



# THE POETIC EDDA

A Dual-Language Edition

EDWARD PETTIT



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# Vǫlundarkviða

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*Vǫlundarkviða* (*Vkv.*) ‘The Lay of Vǫlundr’ survives complete only in **R** (fol. 18r–19v), and derivative paper manuscripts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first five and a half sentences of the prose prologue, however, also appear at the end of the last fol. (6v) of **A**, where they follow *Hym*. The poem’s title comes from the paper manuscripts.

The verses of *Vkv.* are in a free form of *fornyrðislag*, the number of lines per stanza varying between two and seven. Consequently, it is not always clear where one stanza ends and the next begins. Modern editions vary in this respect and in their stanza numbering. The accompanying prose is probably younger than the verse, being partly dependent on it. The poem’s age is uncertain, but indications of influence by late Old English verse may point to an origin, or at least a significant phase of passage, in the ninth- or tenth-century Danelaw of Anglo-Norse England, an area from which other Viking Age pictorial representations of the smith Vǫlundr come.

The two basic stories that form *Vkv.*’s narrative have even earlier origins. First is the arrival, marriage and departure of swan-maidens. Second is the capture of the smith Vǫlundr and his subsequent revenge upon King Níðuðr (a name also spelt *Níðaðr*) and his family. These stories’ ultimate origins are also uncertain, but both occur elsewhere in variant forms that predate the ninth-century settlement of Iceland.

The opening tale of the swan-maidens—their arrival by a lake, and subsequent marriage to and abandonment of men—is the earliest known Western version of an ancient shamanistic story. It is probably of North Eurasian origin and based on observation of the seasonal migration of large water-birds. Versions of it are found as far afield as Siberia, North America, and, as early as *c.* 300 A.D., China. The original story probably ran as follows:

There was a man at the margin of a lake who saw some girls bathing. They had laid aside the feather-garments in which they had flown along, and left them on the bank. Or more likely he had seen them fly down from the sky in the shape of some migratory waterfowl, and then undress. He took the feather-clothes of the youngest. The others donned their feathers and flew away. But by withholding the clothes of the youngest he forced her to marry him—for how could she fly away without them? [...] The man hid her clothes, and they reared a family. [...] But as soon as the bird-woman regained her powers of flight, her longing for her kind overmastered her, and she flew off with her young ones.<sup>1</sup>

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1 A. T. Hatto, ‘The Swan Maiden: A Folk-Tale of North Eurasian Origin?’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24 (1961), 326–52 at 295.

*Vkv.* is unusual in lacking any apparent theft of the feather-garments, in having not one but three marriages,<sup>2</sup> and in not mentioning any offspring. It is also the only text to combine the swan-maiden story with that of *Vǫlundr*'s capture and revenge.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest surviving reference to *Vǫlundr* (equivalent to OE *Weland/Welund*) is probably a runic inscription on a gold solidus (dated 575–625) found in Germany, which reads simply *wela[n]du*.<sup>4</sup> However, most early evidence for tales about him comes from pre-Conquest England. These tales may have first reached England with the peoples who migrated from northern Germany, where the legend of *Vǫlundr/Weland* is thought to have arisen. The fullest Old English reference to this figure—and to counterparts of *Níðuðr* and *Boðvildr*—is in the allusive poem *Deor*, which begins:

Welund him be wurman wræces cunnade,  
 anhydig eorl earfoþa dreag,  
 hæfde him to gesiþþe sorge ond longaþ,  
 wintercealde wræce; wean oft onfond  
 siþþan hine Niðhad on nede legde,  
 swoncre seonobende on syllan monn.  
 Pæs ofereode; þisses swa mæg.

Beadohilde ne wæs hyre broþra deap  
 on sefan swa sar swa hyre sylfre þing,  
 þæt heo gearolice ongieten hæfde  
 þæt heo eacen wæs; æfre ne meahte  
 þriste geþencan hu ymb þæt sceolde.  
 Pæs ofereode; þisses swa mæg.

Welund knew exile on account of snakes(?),<sup>5</sup> the single-minded nobleman endured hardships, had sorrow and longing as his company, winter-cold pain; he often experienced woe after *Niðhad* [= ON *Níðuðr*] laid constraints on him, supple sinew-bonds on the better man. That passed away; so may this.

For Beadohild [= ON *Boðvildr*, daughter of *Níðuðr*] her brothers' death was not as painful to her heart as her own affair, in that she had clearly perceived that she was pregnant; she could not ever consider without fear how it had to turn out. That passed away; so may this.

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- 2 A clue to the antiquity of the marriage of Egill and *Qlrún* might be the pairing of these names in a runic inscription on a sixth-century buckle found in Bavaria; see T. Looijenga, *Texts and Contexts of the Oldest Runic Inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 107, 253–55 and J. McKinnell and R. Simek, with K. Düwel, *Runes, Magic and Religion. A Sourcebook* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2004), pp. 57–59. Egill is also associated with *Qlrún* in *Þiðreks saga*.
  - 3 A fourteenth-century German metrical romance, *Friedrich von Schwaben*, has a hero who calls himself *Wieland*, a version of the swan-maiden story with three marriages, and the garment-theft motif, but it may derive partly from Norse sources, perhaps including an earlier version of *Vkv.*; see U. Dronke, ed., *The Poetic Edda: Volume II. Mythological Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 259, 286.
  - 4 Looijenga, *Texts and Contexts*, p. 308.
  - 5 Scholars dispute the precise meaning of *be wurman*. It might be relevant that, in *Vkv.* 17, *Vǫlundr*'s eyes 'reminiscent of the sparkling snake (*orm*)' prompt *Níðuðr*'s wife to have him hamstrung and isolated.

These allusive narrative details are in broad agreement with the fuller account of *Vkv.* Indeed, lexical correspondences between the two poems strongly suggest a genetic link—a possibility increased by *Deor's* use of a comparable strophic form. Possibly these poems draw upon a common Old English poetic source.

Further details to compare with the story of Vǫlundr in *Vkv.* are carved on the front and lid of a whalebone box, probably from eighth-century Northumbria, now housed in the British Museum. The front of this artefact, known as the Franks (or Auzon) Casket, shows an apparently hamstrung Weland in his smithy. In his left hand he holds a severed head in a pair of tongs upon an anvil, beneath which lies a decapitated body. With his right hand he is either presenting a cup (or perhaps a ring) to, or receiving one from, two women—probably Beadohild and her maid, the latter mentioned in the Old Norse *Þiðreks saga af Bern* ‘Saga of Þiðrekr of Bern’ (outlined below). To the right, a figure is catching long-necked birds; this is probably Weland’s brother (ON *Egill*) gathering feathers for a magical coat in which the smith will fly away. The box’s lid shows an archer, whom an accompanying runic inscription arguably calls *Ægili*, defending a house occupied by a woman. *Ægili* might be an Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the same *Egill*, whose skill at archery is known from tenth-century Old Norse skaldic verse and from *Þiðreks saga*.<sup>6</sup> If so, the woman could be the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of Qlrún, his swan-maiden wife in *Vkv.* (hence the bird-like designs above and below her). To judge again from *Þiðreks saga*, other figures in this scene might include his son, from whose head he has shot an apple in a precursor of the William Tell story, and a flying Weland with hamstrung leg, who is perhaps being shot at. Additionally, it is possible that the back panel of the Franks Casket shows Weland presenting Niðhad with bowls made from the skulls of his sons.

Other Old English poems and place-names confirm Weland’s fame and skill. The heroic poems *Beowulf* and *Waldere* (which also mentions Niðhad and Weland’s son, Widia) tell us that he made marvellous swords and armour. King Alfred substituted Weland’s name for that of the virtuous Roman consul Fabricius (cf. Latin *faber* ‘smith’) in his *Metres of Boethius* (Metre 10). Wayland’s Smithy, an isolated megalithic tomb in Oxfordshire, was so called at least as early as the mid-ninth century; and several other Old English place-names not far from this tomb may suggest local interest in Beadohild and Widia. Weland’s fame, and that of Wade (OE *Wada*, ME *Wade*, ON *Vaði*)—father of Weland’s equivalent, Velent, in *Þiðreks saga*—lasted long after the Norman Conquest in England, and elsewhere in Europe.

Vǫlundr’s flying escape is perhaps shown in four stone carvings from Viking Age northern England (modern Leeds, Sherburn and Bedale). These damaged carvings appear to show a man strapped into a bird-like apparatus, as in *Þiðreks saga*. One carving may show a smith’s tools beneath this figure and a woman (Bǫðvildr?)

6 For other interpretations of *Ægili* and the scene on the Franks Casket, however, see G. Cocco, ‘The Bowman Who Takes the Lid Off the Franks Casket’, in M. E. Rugggerini and V. Szóke, ed., *Studi anglo-norreni in onore di John S. McKinnell: ‘He hafað sundorgecynd’* (Cagliari: CUEC, 2009), pp. 15–31.

above him. Elsewhere, the Ardre VIII stone from Gotland, dated c. 800, shows similar iconography and makes clearer reference to the smith's vengeance: a bird-like form, its beak resting against the back of a woman, is shown leaving a tool-filled smithy, to the right of which are two headless bodies.

These allusive early records testify to the familiarity of Vǫlundr's story. However, the only full retelling, apart from *Vkv.*, is the thirteenth-century Norwegian *Velents saga smiðs* 'Story of Velent the Smith', part of *Þiðreks saga*. This saga is thought to have been largely translated from Low German, but is perhaps also partly based on Old Norse Eddic verse. Briefly, this version of the story runs as follows:

Velent [= *Vǫlundr*] is the son of a Zealand giant called Vaði. Velent learns smithing from a man called Mimir and later from two dwarves. The dwarves try to kill him, but he kills them first and casts himself adrift in a log. It is found by men of the Jutland king Niðungr [= *Níðuðr*], whose protection he asks for and receives. Niðungr discovers Velent's skill at smithing and builds him a smithy. Velent then outdoes the court smith by making the marvellous sword Mímung, a duplicate of which he gives to the king. Velent proceeds to make wonderful treasures.

Shortly before Niðungr is to fight a battle, Velent agrees to fetch a magical 'stone of victory' in return for half the kingdom and marriage to the king's daughter. Unfortunately, in doing so he kills Niðungr's favourite servant, an action the king uses as a pretext to renege on the deal. Velent is exiled as punishment. In vengeance he tries to poison the king, but fails. Niðungr then has Velent's Achilles' tendons cut and builds him another smithy, where Velent makes more wonderful metalwork.

Velent lures the king's two younger sons into walking backwards to visit him. He kills them and buries their bodies under his bellows, but escapes suspicion because their footprints appear to lead away from his smithy. He makes drinking cups from their skulls and assorted tableware for the king's feast from their other bones.

The king's daughter (unnamed), having broken her best gold ring, visits Velent with her maid. He has sex with her and then mends the ring. He then instructs his brother Egill, an expert archer, to collect feathers, from which he makes himself a flying apparatus. He flies off in this and reveals the nature of his vengeance to Niðungr. The king forces Egill to shoot at the flying Velent. Seeing blood fall to the ground, Niðungr thinks Velent has suffered a mortal wound. But the king has been outwitted again. For Velent had earlier told Egill to aim below his left arm, where he would be carrying a bladder filled with the blood of the king's sons. Velent goes home to his family farm. Niðungr dies of sickness and is succeeded by his son Otvin. The princess has a son called Viðga. Velent is reconciled with Otvin and marries the princess.

Despite differences of detail, it is reasonable to conclude that all these texts, from *Deor* to *Þiðreks saga*, and the graphical representations refer to the same basic story: the marvellous smith, having been lamed and confined to a smithy by the king, exacts terrible vengeance by beheading the king's sons, making grim objects from their heads, and impregnating the king's daughter, and then flies away.

*Vkv.*'s presence among the mythic poems of **R** requires some explanation, though there is palaeographical and orthographical evidence confirming its association with these poems. Unlike the preceding poems, and the following *Alv.*, *Vkv.* refers

to neither gods nor giants. Nor does Snorri refer to it in his *Prose Edda*, although that work's inclusion of the kennings *grjót-Níðuðr* 'rock-Níðuðr' (for the kidnapping giant Þjazi) and *Egils vápn* 'Egill's weapons' (for bows and arrows) indicates knowledge of two of its characters. It seems likely that, despite the prominence of humans in *Vkv.*, this poem owes its presence among the mythic texts to the elvish nature of its main character, Vǫlundr. The alliterative pairing of the words for 'gods/Æsir' and 'elves' in, for example, *Háv.* 159 and *Þrk.* 7, which finds parallel in an Old English metrical charm, shows that these two groups were closely associated.

*Vkv.*'s position in **R** interrupts what would otherwise be a series of five poems that either focus on Þórr or include him as an important character: *Hrbl.*, *Hym.*, *Ls.*, *Þrk.* and *Alv.* Why this is so is unknown, but it has been argued that there are reasons to think that *Vkv.* and *Þrk.* are closely associated because of similarities of style, detail and general theme. Chief among these are the poems' shared use of *fornyrðislag* and the story-line—otherwise absent from the *Poetic Edda*—of the theft of a treasured item (a hammer in *Þrk.*, a ring in *Vkv.*), its recovery by the original owner, and his vengeance on the thief and the thief's family.

## Synopsis

*Prose:* The poem's main characters are introduced: the Swedish King Níðuðr and his daughter Þoðvildr; the three brothers Slagfiðr, Egill and Vǫlundr, sons of a Sámi king; and the three swan-maidens (here called valkyries) Hlaðguðr Svanhvít, Hervor Alvittr and Qlrún.

The brothers build a house at Úlfdalir. They discover the swan-maidens on the shore of the nearby lake Úlfvatn. Egill marries Qlrún, Slagfiðr marries Svanhvít and Vǫlundr marries Alvittr. After seven years their wives fly off to seek battles and do not return. Egill and Slagfiðr go in search of their wives, but Vǫlundr—the most skilful man mentioned in old stories—remains at home. There King Níðuðr captures him, as the following poem records.

*Verse:* Strange young female creatures fly north across *Myrkvið* 'Mirkwood' to fulfil their destiny; they rest on a lake-shore and spin linen (1). One embraces Egill, a second trails (or 'wears') swan feathers, a third embraces Vǫlundr (2). Nine years later, the maidens leave to fulfil their destiny (3). Vǫlundr returns from hunting. Egill skis east in search of Qlrún, Slagfiðr goes south after Svanhvít (4), but Vǫlundr stays at home making jewellery in anticipation of his wife's return (5).

Níðuðr learns that Vǫlundr is alone and sets out by night with warriors (6). On arrival at Vǫlundr's home, they see hundreds of rings (7), one of which they take. Vǫlundr returns from hunting and roasts a bear (8–9). He, a 'prince [or 'compatriot'] of elves', counts his rings and, finding one missing, assumes that his wife has returned and taken it (10). He falls asleep and awakes bound hand and foot (11). He asks who has bound him (13). Níðuðr gloatingly asks him where he got all this gold; Vǫlundr

replies that his family had more when they were united (13–14). He names their wives and their wives' fathers (15).

Níðuðr's wife enters and quietly points out Vǫlundr's unfriendliness (16).

*Prose:* Níðuðr gave the stolen ring to Bǫðvildr and bore Vǫlundr's sword.

*Verse:* Níðuðr's wife continues, noting Vǫlundr's reaction to seeing his enemies wear the ring and the sword. She commands that he be hamstrung and confined to a landing place by the sea (17).

*Prose:* The queen's orders were carried out and the place of Vǫlundr's isolation, now called Sævarstaðr, is identified as an 'island off the coast there'. On the island Vǫlundr forged treasures for Níðuðr, the only person who dared visit him.

*Verse:* Vǫlundr says he will not get redress for his losses (18–19). He ceaselessly makes precious things for Níðuðr, whose two young sons run to see them (20). They gaze into the treasure chest (21). Vǫlundr invites them to return the following day for a gift—alone and without telling anyone of their visit (22). They duly return early the next day and look into the chest (23). Vǫlundr beheads and dismembers them, burying their legs in a muddy pool(?) in his smithy and giving Níðuðr silver-cased bowls made from their skulls (24). From their eyes he makes gems as gifts for Níðuðr's wife; from their teeth he fashions brooches for Bǫðvildr (25).

Bǫðvildr, who has apparently broken her stolen ring, tells Vǫlundr about it; she dares tell no one else (26). He says he will mend it (27). He gets her so drunk that she falls asleep and has sex with her to avenge himself (28). He, laughing, lifts himself into the air; but Bǫðvildr leaves the island, weeping for Vǫlundr's departure and her father's anger (29).

Níðuðr's wife enters her husband's hall and asks whether he is awake. From the courtyard he replies that he cannot sleep, that her advice is bad, and that he wants to talk to Vǫlundr (31). He asks Vǫlundr what became of his sons (32). Níðuðr has to swear not to harm Vǫlundr's 'wife', even if she is known to him and pregnant (33). Vǫlundr then tells him what happened to his sons, and that his only daughter Bǫðvildr is now pregnant (34–36).

Níðuðr is distraught but, despite his anger, cannot hurt Vǫlundr as he hovers high in the sky (37). Vǫlundr lifts himself (higher?) into the air, leaving Níðuðr to sit alone (38). Níðuðr tells his slave Þakkráðr to ask Bǫðvildr to come to speak to him (39). He asks Bǫðvildr whether she was alone with Vǫlundr on the island (40). She confirms this, saying it should never have happened, but that she had no power to resist him (41).



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# Völundarkviða

## Frá Völundi

Níðuðr hét konungr í Svíþjóð. Hann átti tvá sonu ok eina dóttur; hon hét Bøðvildr. Bræðr *váru* þrír, synir Finna konungs. Hét einn Slagfiðr, annarr Egill, þriðji Völundr. Þeir skriðu ok veiddu dýr. Þeir kvómu í Úlfdali ok gerðu sér þar hús. Þar er vatn er heitir Úlfsjár. Snemma of morgin fundu þeir á vatnsströndu konur þrjár, ok spunnu lín. Þar váru hjá þeim álptarhamir þeira. Þat váru valkyrjur. Þar váru tvær døtr Hloðvés konungs: Hlaðguðr Svanhvít ok Hervör Alvit. In þriðja var Qlrún, Kjárs dóttir af Vallandi. Þeir hófðu þær heim til skála með sér. Fekk Egill Qlrúnar, en Slagfiðr Svanhvítar, en Völundr Alvitrar. Þau bjöggu sjau vetr. Þá flugu þær at vitja víga ok kvómu eigi aptr. Þá skreið Egill at leita Qlrúnar, en Slagfiðr leitaði Svanhvítar, en Völundr sat í Úlfdølum. Hann var hagastr maðr, svá at menn viti, í fornum sögum. Níðuðr konungr lét hann hönðum taka, svá sem hér er um kveðit.

## Frá Völundi ok Níðaði

1. Meyjar flugu sunnan Myrkvið í gögnum,  
alvittr ungar, ørlög drýgja;  
þær á sævar strönd settusk at hvíflask,  
drósir suðrænar dýrt lín spunnu.
2. Ein nam þeira Egil at verja,  
føgr mætr fira, faðmi ljósum;  
önnur var Svanhvít, svanfjaðrar dró;  
en in þriðja, þeira systir,  
varði hvítan háls Völundar.
3. Sátu síðan sjau vetr at þat,  
en inn átta allan þráðu,  
en inn níunda nauðr um skilði;  
meyjar fýstusk á myrkvan við,  
alvittr ungar, ørlög drýgja.
4. Kom þar af veiði veðreygr skyti;  
Slagfiðr ok Egill sali fundu auða;  
gengu út ok inn ok um sásk;  
austr skreið Egill at Qlrúnu,  
en suðr Slagfiðr at Svanhvítu.
5. En einn Völundr sat í Úlfdølum;  
hann sló gull rautt við gim fastan,  
lukði hann alla lindbauga vel;  
svá beið hann sinnar ljóssar  
kvánar, ef honum koma gerði.

# The Lay of Vǫlundr

## About Vǫlundr

There was a king called Níðuðr in Sweden. He had two sons and a daughter; she was called Bǫðvildr. There were three brothers, sons of the king of the Finnar.<sup>1</sup> One was called Slagfiðr, the second Egill, the third Vǫlundr. They skied and hunted wild beasts. They came to Úlfdalir<sup>2</sup> and built themselves a house there. There is a lake there called Úlfsjár.<sup>3</sup> Early one morning they found three women on the lake's shore,<sup>4</sup> and they were spinning linen. Their swan-skins were beside them.<sup>5</sup> They were valkyries.<sup>6</sup> There were two daughters of King Hlǫðvér:<sup>7</sup> Hlaðguðr Svanhvít<sup>8</sup> and Hervør Alvit.<sup>9</sup> The third was Qlrún,<sup>10</sup> daughter of Kjárr from Valland.<sup>11</sup> They<sup>12</sup> brought them back to the house with them.<sup>13</sup> Egill married Qlrún, and Slagfiðr Svanhvít, and Vǫlundr Alvit. They lived [there] for seven years.<sup>14</sup> Then they<sup>15</sup> flew off to seek battles and did not come back. Then Egill skied in search of Qlrún, and Slagfiðr searched for Svanhvít, but Vǫlundr stayed in Úlfdalir. He was the most skilful man that people know of in old stories. King Níðuðr had him seized, as is told about here.

## About Vǫlundr and Níðuðr

1. Maidens flew from the south across Myrkviðr,<sup>16</sup>  
young alien beings,<sup>17</sup> to fulfil their fates;  
on a lake's shore they settled to rest themselves,<sup>18</sup>  
the southern ladies spun precious linen.<sup>19</sup>
2. One of them, a fair maid of men,<sup>20</sup>  
enfolding Egill in her bright embrace;  
the second was Svanhvít, she trailed swan-feathers;<sup>21</sup>  
and the third, their sister,  
enfolding Vǫlundr's white neck.
3. They stayed like that then for seven years,  
but all the eighth they yearned,  
and in the ninth need parted them;<sup>22</sup>  
the maidens were impelled to the murky wood,<sup>23</sup>  
young alien beings, to fulfil their fates.<sup>24</sup>
4. The weather-eyed shooter<sup>25</sup> came there from the chase;<sup>26</sup>  
Slagfiðr and Egill found the halls empty;  
they went out and in and looked about them;  
Egill skied east after Qlrún,  
and Slagfiðr south after Svanhvít.
5. But Vǫlundr stayed alone in Úlfdalir;  
he beat red gold<sup>27</sup> about a firm[ly-set] gem,<sup>28</sup>  
he closed all the snake-[arm-]rings well;<sup>29</sup>  
thus he waited for his radiant wife,  
in case she came to him.

6. Þat spyrr Níðuðr, Njára dróttinn,  
at einn Völundr sat í Úlfdöllum;  
nóttum fóru seggir, negldar váru brynjur,  
skildir bliku þeira við inn skarða mána.
7. Stigu ór sǫðlum at salar gafli,  
gengu inn þaðan endlangan sal;  
sá þeir á bast bauga dregna,  
sjau hundruð allra, er sá seggr átti.
8. Ok þeir af tóku, ok þeir á létu,  
fyr einn útan, er þeir af létu;  
kom þar af veiði veðreygr skyti,  
Völundr, líðandi um langan veg.
9. Gekk brúnni beru hold steikja;  
ár brann hrísi allþurr fura,  
viðr inn vindþurri, fyr Völundri.
10. Sat á berfjalli, bauga talði,  
álfa ljóði eins saknaði;  
hugði hann at hefði Hlǫðvés dóttir,  
alvitr unga, væri hon aptur komin.
11. Sat hann svá lengi at hann sofnaði,  
ok hann vaknaði vilja lauss;  
vissi sér á höndum höfgar nauðir,  
en á fótum fjötur um spenntan.
12. 'Hverir ru jǫfrar, þeir er á lögðu  
bestibysíma ok mik bundu?'
13. Kallaði nú Níðuðr, Njára dróttinn:  
'Hvar gaztu, Völundr, vísi álfa,  
vára aura í Úlfdöllum?'
14. 'Gull var þar eigi á Grana leiðu,  
fjarri hugða ek vart land fjöllum Rínar;  
man ek at vér meiri mæti áttum  
er vér heil hjú heima várum.
15. 'Hlaðguðr ok Hervǫr borin var Hlǫðvé;  
kunn var Qlrún, Kjárs dóttir.'
16. Hon inn um gekk endlangan sal,  
stóð á gólfi, stillti röddu:  
'Era sá nú hýrr, er ór holti ferr.'

6. Níðuðr, lord of the Njárar,<sup>30</sup> learned this,  
that Vǫlundr stayed alone in Úlfdalir;  
men set out by night, their mail-coats were nailed,  
their shields shone with [the light of] the sheared moon.<sup>31</sup>
7. They stepped from their saddles at the hall's gable,  
from there they went in the whole length of the hall;  
they saw rings strung on a bast-rope,  
seven hundred in all, which the man<sup>32</sup> owned.
8. And they took them off, and they put them back on,  
except for one, which they left off;<sup>33</sup>  
the weather-eyed shooter came there from the chase,  
Vǫlundr, travelling over a long way.
9. He went to roast flesh from a brown she-bear;  
quickly with the faggots blazed the very dry fir,  
the wind-dried wood, before Vǫlundr.
10. He sat on the bear-skin, counted rings,  
the prince of elves<sup>34</sup> missed one;  
he thought that Hlǫðvér's daughter had it,  
the young alien being, that she had come back.
11. He sat so long that he fell asleep,  
and he awoke robbed of his will,<sup>35</sup>  
he felt heavy constraints<sup>36</sup> on his hands,  
and a fetter fastened on his feet.<sup>37</sup>
12. 'Who are the princes, they who have put  
a restrictive bast-rope on [me] and bound me?'<sup>38</sup>
13. Now Níðuðr, lord of the Njárar, called out:  
'Where, Vǫlundr, wise one<sup>39</sup> of the elves, did you get  
our wealth in Úlfdalir?'<sup>40</sup>
14. 'There wasn't gold on Grani's path;<sup>41</sup>  
I thought our land far from the mountains of the Rín;<sup>42</sup>  
I remember that we had more treasures  
when we were a whole family at home.
15. 'Hlaðguðr and Hervǫr were born to Hlǫðvér;  
Ǫlrún was famous,<sup>43</sup> Kjárr's daughter.'
16. She<sup>44</sup> walked in the whole length of the hall,  
stood on the floor, lowered her voice:  
'He's not friendly now, the one who comes from the forest.'





King Níðuðr gave his daughter, Bǫðvildr, the gold ring, the one which he took from the bast-  
rope at Vǫlundr's. And he himself bore the sword which Vǫlundr owned.<sup>45</sup> And the queen said:

17.                    'He bares his teeth when the sword is shown to him  
                              and he recognizes Bǫðvildr's ring;  
                              his eyes are reminiscent of the sparkling snake;  
                              cut away the strength of his sinews  
                              and then set him on the sea's shore!<sup>46</sup>

So it was done, in that the sinews behind his knees were cut, and he was set on an islet off the  
coast there, which was called Sævarstaðr. There he forged for the king treasures of every kind.  
No one dared go to him, except the king alone.

Vǫlundr said:

18.                    'A sword shines at Níðuðr's belt,<sup>47</sup>  
                              that which I sharpened as skilfully as I knew,  
                              and I tempered as seemed to me most suitable,<sup>48</sup>  
                              that flashing blade is forever borne far from me,  
                              I shall not see it borne to Vǫlundr's smithy.
19.                    'Now Bǫðvildr bears my bride's —  
                              I shall not see redress for this — red rings.'
20.                    He sat, he did not sleep, ever, and he struck with his hammer;  
                              rather quickly he made ingenious items for Níðuðr;  
                              two young ones, sons of Níðuðr,  
                              rushed to see the valuables at the sea's shore.
21.                    They came to the chest, craved the keys;  
                              ill-will was disclosed<sup>49</sup> when they looked inside;  
                              there was a host of torcs, which seemed to the boys  
                              to be red gold and treasures.
22.                    'Come alone, you two, come tomorrow!<sup>50</sup>  
                              I'll have the gold given to you!  
                              Don't tell the maids or domestics,  
                              any man, that you visited me!'
23.                    Early, one lad called to the other,  
                              brother to brother: 'Let's go see a ring!'<sup>51</sup>  
                              They came to the chest, craved the keys,  
                              ill-will was disclosed when they looked inside.
24.                    He cut off the cubs' heads,<sup>52</sup>  
                              and put their legs under the 'fen of the fetter';<sup>53</sup>  
                              but the bowls which were beneath their hair  
                              he encased in silver, gave them to Níðuðr.<sup>54</sup>

25. En ór augum jarknasteina  
sendi hann kunnigri konu Níðaðar;  
en ór tǫnnum tveggja þeira  
sló hann brjóstkringlur, sendi Bǫðvildi.
26. Þá nam Bǫðvildr baugi at hrósa  
er brotit hafði:  
'Þoriga ek at segja, nema þér einum!'
27. Völundr kvað:  
'Ek bæti svá brest á gulli,  
at feðr þínum fegri þikkir,  
ok mœðr þinni miklu betri,  
ok sjálfri þér at sama hófi.'
28. Bar hann hana bjóri, þvíat hann betr kunnir,  
svá at hon í sessi um sofnaði;  
'Nú hefi ek hefnt harma minna,  
allra nema einna íviðgjarnra!'
29. 'Vel ek', kvað Völundr, 'verða ek á fitjum,  
þeim er mik Níðaðar námu rekkar!'  
Hlæjandi Völundr hófsk at lopti;  
grátandi Bǫðvildr gekk ór eyju,  
tregði fǫr friðils ok fǫður reiði.
30. Úti stendr kunnig kván Níðaðar,  
ok hon inn um gekk endlangan sal;  
en hann á salgarð settisk at hvílask:  
'Vakir þú, Níðuðr, Njára dróttinn?'
31. 'Vaki ek ávalt, vilja lauss,  
sofna ek minnst sízt mína sonu dauða;  
kell mik í hǫfuð, kǫld eru mér ráð þín,  
vilnumk ek þess nú, at ek við Völund dæma.
32. 'Seg þú mér þat, Völundr, vísi álfa:  
af heilum hvat varð húnum mínum?'
33. 'Eiða skaltu mér áðr alla vinna,  
at skips borði ok at skjaldar rǫnd,  
at mars bægi ok at mækis egg,  
at þú kveljat kván Völundar,  
né brúði minni at bana verðir,  
þótt vér kván eigim, þá er þér kunnioð,  
eða jóð eigim innan hallar!'



34. 'Gakk þú til smiðju, þeirar er þú gørðir,  
þar fiðr þú belgi blóði stokna;  
sneið ek af hofuð húna þinna  
ok undir fen fjöturs fœtr um lagðak!
35. 'En þær skálar er und skörum váru  
sveip ek utan silfri, senda ek Níðaði;  
en ór augum jarknasteina  
senda ek kunnigri kván Níðaðar!
36. 'En ór tönnum tveggja þeira  
sló ek brjóstkringlur, senda ek Bøðvildi;  
nú gengr Bøðvildr barni aukin,  
eingadóttir ykkur beggja!
37. 'Mæltira þú þat mál, er mik meirr tregi,  
né ek þik vilja, Völundr, verr um níta;  
erat svá maðr hár at þik af hesti taki,  
né svá öflugr at þik neðan skjóti,  
þar er þú skollir við ský uppi!
38. Hlæjandi Völundr hófsk at lopti;  
en ókátr Níðuðr sat þá eptir.
39. 'Upp ristu, Þakkráðr, þræll minn inn bezti,  
bið þú Bøðvildi, meyna bráhvítu,  
ganga fagrvarið við fòður ræða!
40. 'Er þat satt, Bøðvildr, er sögðu mér:  
sátuð it Völundr saman í hólmi?'
41. 'Satt er þat, Níðaðr, er sagði þér:  
sátu vit Völundr saman í hólmi,  
eina ögurstund — æva skyldi!  
Ek vætr honum *vinna* kunnak,  
ek vætr honum *vinna* máttak!

34.                   ‘Go to the smithy, the one that you made,  
there you’ll find a bellows<sup>70</sup> spattered with blood;  
I cut off the heads of your cubs  
and laid their legs under the “fen of the fetter”!
35.                   ‘And the bowls which were beneath their hair  
I encased in silver, I sent<sup>71</sup> them to Níðuðr;  
and from their eyes noble stones  
I sent to Níðuðr’s cunning wife!
36.                   ‘And from the teeth of those two  
I fashioned breast-rings, I sent them to Bǫðvildr;  
now Bǫðvildr walks big<sup>72</sup> with child,  
the only daughter of you both!<sup>73</sup>
37.                   ‘You couldn’t utter words which would grieve me more,  
[and] I would not deny you, Vǫlundr, worse;<sup>74</sup>  
no man is so tall that he might take you from a horse,<sup>75</sup>  
nor so strong that he might shoot you from below,  
there where you hover up near the clouds!<sup>76</sup>
38.                   Laughing, Vǫlundr raised himself aloft,  
but unhappy Níðuðr sat behind then.
39.                   ‘Get up, Þakkráðr, my best slave,  
ask Bǫðvildr, the bright-browed girl,  
to go fairly dressed to speak with her father!<sup>77</sup>
40.                   ‘Is it true, Bǫðvildr, what they told me:  
Did you and Vǫlundr sit together<sup>78</sup> on the islet?’
41.                   ‘It’s true, Níðuðr, what he told you.  
Vǫlundr and I sat together on the islet,  
for one sad hour<sup>79</sup> — it should never have been!<sup>80</sup>  
I didn’t know how to resist him at all,  
I had no power to resist him at all!’

Textual Apparatus to *Vǫlundarkviða*

*Vǫlundarkviða*] This title, now traditional, is not in **R** but supplied from later, paper manuscripts

*Frá Vǫlundí*] An illegible rubricated heading in the facsimile volume of **R**; the reading is therefore taken from its transcription, which is bracketed; **A** *Frá níðaði konungi* 'About King Níðaðr'

*Níðuðr*] The first letter is large and rubricated, but faded, in **R**; **A** *Níðaðr*

*hon hét*] **A** *ok hætt hon* 'and she was called'

*váru*] so **A**; **R** absent

*Slagfiðr*] **A** *slagfinnr*

*gerðu*] **A** ends here

*Hlǫðvés*] **R** *lauðvés*

*Svanhvítar*] **R** *svanhvitrar*

*Vǫlundr*] **R** *Vaulvnd*

*Svanhvítar*] **R** *svanhvitrar*

*Frá Vǫlundí ok Níðaði*] An illegible rubricated heading in the facsimile volume of **R**; the reading is therefore taken from the transcription therein

1/1 *Meyjar*] The first letter is large, inset and rubricated, but faded

1/3 *ungar*] **R** *vnga* 'young (Alvitr)'

2/10 *Vǫlundar*] **R** *onondar*

3/9 *ungar*] **R** *vnga* 'young (Alvitr)'

4/2 *veðreygr*] **R** *vegreygr*

4/7 *skreið*] **R** *skreiðr*

5/4 *gim fastan*] **R** *gimfástaN*

5/8 *ljóssar*] **R** *líosár*

6/5 *fóru*] **R** *voro*

6/5 *seggir*] **R** *seger*

9/3 *ár*] **R** *hár*

9/4 *allþurr*] **R** *allþvr*

9/5 *vindþurri*] **R** *vín þvri*

16/4 *stilti*] **R** *stilti*

16 pr. *gullhring*] **R** *göllring*

17/5 *ámun*] **R** *amon*

17/9 *setið*] **R** *settip*

- 18/4 *hagast*] **R** *hagast*  
 20/3 *gørði*] **R** *gørði görði*  
 23/1 *kallaði*] **R** *kallað*  
 23/2 *á annan*] **R** *aNan*  
 24/4 *lagði*] **R** *log | þi*  
 28/8 *íviðgjarnra*] **R** *íviþ giarira*  
 31/2 *vilja lauss*] **R** *vilja er laus.*  
 32/4 *húnum*] **R** *sonom 'sons'*  
 33/13 *eða*] **R** *eð*  
 39/1 *þakkraðr*] **R** *þacraþr*  
 41/8 *vinna*] **R** *absent*

## Notes to the Translation

- 1 The *Finnar* 'Sámi' are often associated with magic and sorcery in Old Norse literature.
- 2 'Wolf Dales'.
- 3 'Wolf Sea'.
- 4 Many versions of the swan-maiden story have them bathing in a lake.
- 5 When wearing these skins (clothes), the women take on the nature of swans. Cf. *Vkv.* 2 and perhaps *Vǫlundr's* means of escape in *Vkv.* 29; also *Hlr.* 6 and the goddess Freyja's feather-coat in *Þrk.*
- 6 Valkyries are not normally swan-maidens, but horse-riding warriors who decide who falls in battle, at Óðinn's command. The swan-maidens' spinning may tie in with the valkyries' role in determining the fate of warriors. Cf. the valkyries who weave the 'web of war' in the Eddic poem *Darraðarljóð* 'Song of the Battle-Pennant(?)' in the thirteenth-century *Brennu-Njáls saga*.
- 7 'Famous Warrior'; the name corresponds to Frankish *Chlodowech* (now Ludwig), and this personage might be a reflex of the historical Louis I (778–840), king of the Franks and Holy Roman Emperor. The name recurs in *Gðr.* II 25.
- 8 'Lace-Battle Swan-White'.
- 9 It is uncertain whether, in *Alvittr* (or *alvittr*), the vowel in *-vittr* is short or long, but this edition uses a short vowel in all instances. The word means either 'Alien Being' or 'All Wise'.
- 10 These names for the three swan-maidens are a rationalization of the poem's four names: *Qlrún* (Egill's wife in *Vkv.* 4), *Svanhvít* (Slagfiðr's wife in *Vkv.* 4), *Hlaðguðr* and *Hervqr* (*Vkv.* 15), one of these last two being *Vǫlundr's* wife (*Vkv.* 10). To reduce this number to three, the author of the prose prologue has combined *Hlaðguðr* with *Svanhvít*. He has also combined *Hervqr* with *alvittr* on the basis of *Vkv.* 10.
- 11 Caesar, *Valland* being the Old Norse word for Gaul.
- 12 I.e., the brothers.

- 13 In most versions of the story a man forces one of the maidens to stay with him by depriving her of her feather-coat and therewith her ability to fly. But in *Vkv.* 2 the unions seem voluntarily instigated by the swan-maidens: they embrace their husbands and at least one still has her swan plumage.
- 14 In the poem (st. 3) they stay for eight years and leave in the ninth.
- 15 I.e., the women.
- 16 'Murk Wood'. See *Ls.* 42.
- 17 Cf. *HH.* II 20 [26], where another instance of *alvitr* 'alien being', 'strange creature' denotes a valkyrie.
- 18 Literally 'sea's shore'.
- 19 This action is suggestive of the weaving of the threads of fate.
- 20 Literally 'of living beings'.
- 21 Or perhaps 'wore swan's plumage'.
- 22 In the prose they stay for only seven years.
- 23 The *Myrkviðr* of *Vkv.* 1.
- 24 The opening prose seems to interpret *ørlog drýgja* 'to fulfil their fates' as 'to seek battles', whence perhaps its identification of the swan-maidens as valkyries.
- 25 I.e., a huntsman (here *Vǫlundr*) who keeps a keen eye on the weather; the emendation of *R*'s *vegreygr* 'way/road-eyed' is probably justified by *veðreygr*, the *lectio difficilior*, in *Vkv.* 8.
- 26 I.e., the hunt.
- 27 Gold is often described as 'red' in early Germanic texts. The explanation is probably not that gold was alloyed with copper to make what we now call 'red gold', but that the semantic range of ON *rauðr* included 'gold'. References to 'red rings' in the Eddic poems presumably also denote golden objects.
- 28 The text and meaning of the second half of this line are uncertain. This translation interprets *gim* as the acc. sg. of \**gimr* 'gem' (cf. *gimsteinn* 'gemstone' and OE *gim*) and *R*'s *fástaN* (disregarding the accent on the first vowel) as the acc. sg. masc. of *fastr* 'fast', 'firm'. Two alternatives: *hann sló gull rautt | við gim fástan* 'he beat red gold about a most bright gem', taking *fástan* as the superlative of *fár* 'multi-coloured', 'bright'; and *hann sló gull rautt | við gimfastan* 'he beat red gold on a fire-proof [anvil]', taking *gim* as an otherwise attested poetic term for 'fire', *-fastan* as 'firm', and assuming the implied presence of *steði*, acc. sg. of *steðja* 'anvil'.
- 29 The otherwise unattested compound *lindbauga* might mean 'rings for the linden(-bast) cord', but the interpretation 'snake-(arm)-rings' is arguably more attractive, as many early Germanic arm- and finger-rings are shaped like snakes or decorated with them. Cf. ON *armlinnr* 'arm-snake', i.e. 'armlet', OHG *lint* 'snake', Modern Icelandic *lindormur* 'serpent-snake', Swedish and Norwegian *lindorm*.
- 30 Apparently a Swedish people.
- 31 I.e., a waning moon, diminished as if cut by an edged weapon.
- 32 *Vǫlundr*.
- 33 We learn from the prose following *Vkv.* 16 that *Níðuðr* takes this one ring.
- 34 Or perhaps merely 'compatriot of elves', i.e., 'elf'. *Vǫlundr* is called *vísi álfa* 'wise one of the elves' in *Vkv.* 13 and 32. In the prose introduction, though, he is the son of a Sámi king.



- In *Þiðreks saga* the smith's ancestors include a human king, a mermaid and a giant, but no elves. He is, however, apprenticed to two dwarf-smiths, and *SnESkáld* (I, 35, p. 41) seems to equate such creatures with *svartálfar* 'dark-elves'.
- 35 Literally, 'free from his will/joy'. Cf. *Vkv.* 31.
- 36 This use of *naudir* 'constraints', 'bonds' finds parallel in the Old English poem *Deor's* cognate noun *nede* (l. 5).
- 37 Or 'legs'.
- 38 The use of *á lögðu* 'put on' here is paralleled in *Deor's on legde*.
- 39 *Visi*, literally 'wise one', can mean simply 'leader', but smiths are solitary folk. Cf. King Alfred's Old English *Metres of Boethius* 10 (l. 33): *Hwær sint nu þæs wisan / Welandes ban* 'Where now are the bones of the wise Weland?'
- 40 *Níðuðr* uses the royal 'we'.
- 41 Possibly *Gnitaheidr* (see *Fm.*'s initial prose).
- 42 *Grani* 'Moustached One' is the horse of *Sigurðr*, the great hero who appears in several subsequent poems. He won the dragon *Fáfnir's* treasure and took it away on *Grani* (see *Fm.*). It was later sunk in the Rhine (*Rín*).
- 43 Or perhaps 'wise' or 'skilled in magic'.
- 44 Apparently *Níðuðr's* (unnamed) wife.
- 45 In *Þiðreks saga* the king desires *Velent's* marvellous sword, *Mimungr*, but unwittingly gets a look-alike weapon instead.
- 46 Literally, 'in the sea's place', i.e., a landing place by the sea. The following prose interprets this term as a place name, *Sævarstaðr* 'Sea's Stead'.
- 47 It appears that *sk-* alliterates with *sv-* in the Old Norse line.
- 48 In *Þiðreks saga* *Velent* creates the sword *Mimungr* from the droppings of a starved fowl which he had fed meal mixed with sword-filings.
- 49 Literally 'open'.
- 50 Or 'Come alone, you two, come another day!'
- 51 Or perhaps 'the ring'.
- 52 The boys are likened to bear cubs, as also in stt. 32 and 34; cf. *Akv.* 12.
- 53 What the term *fen fjöturs* 'fen of the fetter' refers to is uncertain, but perhaps the 'fetter' is a bellows' metal mouth or frame, or part of an anvil, here used *pars pro toto* and in retributive reference to the literal *fjötur* 'fetter' laid on *Völundr's* legs in *Vkv.* 11; the 'fen' might be a muddy pool beneath the 'fetter'. In *Þiðreks saga* *Velent* buries the boys' bodies in a deep grave beneath the bellows; a similar fate is apparent from the front of the Franks Casket and the *Ardre VIII* picture stone.
- 54 Cf. *Am.* 82.
- 55 I.e., he made gems from their eyes.
- 56 Round brooches or round pendants.
- 57 A half-line may have dropped out of this stanza. Nevertheless, the general sense seems clear: *Þöðvildr* has broken the gold ring which her father stole from *Völundr*.
- 58 The last line is partly corrupt and its interpretation uncertain.

- 59 The interpretation of this line is disputed, but with the word *fitjum* (nom. sg. *fit*) Vǫlundr seems to describe his feet in terms of the hind flippers of a seal or, more likely, the webbed feet of a water-bird. Middle Low German *vittek* 'wing' might also be relevant.
- 60 By hamstringing Vǫlundr, they had deprived him of the ability to walk.
- 61 How Vǫlundr takes to the air is uncertain. Possibly he made a magical feather-coat akin to those of the swan-maidens, or some sort of flying machine.
- 62 It is unclear whether this refers to Níðuðr or Vǫlundr.
- 63 Or perhaps 'had seated himself on the hall-fence'.
- 64 The queen asks this question.
- 65 And/or 'robbed of joy'. Cf. *Vkv.* 11.
- 66 Cf. *Am.* 79 [81].
- 67 Women's counsels are proverbially 'cold' in Old Norse literature; cf. *Ls.* 51.
- 68 Here Þǫðvildr, who is also the 'bride' of the next line.
- 69 Vǫlundr uses the royal 'we'.
- 70 *Belgi* 'skin bags' might be deliberately ambiguous, referring to both the bellows and the murdered boys' torsos.
- 71 If *senda* 'sent' is an error for *selda*, the originally intended sense would be 'gave'; cf. *seldi* 'gave' in *Vkv.* 24.
- 72 ON *aukin* 'big', literally 'increased', finds parallel in *Deor's* cognate *eacen*.
- 73 We know from other records that Þǫðvildr will bear a son, Viðga. His martial exploits are told at length in *Bidreks saga*. He is perhaps a reflex of the Gothic hero Vidigoia mentioned in the sixth-century *Gothic History* of Jordanes.
- 74 Alternatively, emendation of *níta* 'to deny' to *njóta* 'to enjoy' yields 'nor could I wish you, Vǫlundr, to enjoy worse'.
- 75 Or perhaps 'there is no one tall enough to take you from your horse'. In *Bidreks saga* Velent has a horse as fast as a flying bird, but he is never said to fly on it.
- 76 By contrast, in *Bidreks saga* Egill shoots at Velent at Niðung's command. The arrow appears to hit him, but, as Egill intended, instead pierces a blood-filled bladder under the smith's left arm.
- 77 Níðuðr speaks these words.
- 78 A euphemism for sexual intercourse.
- 79 *Qgurstund* can refer specifically to the 'period (*stund*) when the tide is highest', at which point the islet was perhaps cut off from the mainland. At the same time, the word probably denotes a 'period of great distress', as there was also a noun *qgur* meaning 'heavy heart'. Given Þǫðvildr's anguish at being raped by Vǫlundr, the earlier statement in *Vkv.* 29 that she 'grieved at her lover's going' may appear grimly ironic.
- 80 Cf. *Deor's* description of Beadohild's distress about her pregnancy: *æfre ne meahste / þriste geþencan hu ymb þæt sceolde* 'she could never consider without fear how it had to turn out.' There are lexical correspondences between OE *æfre ... meahste ... sceolde* and ON *æva skyldi ... máttak*.