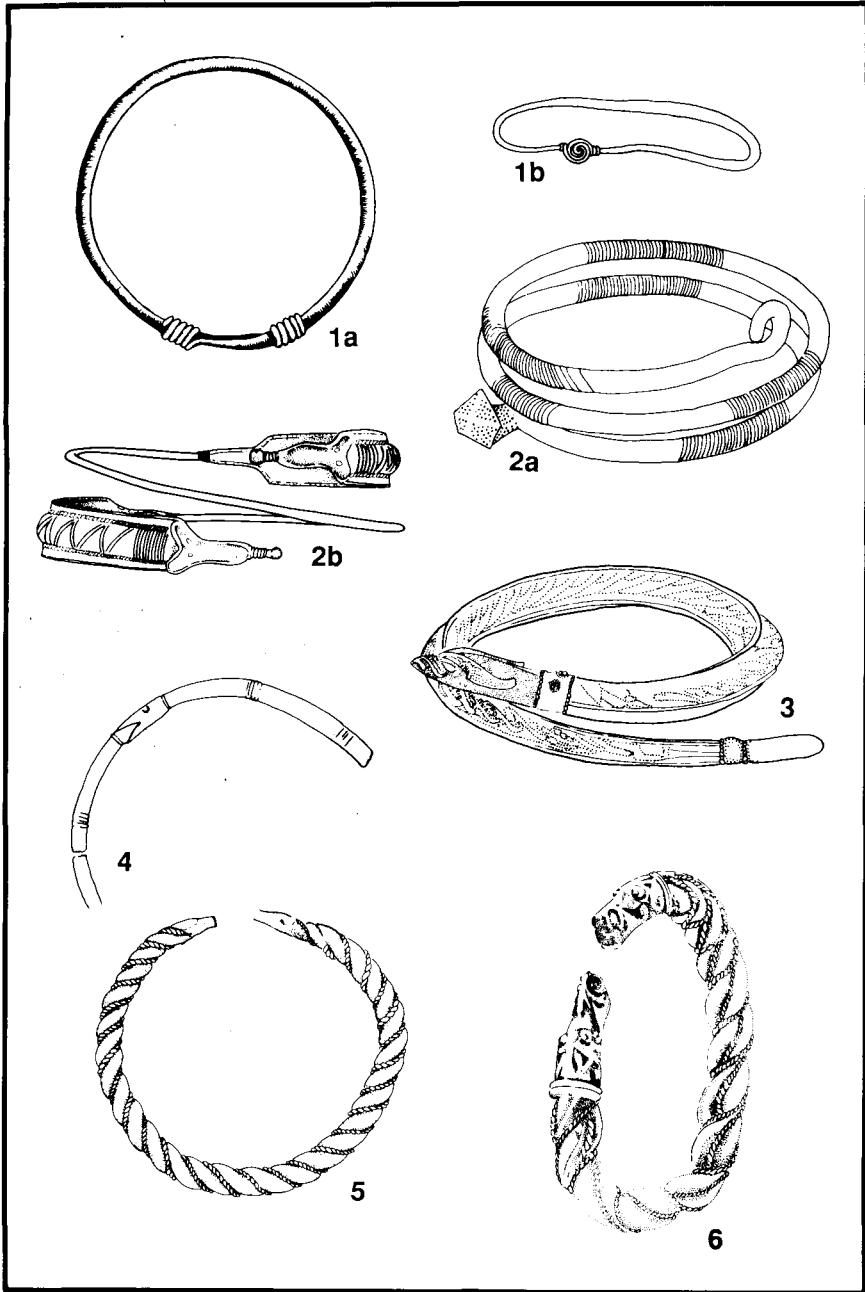
finger ring of twisted silver wire from York may be a more abstract version of the same motif (figure 14).

Rings of twisted or plaited wire appear in the tenth and eleventh centuries. When left open, the twisted ones sometimes have snake heads on the opposing ends (figure 6). Possibly twisting and plaiting alone constitute a snake motif; in which case, several other types of rings whose 'snakeyness' is less obvious to our eyes would have at least marginal status. These would include open bracelets of twisted wires (figure 5), and finger rings of twisted wire (figure 13) and plaited wire (figure 15) as well.

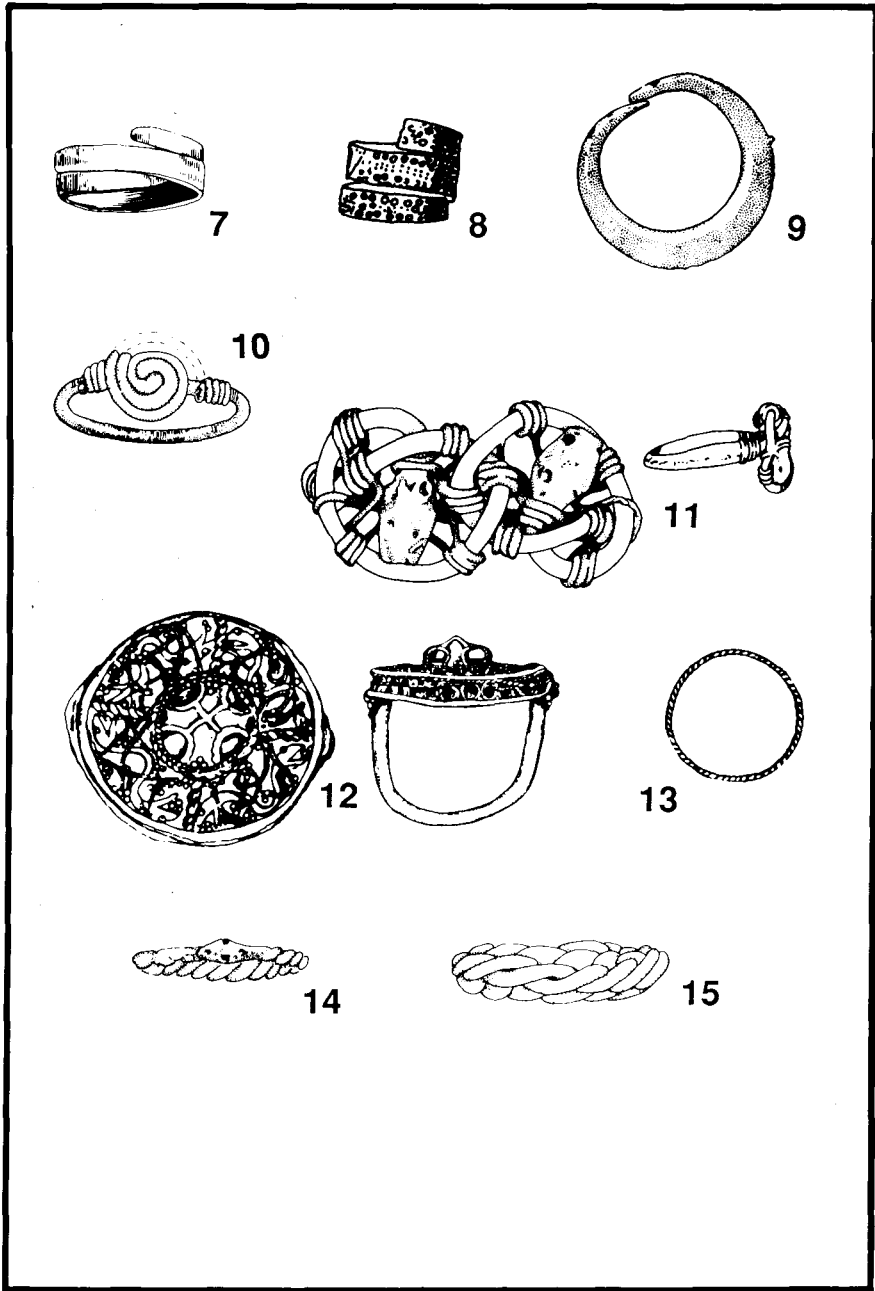
But these types move us away from the coiled and spiral rings with which we started and which constitute the real basis of the proposed category 'snake rings'. Let us suppose, just for the sake of argument, that we could ask an Anglo-Saxon audience what sort of rings the legendary Wayland made. There is no doubt we would be told that he made rings in the old style. Spiral rings, with and without snake head terminals, were made and worn throughout the Germanic world from the fourth century onwards, but they tend to disappear in place after place as coins become available. Why? The connection is fundamental: coiled and spiral-form rings of precious metal wire were simply a way of carrying around spendable assets. Whole rings or parts of them could be used in trade or the payment of debts, including wergild. For fractional amounts, bits could be nipped off one end or the other until the ring was used up (e.g. figure 10). The Old English poetic epithet for a magnanimous prince, *beaga brytta*, 'breaker of rings', is cognate with ON *baug-broti*, and both probably are based on a phrase in common Germanic. Museums in Scandinavia, where their use lasted the longest, show many examples of these 'payment rings' (*betalingsringer*), in various states of 'expenditure'.³¹ Earlier, a similar system must have operated in England and on the mainland.³² As a culture moved to coin currency, the spiral-form ring became free to develop as an ornament, but lost its basic utilitarian value and had to compete with other forms. The naturalistic snake (figure 3) made by a Scandinavian silversmith in the eleventh century represents a synthesis: one could look at it as new wine in an old bottle, a decorative updating of the spiral form.³³ But it also comes near the end of the time when 'barbaric' Germanic art could assimilate outside influences and develop from them.³⁴ Shortly, even in its last retreat, Germanic art would be overwhelmed by the Romanesque, and many of its forms and meanings would be lost. Among them, arguably, would be the snake ring.

The following conclusions seem tenable: (1) philological and material evidence

supports reading 'lindbauga', *Vkv.* 5. 6, as 'snake rings' and (2) the argument for reading 'wurman', *Deor*, 1a, as another reference to 'snake[rings]', while less conclusive, is at least as attractive as reading 'wurman' as a reference to 'swords'. The opening line of *Deor* might thus be read 'Welund endured torment amidst [his] snake[ring]s'.³⁵ As Malone implied, there is irony in the hero suffering in the presence of the objects he himself had made 'which were the finest and most highly esteemed expressions of the smith's art'. They were also objects of great intrinsic value and appropriate icons of wealth. The motif *de casibus*, the rich man coming to grief among his useless riches, is both a Germanic and a medieval commonplace, and offers a moral lesson very much in keeping with the general tenor of the poem: 'this [wealth] too shall pass away', as the refrain of the poem keeps hammering home.³⁶ Such a reading of *Deor*, 1a, makes sense, although it depends upon the first conclusion above and then upon how heavily one weighs *Vǫlundarkviða* as a source of pertinent lore about Wayland the Smith. If *Vǫlundr* is explicitly identified in *Vǫlundarkviða* as a maker of snake rings, that also might help to explain why Wielandt's name is associated with the snake on Witege's banner in the *Virginâl*. Otherwise, as I have said before, there is no story about Wayland and snakes. It seems odd that such a story, had there been one, would have completely escaped the attention of the author of *Þiðriks saga*. What we know about Wayland from earlier sources, and a good deal more besides, is gathered there – strangely changed, but recognizable. Velent is still an expert maker of both swords and rings. But by the thirteenth century, when both *Þiðriks saga* and the *Virginâl* were written, the old spiral snake rings that Wayland had made so skilfully were faded from memory.



Figures 1-6: Armlets



Figures 7-15: Finger rings

Appendix

Armlet, coiled or spiral form

Figure 1a, surface undecorated, may be thought of as 'snake-like' by virtue of its form. Example: silver, 'pagan period', Faversham [Kent]; cf. **figure 1b** silver, c. 911, Cuerdale [Lancs.]. For discussion see R. A. Smith, *British Museum: A Guide to the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic Antiquities in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities* (London, 1923), pp. 45 and 108.

Figure 2a, surface decorated with hatching, scoring or stamping (to suggest the body of a snake?), one end shaped to suggest head of snake. Example: silver, ninth century, Asarve hoard [Gotland]; cf. **figure 2b**, decorated surface, stylized snake heads on terminals, gold, fourth century, Tuna, Hjalsta, Uppland [Sweden]. For **figure 2a**, see Holger Arbman, *The Vikings*, translated and edited by Alan Binns (London, 1961), page 201 and plate 43; for **figure 2b**, see Statens Historiska Museum, *Objets d'art d'origine suédoise de X premiers siècles de notre ère* (Stockholm, 1933), plate 2.

Figure 3, a naturalistic representation of a snake, including head, body and tail. Example: neilloomed silver, eleventh century, Undrom, Boteå [Sweden]. See David M. Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, second edition (Minneapolis, 1980), plate LXII d.

Armlet, closed circle

Figure 4, surface decorated to represent a snake swallowing its own tail. Example: Stamford Bridge [Yorks.], fragment, no date. See George Speake, *Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background* (Oxford and New York, 1980), figure 11j.

Armlet, open circle, twisted or plaited wires

Figure 5, no obvious animal ornament, 'Viking' type. Example: thick and thin gold wire, tenth century, Wendover; further examples in gold from Douglas [Isle of Man], West Berholt [Essex], Gotland and Hon [Norway] and in silver from Douglas [Isle of Man] and from Cuerdale [Lancs.]. For discussion, see Smith, *Guide to Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic Antiquities*, pp. 107-08 and plate III; for the Hon hoard, see Tre Tryckare and Ewert Cagner, *The Viking* (London, 1966), p. 212.

Figure 6, similar to figure 5, but with snake heads on the opposing ends. Example: thick and thin silver wire, eleventh century, Hejslunds [Gotland]. See Arbman, *The Vikings*, p. 202 and plate 66.

Finger ring, coil or spiral form

Figure 7, undecorated, the 'common form'. Example: silver, 'pagan period', Faversham [Kent]; also examples from Chessel Down [Isle of Wight], Long Wittenham [Berks.], and Cuerdale [Lancs.]. For discussion, see Smith, *Guide to Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic Antiquities*, pp. 45, 107-08, and figures 45 and 132.

Figure 8, surface decorated with hatching, scoring or stamping (to suggest the body of a snake?). Example: silver strip, 'early Iron Age', Cassington [Oxf.]; also gold wire ring from Hon [Norway]. See Ronald F. Jessup, *Anglo-Saxon Jewellery* (London, 1950), p. 129 and plate XXXV. 5; for the Hon hoard, see Tryckare and Cagner, *The Viking*, p. 212.

Finger ring, open circle

Figure 9, surface decorated with stamping (to suggest the body of a snake?). Example: gold, 'Viking style', Soberton; a similar ring from Thaxted [Essex]. See Smith, *Guide to Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic Antiquities*, p. 117 and plate III. 4.

Finger ring, coiled bezel

Figure 10, undecorated. Example: silver, 'pagan period', Faversham [Kent]; a similar ring from Sarre [Kent]. See Smith, *Guide to Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic Antiquities*, p. 45 and figure 45; Jessup, *Anglo-Saxon Jewellery*, p. 129 and plate XXXV. 5.

Finger ring, snake on bezel

Figure 11, bezel consists of naturalistic representation of two intertwined snakes 'in combat'. Example: gold wire, ninth century, Dorchester [Dorset]. See David A. Hinton, *A Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork, 700-1100, in the Department of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford, 1974), p. 16 and plate VI.

Figure 12, bezel surface decorated with two-headed snakes and beading under filigree. Example: gold, disc bezel, no provenance, but stylistically related to Windsor pommel. See Hinton, *Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork*, p. 66 and plate 20.

Finger ring, closed circle, twisted wires

Figure 13, undecorated, no bezel. Example: gold, ? eleventh century Anglo-Scandinavian, Oxford. See Hinton, *Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork*, p. 48.

Figure 14, bezel flattened and decorated with four dots (to represent a snake swallowing its own tail?). Example: silver, 'Viking work', ninth to eleventh century, no provenance. See Charles C. Oman, *Victoria and Albert Museum, Department of Metalwork, Catalogue of Rings* (London, 1930), item 229 and frontispiece.

Finger ring, open circle, twisted or plaited wires

Figure 15, undecorated, but wires thicker for bezel. Example: gold, eleventh

century, Soberton; other rings in gold from Hamsey [Sussex], Oxford and Waterford. See Smith, *Guide to Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic Antiquities*, p. 117 and plate III. 5.

NOTES

¹ See *Deor*, edited by Kemp Malone, revised edition (Exeter, 1977), pp. 6-7. For *Völundarkviða*, see *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius. I. Text*, edited by Gustav Neckel, revised by Hans Kuhn, fifth edition (Heidelberg, 1983), pp. 116-23. Relevant sections of *Þiðriks saga* are translated by Edward R. Haymes in *The Saga of Thidrek of Bern* (New York, 1988), pp. 40-55. The best discussion of Wayland motifs on the Franks casket is in Alfred Becker, *Franks Casket* (Regensburg, 1973). For survey of the records of the Wayland legend see Otto L. Jiriczek, *Deutsche Heldensagen* (Strassburg, 1898), pp. 1-54, and Hermann Schneider, *Germanische Heldensage*, 2 vols in 3 (Berlin and Leipzig, 1928-34), II, Part 2, 72-95. I wish to thank Professors Joseph Harris (Harvard University) and Thomas D. Hill (Cornell University) for reading an earlier version of this paper and for offering valuable advice during the 1987 NEH seminar 'Beowulf and the Reception of Germanic Antiquity', for which it was originally written.

² The Old English text is from Malone's edition.

³ My provisional translation, in which I have tried to be unpolemic about 'be wurman'. Departures from Malone's glossary will be discussed below.

⁴ An instrumental meaning of *be* is grammatically objectionable in this context because *cunnian* 'endure' or 'experience' requires an experiencer, rather than an agent, as its subject: Welund does not inflict torment; he endures it. It makes no sense, for instance, to say that Welund (as experiencer) endured torment using snakes. It would make sense to say that somebody else (as agent) tormented Welund (as experiencer) using snakes, but the text does not support that interpretation. Although 'by' is the first term given for the lemma *bi* in Malone's glossary, Modern English *by* has as broad a range of meaning as Old English *be*. In discussion of the passage Malone seems to favour taking *be* (and 'by') as marking locative meaning ('by, i.e. amid' and 'in the midst of' p. 7). Locative, circumstantial, and causative meanings of *be* are attested in T. N. Toller's *Supplement* (Oxford, 1908) to *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1898); see *be* A. I. (3), A. III. (8), and A. III (15). Bruce Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1985), I, § 1183, dismisses 'be wurman' as a proposed instance of *be* taking accusative case, but says nothing helpful about the meaning of the phrase. James E. Anderson, 'Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, and the Soul's Address: How and Where the Old English Exeter Book Riddles Begin', in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, edited by Martin Green (Madison, New Jersey, 1983), takes *cunnian* as 'try, seek for', which does require an agent subject. This produces a startling reading of the line: 'Welund tried punishment on them [the brothers of Beadohild] with purple' (i.e. bloody revenge), p. 207, notes 5 and 10. In this reading he also takes 'wurman' as a dative singular of *wurma* 'purple dye'; he suggests that 'be wurman' means 'with purple' i.e. 'bloody'. The argument depends crucially upon an idiom otherwise attested only in

Elizabethan English. \

⁵ In a review of the first edition of Malone's *Deor*, Eilert Ekwall, *Modern Language Review*, 29 (1934), 81, argues that 'be wurman' is corrupt, but suggests that 'if . . . the word *wurm* is meant, I suppose we must assume that there was a variant of the Weland story in which the hero had to spend some time in the snake-pit'. For objections, see Malone, *Deor*, p. 6, note 2. In the same note Malone dismisses Frederick Tupper's suggestion, 'The Song of Deor', *Modern Philology*, 9 (1911-12), 266, note 2, that *wurman* refers to the people of Vermarland (modern Värmland) in Sweden. Frederick Klaeber, 'The First Line of Deor', *Beiblatt zur Anglia*, 32 (1921), 38-40, summarizes earlier conjectures and offers another of his own. For a convenient summary of proposed emendations, see the notes in *Exeter Book*, edited by G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 6 vols (New York, 1936), III, pp. 318-19.

⁶ Malone, *Deor*, p. 6; he also mentions that the Queen of the Vipers appears in a modern French folk-tale version of the Wayland story.

⁷ A grammatical difficulty with Smith's reading is that it uses *be* as a marker of instrumentality by covertly adding a new predication: Welund endures torment (at the hands of Niðhad, who torments him) 'by means of' his own swords.

⁸ Malone, *Deor*, p. 7; but see further: 'and certainly the picture of the hero oppressed in the midst of weapons of his own making is ironical and striking enough' (ibid.).

⁹ And into Malone's glossary, where under *wurm*, *wurman*, one finds 'worm, snake, sword(?), ring(?)' and a reference to his introduction.

¹⁰ R. E. Kasse, 'Weland and the *wurmas* in *Deor*', *English Studies*, 44 (1963), 190-91. One might add to Kasse's observations that the serpent motif also appears in *Þiðriks saga* among Valent's gifts to his son; for instance, when he sets out on his adventures Vidga is given a helmet decorated with a dragon 'that is called serpent. The dragon was gold coloured, which designated his knighthood. The serpent was full of poison, showing Vidga's bravery and his grim courage . . .'. Valent also gave Vidga an ivory saddle upon which there was 'a drawing of an adder' (Haymes, *The Saga of Thidrek of Bern*, p. 57).

¹¹ Albrecht von Kemenaten, *Dietrichs Abenteuer*, edited by Julius Zupitza, Deutsches Heldenbuch, 5 vols (Berlin, 1866-73), V (1870), 120; stanza 652, lines 11-13. The translation is my own.

¹² Kasse, 'Weland and the *wurmas*', p. 191; Kasse's second rendering takes *be* as causative: 'because of'. Either of the two meanings – locative or causative – is possible, of course, but with distinctly different implications.

¹³ The phrase is omitted in translations by Charles W. Kennedy, *Anthology of Old English Poetry* (New York, 1960), p. 57; R. K. Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1954), p. 71; Michael Alexander, *The Earliest English Poems: A Bilingual Edition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles,

1970), p. 189, and a translation of the section by Brian Branston, *The Lost Gods of England*, revised edition (London, 1974), p. 12, but appears as 'Wermland' in Burton Raffel's *Poems from the Old English* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1960), p. 57, and as 'trammels' in S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, Melbourne, and Toronto, 1982), p. 364. Malone himself had translated the phrase as 'from wounds' in *The Old English Poems* (Baltimore, 1941), p. 48. Bradley's translation reflects an emendation proposed by John C. Pope, *Seven Old English Poems* (Indianapolis and New York, 1966), p. 93, who refers to both of Malone's suggestions, but prefers 'be wearnum' 'by hindrances', as an allusion to hamstringing. W. F. Bolton, *An Old English Anthology* (Evanston, 1966) p. 96, suggests 'wurman' may refer to 'swords' or 'weapons'; Michael Alexander, *The Earliest English Poems*, p. 189, suggests 'swords'; Jackson J. Campbell and James L. Rosier, *Poems in Old English* (New York and Evanston, 1962), p. 70, suggest both 'swords' and 'rings'.

¹⁴ See entry for *armlinnr* in *Lexicon Poëticum*, edited by Sveinbjörn Egilsson, revised edition by Finnur Jónsson, 3 vols (Copenhagen, 1913-16); in the following discussion, however, I will cite more copious notes in the original *Lexicon Poëticum: antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis*, edited by Sveinbjörn Egilsson (Copenhagen, 1860).

¹⁵ The translation of this and the following verses is mine.

¹⁶ Karen Grimstad considers the possibility that the ring bestows the power of flight in 'The Revenge of Völundr', in *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, edited by Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies, 4 (Winnipeg, 1983), pp. 187-209 (pp. 191-92). Karl Hauk argues that Wayland's ring came to be identified with the ring of Solomon on the Frank's casket in 'Auzon, das Bilder- und Runenkästchen', *Realexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, edited by Johannes Hoops, second edition, revised by Heinrich Beck, et al., 7 vols (Berlin and New York, 1973-89), I, 514-22. Joseph Harris, 'Deor and Its Refrain: Preliminaries to an Interpretation', *Traditio*, 43 (1987), 23-53, develops the connection with Solomon by extending it to the poem's refrain. I am indebted to Professor Harris for these references.

¹⁷ *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius. II. Kurzes Wörterbuch*, edited by Gustav Neckel, revised by Hans Kuhn, third edition (Heidelberg, 1968), pp. 51 and 75; for the phrase 'den sehr bunten edelstein' see *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius. I. Text*, edited by Gustav Neckel (Heidelberg, 1914), p. 113.

¹⁸ For instance, see Patricia Terry, *Poems of the Vikings* (Indianapolis, 1969), p. 94: 'he set red gold with sparkling gems'. But Kuhn and Neckel's preferences are accepted by Daniel Calder and Robert E. Bjork, et al., *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry II: The Major Germanic and Celtic Texts in Translation* (Totowa, New Jersey, 1983), p. 66: '[H]e forged red gold against the anvil (?). Well he coiled all the arm rings (?)'.

¹⁹ *Edda. II. Kurzes Wörterbuch*, p. 129. Neckel's textual notes (*Edda. I. Text* 113) and Kuhn's glossary (*Kurzes Wörterbuch*, p. 128) also record emendations by Bugge ('liðbauga' 'gliedring' [link-

ring]) and Jónnson ('lind baugom' 'bastseil' [bast rope]).

²⁰ Egilsson, *Lexicon Poëticum* (1860), p. 521, cites under *linni*, e.g., 'randar linni' 'serpens clipei, gladius' [snake of the shield, spear] and under *linnr*, 'linns blóða látr' 'cubile serpentis, aurum' [couch of serpent's (blood), gold]. These phrases seem to occur in court poetry.

²¹ Egilsson, *Lexicon Poëticum* (1860) cites under *armlinnr*, 'armlinns eyðir', 'vir' and 'armlinns ytir', 'vir' [spender(?) of the armllet, 'man'] in *Gyðings visur*, 7 and *Egils Saga*, section 75.1, and 'armlinns þóll', 'femina' [tree of the armllet, i.e. woman] in *Eyrbyggja Saga*.

²² Egilsson, *Lexicon Poëticum* (1860), p. 520, offers three interpretations, none with *linnr*, for *Vkv.* 5. 5-6, which he describes as *difficile*: (1) 'he tied all the rings together well with bast' (2) 'he joined together all <of the gold rings> of the linden-tree-of-bracelets [i.e. his wife]' and (3) 'he joined the rings together well in every way' [?'á allar lundir']. Only the first of Egilsson's suggestions has found favour. It underlies Cleasby-Vigfusson's entry, which in turn shapes most translations of *Völundarkviða* into Modern English: *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, initiated by Richard Cleasby, revised, enlarged and completed by Gudbrand Vigfusson, second edition with supplement by Sir William Craigie (Oxford, 1957).

²³ Kuhn does not explain why *lind-* is acceptable, but under *linnból* [serpent bed, gold] Egilsson, *Lexicon Poëticum* (1860), p. 521, cites a manuscript reading 'lindból's gjafi' [giver of the serpent bed, gold giver], where *lind* = *linn*.

²⁴ Adolf Noreen, *Altislandische und altnorwegische Grammatik*, fourth edition (Halle, 1923), § 275; see also § 317, 2(b).

²⁵ William J. Paff, *The Geographical and Ethnic Names in the Þiðriks Saga: A Study in Germanic Heroic Legend* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 53; see also Andreas Heusler, *Die altgermanische Dichtung*, second edition reprint (Darmstadt, 1957) p. 159.

²⁶ *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius. II. Kurzes Wörterbuch*, edited by Gustav Neckel, (Heidelberg, 1927), p. 105.

²⁷ Charles C. Oman, *Victoria and Albert Museum, Department of Metalwork, Catalogue of Rings* (London, 1930) plate IV, items 84, 87, and 88.

²⁸ Cyril Fox, *Pattern and Purpose: A Survey of Early Celtic Art in Britain* (Cardiff, 1958), plate 53 and p. 8. Compare the same combination of motifs on the Gundestrup cauldron.

²⁹ Quoted from *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, edited by Frederick Klaeber, third edition (Boston, 1950) p. 291, appendix iv. The translation is my own.

³⁰ Illustrations, by Sandra McNett-McGowan of the University of the Pacific School of Pharmacy, are based on photographs and drawings in sources cited in the Appendix. Her work was underwritten by a grant from the Research Activities Fund of the University of the Pacific.

³¹ For example, at the University of Oslo in the collection of Norwegian antiquities: see Ingvald Undset, *Universitets Samling af Nordiske Oldsager* (Christiania [Oslo], 1878), case 13

[p. 19] and case 15 [pp. 20-21]. Also see *Guides to the National Museum, Copenhagen: the Danish Collection, Antiquity* (Copenhagen, 1938), Room 19, cases 11-19 [p. 100]. Even coins were cut up by traders in the Viking period; see *ibid.*, Room 20, cases 20-22 [p. 106].

³² Modest and relatively unadorned spiral coiled armlets are found in early graves. In the historical period, substantial armlets were assigned bullion value and passed on to heirs or returned with land to grantors: see *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, edited by Dorothy Whitelock, *Cambridge Studies in English Legal History*, 6 (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 35 and 63. Peter J. Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* (New York, 1970), p. 198, refer to similar practices in Scandinavia.

³³ David M. Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, second edition (Minneapolis, 1980), p. 140, date the armlet on the basis of style, which they identify as Ringerike because of the head, the shape of the eye, the lappet and the engraved and nielloed tendril ornament on the snake's back. They see the Ringerike style as harking back to the Jellinge stone for its principal motifs (p. 134).

³⁴ Wilson and Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, p. 161.

³⁵ That is, taking 'be' as locative; other meanings justifiable from the story in *Völundarkviða* are causative ('as a consequence of snake[rings]') or circumstantial ('in the matter of snake[rings]').

³⁶ For this reading of the refrain, see Harris, 'Deor and its Refrain', cited above in note 16.