This book is an edition and translation of one of the most important and celebrated sources of Old Norse-Icelandic mythology and heroic legend, namely the medieval poems now known collectively as the *Poetic Edda* or *Elder Edda*.

Included are thirty-six texts, which are mostly preserved in medieval manuscripts, especially the thirteenth-century Icelandic codex traditionally known as the Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda*. The poems cover diverse subjects, including the creation, destruction and rebirth of the world, the dealings of gods such as Óðinn, Þórr and Loki with giants and each other, and the more intimate, personal tragedies of the hero Sigurðr, his wife Guðrún and the valkyrie Brynhildr.

Each poem is provided with an introduction, synopsis and suggestions for further reading. The Old Norse texts are furnished with a textual apparatus recording the manuscript readings behind this edition's emendations, as well as select variant readings. The accompanying translations, informed by the latest scholarship, are concisely annotated to make them as accessible as possible.

As the first open-access, single-volume parallel Old Norse edition and English translation of the *Poetic Edda*, this book will prove a valuable resource for students and scholars of Old Norse literature. It will also interest those researching other fields of medieval literature (especially Old English and Middle High German), and appeal to a wider general audience drawn to the myths and legends of the Viking Age and subsequent centuries.

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Front cover: The Twa Corbies by Arthur Rackham, from *Some British Ballads* (London, [1919]).

Back cover: The god Heimdallr blowing his horn, from a seventeenth-century Icelandic manuscript (AM 738 4to, fol. 35v), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Heimdallr_edda_oblongata.png.

Cover design by Katy Saunders.

Edward Pettit

*The Poetic Edda* A Dual-Language Edition

Edward Pettit

ebook and OA editions also available.
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 Nīðaðr) 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.¹

Vkv. is unusual in lacking any apparent theft of the feather-garments, in having not one but three marriages,\textsuperscript{2} 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.\textsuperscript{3}

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 \textit{wela[n]du}.\textsuperscript{4} 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 Bǫðvildr—is in the allusive poem \textit{Deor}, which begins:

\begin{verbatim}
Welund him be wurman  wræces cunnade,
anhydig eorl  earfþa dreag,
hæfde him to gesiþþe  sorge ond longþ,
wintercalde wræce;  wean oft onfond
síþþan hine Niðhad on  nede legde,
swoncre seonobende  on syllan monn.
Pæs ofereode;  þisses swa mæg.
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
Beadohilde ne wæs  hyre broþra deaþ
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.
\end{verbatim}

Welund knew exile on account of snakes(?)\textsuperscript{5}, 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 Bǫðvildr, 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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\textsuperscript{2} A clue to the antiquity of the marriage of Egill and Ólfrún might be the pairing of these names in a runic inscription on a sixth-century buckle found in Bavaria; see T. Looijenga, \textit{Texts and Contexts of the Oldest Runic Inscriptions} (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 107, 253–55 and J. McKinnell and R. Simek, with K. Düwel, \textit{Runes, Magic and Religion. A Sourcebook} (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2004), pp. 57–59. Egill is also associated with Ólfrún in \textit{Þiðreks saga}.

\textsuperscript{3} A fourteenth-century German metrical romance, \textit{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 \textit{Vk}v.; see U. Dronke, \textit{ed.}, \textit{The Poetic Edda: Volume II. Mythological Poems} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 259, 286.

\textsuperscript{4} Looijenga, \textit{Texts and Contexts}, p. 308.

\textsuperscript{5} Scholars dispute the precise meaning of \textit{be wurman}. It might be relevant that, in \textit{Vk}v. 17, Vǫlundr's eyes 'reminiscent of the sparkling snake (\textit{orm})' prompt Niðuðr'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*. If so, the woman could be the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of Ælfrún, 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?)

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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 Völundr’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 [= Völundr] 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 [= Niðuðr], 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 Mimung, 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 renge 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 *brk.* 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.*, *brk.* and *Alv.* Why this is so is unknown, but it has been argued that there are reasons to think that *Vkv.* and *brk.* 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 *brk.*, 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 Bǫðvildr; the three brothers Slagfiðr, Egill and Vǫlundr, sons of a Sámi king; and the three swan-maidens (here called valkyries) Hlaðguðr Svanhvít, Hervǫr Alvitr and Ǫlrún.

The brothers build a house at Úlfdalir. They discover the swan-maidens on the shore of the nearby lake Úlfvatn. Egill marries Ǫlrún, Slagfiðr marries Svanhvít and Vǫlundr marries Alvitr. 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 (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 Ǫlrún, 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.

_Verses:_ 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.

_Verses:_ 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 ᵇakkráðr 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).
Further Reading


Nedoma, R., Die bildlichen und schriftlichen Denkmäler der Wielandsage (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1988).


Vǫlundarkviða
Frá Vǫlundi


Frá Vǫlundi ok Niðaði

1. Meyjar flugu sunnan Myrkvið í gögnunum, alvitr ungar, ørlög drýgja; þær á sævar strönd settusk at hvílask, drósir suðrœnar dyrt lin spunnu.

2. Ein nam þeira Egil at verja, fœgr mær fira, faðmi ljósum; þeira systir, varði hvítan hál Vǫlund, ónnvar var Svanhvít, svanfjaðrar dró; en in þriðja, þeira systir, varði hvítan hál Vǫlund.

3. Sátu síðan sjau vetr at þat, en inn átta allan þráðu, en inn niunda nauðr um skilði; meyjar fýstusk á myrkván við, alvitr 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 Vǫlundr sat í Úlfdóulum; hann sló gull rautt við gim fastan, lukki hann alla lindbauga vel; svá beið hann sinnar ljóssar kvána, 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. One was called Slagfiðr, the second Egill, the third Vǫlundr. They skied and hunted wild beasts. They came to Úlfdalir and built themselves a house there. There is a lake there called Úlfsjär. Early one morning they found three women on the lake’s shore, and they were spinning linen. Their swan-skins were beside them. They were valkyries. There were two daughters of King Hlǫðvér: Hlaðguðr Svanhvít and Hervǫr Alvitr. The third was Ǫlrún, daughter of Kjárr from Valland. They brought them back to the house with them. Egill married Ǫlrún, and Slagfiðr Svanhvít, and Vǫlundr Alvitr. They lived [there] for seven years. Then they flew off to seek battles and did not come back. Then Egill skied in search of Ǫlrún, 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, young alien beings, to fulfil their fates; on a lake’s shore they settled to rest themselves, the southern ladies spun precious linen.

2. One of them, a fair maid of men, enfolded Egill in her bright embrace; the second was Svanhvít, she trailed swan-feathers; and the third, their sister, enfolded 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; the maidens were impelled to the murky wood, young alien beings, to fulfil their fates.

4. The weather-eyed shooter came there from the chase; Slagfiðr and Egill found the halls empty; they went out and in and looked about them; Egill skied east after Ǫlrún, and Slagfiðr south after Svanhvít.

5. But Vǫlundr stayed alone in Úlfdalir; he beat red gold about a firmly-set gem, he closed all the snake-[arm-]rings well, thus he waited for his radiant wife, in case she came to him.
6. Þat spyrr Níðuðr, Njára dróttinn,
at einn Vǫlundr sat í Úlfdölum;
nóttum fóru seggr, negldr varu brynjur,
skildir bliku þeira við inn skarða mána.

7. Stigu ór söðlum 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 utan, er þeir af létu;
kom þar af veiði veðreygr skyti,
Vǫlundr, liðandi um langan veg.

9. Gekk brúnni beru hold steikja;
ár brann hrísi allþurr fura,
viðr inn vinþurr, fyr Vǫlundi.

10. Sat á berfjalli, bauga talði,
álfajjóði eins saknaði;
hugði hann at hefði Hlǫðvés dóttir,
 alvítr unga, væri hon aprt komín.

11. Sat hann svá lengi at hann sofnæði,
ok hann vaknaði vilja lauss;
víssí sér á hǫndum hǫfgar nauðir,
en á fótum fjótur um spenntan.

12. ‘Hverir rú jǫfrar, þeir er á logðu
 bestibyrssima ok mik bundu?’

13. Kallaði nú Níðuðr, Njára dróttinn:
‘Hvar gaztu, Vǫlundr, visi álfa,
 vára aura í Úlfdölum?’

14. ‘Gull var þar eigi á Grana leiðu,
fjarri hugða ek várt land fjollum Rínar;
man ek at vér meiri mæti áttum
 er vér heil hjú heima várum.

15. ‘Hlaðguðr ok Hervǫr borin var Hlǫðvé;
kunn var Ǫlrún, Kjárs dóttir.’

16. Hon inn um gekk endlangan sal,
stöð á gólf, stillti roðdu:
‘Era sá nú hýrr, er ör holti ferr.’
6. Níðuðr, lord of the Njárar, learned this, that Vǫlundr stayed alone in Úlfðalir; men set out by night, their mail-coats were nailed, their shields shone with [the light of] the sheared moon.

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 owned.

8. And they took them off, and they put them back on, except for one, which they left off; 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 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; he felt heavy constraints on his hands, and a fetter fastened on his feet.

12. ‘Who are the princes, they who have put a restrictive bast-rope on [me] and bound me?’

13. Now Níðuðr, lord of the Njárar, called out: ‘Where, Vǫlundr, wise one of the elves, did you get our wealth in Úlfðalir?’

14. ‘There wasn’t gold on Grani’s path; I thought our land far from the mountains of the Rín; I remember that we had more treasures when we were a whole family at home.

15. ‘Hlaðguðr and Hervǫr were born to Hlǫðvér; Ælrún was famous, Kjárr’s daughter.’

16. She 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.’
Níuðr konungr gaf dóttur sinni, Bóðvildi, gullring, þann er hann tók af bastinu at Völundar. En hann sjálfr bar sverðit er Völundr átti. En dröttning kvað:

17. 'Tenn honum teygjask er honum er tét sverð
    ok hann Bóðvildar baug um þekkir;
    ámun eru augu ormi þeim inum frána;
    snúiðið er hann sina magni
    ok setið hann síðan í sævar stóð!'

Svá var gört, at skornar váru sinar í knésfötum, ok settí í hólm einn er þar var fyrir landi, er hét Sævarstaðr. Þar smíðaði hann konungi alls kyns görsimar. Engi maðr þórði at fara til hans nema konungr einn.

Völundr kvað:

18. 'Skínn Níðaði sverð á linda,
    þat er ek hvesta sem ek hagast kunna,
    ok ek herðak sem mér hægst þótti;
    sá er mér, fránn mækir, æ fjarið borinn,
    sekka ek þann Völundi til smiðju borinn.

19. 'Nú berr Bóðvildr brúðar minnar —
    bíóka ek þess bótt — bauga rauða.'

20. Sat hann, né hann svaf, ávalt, ok hann sló hamri;
    vél gördi hann heldr hvatt Níðaði;
    drifu ungir tveir á dýr sjá,
    synir Níðaðar, í sævar stóð.

21. Kómu þeir til kistu, krǫfðu lukla;
    opin var illúð er þeir í sá;
    fjölð var þar menja, er þeim mögum sýndisk,
    at væri gull rauðt ok görsimar.

22. 'Komid einir tveir, komid annars dags!
    Ykkr læt ek þat gull um gefit verða!
    Segiða meyjum né saltjóðum,
    manni ðongum, at it mik fyndið!'

23. Snemma kallaði seggr á annan,
    bróðir á bróður: 'Gongum baug sjál!
    Kómu til kistu, króðu lukla,
    opin var illúð er þeir í litu.

24. Sneið af hófuð huña þeira,
    ok undir fen fjótturs foetr um lagði;
    en þer skálar er und skörum váru
    sveip hann útan silfr, seldi Níðaði.
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. 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!' 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, that which I sharpened as skilfully as I knew, and I tempered as seemed to me most suitable; 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 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! 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!’ They came to the chest, craved the keys, ill-will was disclosed when they looked inside.

24. He cut off the cubs’ heads and put their legs under the ‘fen of the fetter’, but the bowls which were beneath their hair he encased in silver, gave them to Níðuðr.
En ór augum jarknasteina
sendi hann kunnigri konu Niðaðar;
en ór þönnun tveggja þeira
sló hann brjóstkringlur, sendi Bǫðvildi.

Pá nam Bǫðvildr baugi at hrósa
er brotit hafði:
‘Póriga ek at segja, nema þér einum!’

Vǫlundr kvað:
‘Ek bœti svá brest á gulli,
at feðr þínum fegri þikkir,
ok mœðr þínni miklu betri,
ok sjálfri þér at sama hófi.’

Bar hann hana bjóri, þvíat hann betr kunni,
svá at hon í sessi um sofnaði;
‘Nú hefi ek hefnt harma minna,
allra nema einna ívíðgjarnra!’

‘Vel ek’, kvað Vǫlundr, ‘verða ek á fitjum,
þeim er mik Niðaðar námu rekkar!’
Hlaðandi Vǫlundr höfði at lopti;
grátandi Bǫðvildr gekk ór eyju,
tregði fǫr friðils ok fǫður reiði.

Úti stendr kunnig kván Niðaðar,
ok hon inn um gekk endlangan sal;
en hann á salgarð settisk at hvílask:
‘Vakir þú, Niðuðr, Njára dróttinn?’

‘Vaki ek ávalt, vilja lauss,
sofna ek minnst sízt mína sonu dauða;
kell mik í hófuð, kold eru mér ráð þín,
vilnumk ek þess nú, at ek við Vǫlund dóma.

‘Seg þú mér þat, Vǫlundr, vísi álfa:
af heilum hvat varð húnum mínun?’

‘Eiða skaltu mér áðr alla vinna,
at skips borði ok at skjaldar rönd,
at mars bøgi ok at máekis egg,
at þú kveljat kván Vǫlundar,
né brúði minni at bana verðir,
þótt vér kván eigim, þá er þér kunnið,
edá jöð eigim innan hallar!’
And from their eyes noble stones he sent to Níðuðr’s cunning wife; and from the teeth of the two he fashioned breast-rings, sent them to Bǫðvildr.

Then Bǫðvildr began to praise the ring which she had broken: ‘I dare not speak of it, except to you alone!’

Vǫlundr said:

‘I can fix the fracture in the gold, so that to your father it will seem fairer, and to your mother much better, and to you yourself in equal measure.’

He overbore her with beer, because he knew better, so that she fell asleep on the seat; ‘Now I have avenged my hurts, all except a few malicious ones!’

‘I’d be well,’ said Vǫlundr, ‘were I to get on my webbed feet, those which Níðuðr’s men took from me!’

Laughing, Vǫlundr raised himself aloft; weeping, Bǫðvildr went from the island, grieved for her lover’s going and her father’s wrath.

Outside stands Níðuðr’s cunning wife, and she walked in the whole length of the hall; but he had settled in the hall-yard to rest: ‘Are you awake, Níðuðr, lord of the Njárar?’

‘I’m always awake, robbed of will. I sleep scarcely at all since the deaths of my sons; my head is chilled, your counsels are cold to me; I wish now for this, that I might speak with Vǫlundr.

‘Tell me this, Vǫlundr, wise one of the elves: what happened to my healthy cubs?’

‘First you must swear me all oaths, by ship’s side and by shield’s rim, by horse’s shoulder and by sword’s edge, that you won’t torment Vǫlundr’s wife, nor be the death of my bride, even if we have a wife who is known to you, or have a child within your hall!’
34. ‘Gakk þú til smiðju, þeirar er þú gørðir, þar fiðr þú belgi blóði stokna; sneið ek af hofuð húna þinna ok undir fen fjǫturs fætr um lagðak!

35. ‘En þær skálar er und skǫrum váru sveip ek utan silfri, senda ek Níðaði; en ór augum jarknasteina senda ek kunnigrí kván Níðaðar!

36. ‘En ór tönnum sveipja þeira sló ek brjóstkringlur, senda ek Bǫðvildi; nú gengr Bǫðvildr barni aukin, eingadóttir ykkur beggja!’

37. ‘Mæltira þú þat mál, er mik meirr tregi, né ek þik vilja, Vǫlundr, verr um níta; erat svá maðr hár at þik af hesti taki, né svá Óflugr at þik neðan skjóti, þar er þú skollir við sky uppi!’

38. Hlæjandi Vǫlundr hófsk at lopti; en ókátr Níðuðr sat þá eptir.

39. ‘Upp rístu, Þakráðr, þráll minn inn bezti, bío þú Bǫðvildi, meyna þráhvítu, ganga fagrvarið við fǫður rœða!

40. ‘Er þat satt, Bǫðvildr, er sǫgðu mér: såtuð it Vǫlundr saman í hólmi?’

41. ‘Satt er þat, Níðaðr, er sagði þér: såtu vit Vǫlundr saman í hólmi, eina ogurstund — æva skylði! 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 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 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 with child,  
the only daughter of you both!’

37.  ‘You couldn’t utter words which would grieve me more,  
[and ] I would not deny you, Vǫlundr, worse;  
no man is so tall that he might take you from a horse,  
nor so strong that he might shoot you from below,  
there where you hover up near the clouds!’

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!’

40.  ‘Is it true, Bǫðvildr, what they told me:  
Did you and Vǫlundr sit together on the islet?’

41.  ‘It’s true, Níðuðr, what he told you.  
Vǫlundr and I sat together on the islet,  
for one sad hour — it should never have been!  
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 Vǫlundi*] An illegible rubricated heading in the facsimile volume of *R*; the reading is therefore taken from its transcription, which is bracketed; *A Frá niðaði konungi ‘About King Níðaðr’*

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

*hon hét*] *A ok hæt hon ‘and she was called’*

*váru*] so *A*; *R* absent

*Slagfiðr*] *A* slagfinnr

*gerðu*] *A* ends here

*Hljóðvés*] *R* lauðvés

*Svanhvítar*] *R* svanhvitrar

*Vǫlundr*] *R* Vaulvnd

*Svanhvítar*] *R* svanhvitrar

*Frá Vþlundi 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 *Vþlundar*] *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* liosár

6/5 *föru*] *R* voro

6/5 *seggir*] *R* seger

9/3 *ár*] *R* hár

9/4 *allþurr*] *R* allþvr

9/5 *vindþurr*] *R* vín þvri

16/4 *stillti*] *R* stillti

16 pr. *gullhring*] *R* gellring

17/5 *ámun*] *R* amon

17/9 *setið*] *R* settiþ
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 Völundr’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 Darðariiðóð ‘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 Gør. II 25.
8. ‘Lace-Battle Swan-White’.
9. It is uncertain whether, in Alvitr (or alvitr), the vowel in -vitr 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: Ólrún (Egill’s wife in Vkv. 4), Svanhvítt (Slagfiðr’s wife in Vkv. 4), Hlaðguðr and Hervǫr (Vkv. 15), one of these last two being Völundr’s wife (Vkv. 10). To reduce this number to three, the author of the prose prologue has combined Hlaðguðr with Svanhvítt. He has also combined Hervǫr with alvitr on the basis of Vkv. 10.
11. Caesar, Valland being the Old Norse word for Gaul.
12. I.e., the brothers.
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.

In the poem (st. 3) they stay for eight years and leave in the ninth.

I.e., the women.

‘Murk Wood’. See Ls. 42.

Cf. HH. II 20 [26], where another instance of *alvitr* ‘alien being’, ‘strange creature’ denotes a valkyrie.

Literally ‘sea’s shore’.

This action is suggestive of the weaving of the threads of fate.

Literally ‘of living beings’.

Or perhaps ‘wore swan’s plumage’.

In the prose they stay for only seven years.

The Myrkviðr of Vkv. 1.

The opening prose seems to interpret ørlpg drýgja ‘to fulfil their fates’ as ‘to seek battles’, whence perhaps its identification of the swan-maidens as valkyries.

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 vedreygr, the *lectio difficilior*, in Vkv. 8.

I.e., the hunt.

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.

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. gimstein ‘gemstone’ and OE *gim*) and R’s *fástan* (disregarding the accent on the first vowel) as the acc. sg. masc. of fasr ‘fast’, ‘fimr’. Two alternatives: *hann sló gull rauðt víð 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 rauðt víð gimfástan* ‘he beat red gold on a fire-proof [anvil]’, taking gim as an otherwise attested poetic term for ‘fire’, -fástan as ‘firm’, and assuming the implied presence of steði, acc. sg. of steðja ‘anvil’.

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.

Apparently a Swedish people.

I.e., a waning moon, diminished as if cut by an edged weapon.

Vǫlundr.

We learn from the prose following Vkv. 16 that Níðuðr takes this one ring.

Or perhaps merely ‘compatriot of elves’, i.e., ‘elf’. Vǫlundr is called *vísi álfas* ‘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’.


36 This use of *nauðir* ‘constraints’, ‘bonds’ finds parallel in the Old English poem *Deor’s* cognate noun *nede* (l. 5).

37 Or ‘legs’.

38 The use of *á lǫgðu* ‘put on’ here is paralleled in *Deor’s* *on legde*.

39 *Vísí*, 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 Niðuðr uses the royal ‘we’.

41 Possibly Gnitaheiðr (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 Niðuðr’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. *Ákv.* 12.

53 What the term *fen fjǫturs* ‘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 *fjǫtur* ‘fetter’ laid on Vǫlundr’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: Bǫðvildr has broken the gold ring which her father stole from Vǫlundr.

58 The last line is partly corrupt and its interpretation uncertain.
The Poetic Edda

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 Niðuðr 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 Bǫðvildr, 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 Bǫðvildr will bear a son, Viðga. His martial exploits are told at length in *Þidreks saga*. He is perhaps a reflex of the Gothic hero Vidigoia mentioned in the sixth-century Gothic History of Jordanes.

74 Alternatively, emendation of *niða* ‘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 *Þidreks saga* Velent has a horse as fast as a flying bird, but he is never said to fly on it.

76 By contrast, in *Þidreks saga* Egill shoots at Velent at Niðungr’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 Niðuðr speaks these words.

78 A euphemism for sexual intercourse.

79 *Ǫgurstund* 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 *ggar* meaning ‘heavy heart’. Given Bǫðvildr’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 meahte / þriste gehencan hu ymb þæt sceolde* ‘she could never consider without fear how it had to turn out.’ There are lexical correspondences between OE *æfre* ... *meahte* ... *scoelde* and ON *æva skyldi* ... *máttak*.