

**SMALL THINGS
WIDE HORIZONS**

**STUDIES IN HONOUR OF
BIRGITTA HÅRDH**

Edited by

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Preface

The 16th of August 2015 is Professor Birgitta Hårdh's 70th birthday. At the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History in Lund, an editorial group was set up for the publication of a Festschrift in her honour.

For several decades Birgitta has been an important staff member and researcher at the Department. Her doctoral dissertation was based on Viking Age silver deposits in southernmost Sweden. This is a field that she later developed in several national and international publications. As a result she is regarded as one of the leading experts on the Northern European Viking Age, engaged in diverse research projects both in Sweden and internationally, and she is a vital collaborator in various networks specializing in the Viking Age.

Through time, Birgitta has extended her research to comprise other periods in the Iron Age. This is particularly clear in her research on the major site of Uppåkra outside Lund. Here she has devoted articles to a detailed treatment of the finds from the Late Iron Age. She has also edited several of the volumes in the series Uppåkrastudier, with both national and international contributions.

Another special field examined by Birgitta Hårdh is the megalithic graves in south-west Scania. Both find material from individual sites and broader perspectives on the Middle Neolithic have been covered in these studies.

Besides doing research, Birgitta Hårdh has for several decades been a lecturer and professor, with long experience of teaching students and supervising doctoral candidates in the subject. She has also been director of studies and served on a number of committees in the Faculty of Arts and Theology.

A feature common to all Birgitta Hårdh's research is that she has been able, through analysis of a body of finds, to broaden the perspective, not least geographically through her profound knowledge of phenomena in Northern Europe and indeed all of Europe. This book has been given the title *Small Things – Wide Horizons*, which is a good summary of Birgitta's research hitherto.

Thanks to the large network of contacts to which Birgitta Hårdh belongs, the call for papers for this Festschrift met a great response. A total of forty titles were submitted to the proposed volume.

Through this Festschrift we wish to thank and honour Professor Birgitta Hårdh as a fine colleague and an excellent scholar. We all look forward to coming years and many more important contributions to archaeological research.

*Lars Larsson, Fredrik Ekengren,
Bertil Helgesson, Bengt Söderberg*



BIRGITTA HÅRDH

Hoard and sinuous snakes

Significance and meaning of ring ornaments in Early Viking Age hoards from Gotland

Christoph Kilger

Abstract

The inflow of Islamic dirhams into the Baltic Sea zone in the 9th and 10th century has often been described as a watershed in the economic development of Northern Europe. There are reasons to believe that silver gained significance in calculated exchange relations in this transitional period. However in which ways silver was imbued with value is not clear. One interesting question to be investigated is how the medium silver became accepted as substance and as a means of payment and on which “paths” the validation of silver followed already existing concepts of value. In this paper this issue will be addressed by examining aspects of shape and ornamentation of some of the earliest silver ring types on Gotland. It is argued that the recurring pattern of spiral rings and bracelets with hourglass shaped pattern imitate snakes in different ways which links them with aspects of hoarding and wealth.

Island of silver

The island of Gotland holds a prominent place in the discussions on the use and meaning of silver. With more than 750 silver hoards recorded Gotland is the most abundant region for Viking silver in the world. Adding to that Gotland displays a continuous record of hoarding throughout the whole Viking period stretching more than 300 years from the end of the 8th to the middle of the 12th century. Needless to say that the earliest and latest silver hoards in Scandinavia have been found on this island. This makes Gotland and its hoards an appropriate case to study the impact and significance of silver on society. In this paper certain aspects of the earliest silver hoards will be discussed, focusing on the non-minted elements and changes in composition and morphology which deserves closer scrutiny.

The results presented here are also based on the dirhams, silver coins minted in the Muslim caliphate trickling into the Baltic Sea zone since the end of the 8th century and building the main component in the silver hoards until the end of the 10th century. The reader interested in the numismatic dimension may excuse, as the dirhams will only be used as a tool for the purpose of dating, which enables to order mixed hoards chronologically and to trace changes in composition.

The arrival of Abbasid dirhams to Scandinavia started on a small scale in the beginning of the 9th century but lingered on a small scale. Scattered finds are found in various regions of the Baltic Sea zone, but there is a clear

concentration of early dirham hoards on Gotland (Kilger 2008a, 214ff., fig. 7.9). In the second quarter of the 9th century the amount of coined silver in circulation gained momentum and there are signs of a more organized and structured exchange of dirhams stretching far into Eastern Europe (Kilger 2008a, 221ff.). A more pronounced increase is observable in mixed hoards deposited after ca 860, which contain two thirds of all Abbasid dirhams from all known finds in Eurasia (Kilger 2008a, 221ff., 240, fig. 7.22). This quantitative jump is of course a reflection of the mega hoards from Spillings recently discovered on Gotland. Both of the Spillings hoards weighing 66 kilos of silver (Thunmark Nylén 2006b, 701ff.; Östergren 2011, table I). Indeed the size of the Spillings hoards is exceptional, however there are also other huge hoards from this period containing more than 1000 to 2000 dirhams which supports the impression that there was increased access to coined silver in some regions in the Baltic Sea zone. Gotland seems to confirm its position as gateway for the reception, handling and redistribution of silver probably masterminded by networks based on the island.

Some thoughts on composition and morphology

This scenario of fluctuating tides of the dirham flows are well known in the literature and have been discussed in terms of economic development, organization of trade and production stressing Gotlands engagement with the outside world. Often left aside is what stimulating or disturbing effects the affluence of silver—in its capacity as moveable wealth—had *within* society in terms of landed relations, concepts of ownership and property, structures of inheritance, power relationships within and between families and gender identities (e.g. Burström 1993; Sindbæk 2011). This engendered view on hoards and generally the use of and meaning of silver is a growing field of research. A promising tool to approach this dimension is the analysis of the composition of hoards and their constellations revealing fixed sets of unminted ornaments (e.g. Kilger 2008c; Myrberg 2009a–b). Another important aspect to consider in this context is shape, ornamentation and the morphological condition of its body, its wholeness or varying degree of fragmentation, which may offer venues to current concepts of value in society. The fragmentation of an object entails also a destruction of its value content and concomitantly its biography. The fragmentation of silver objects such as coins, rings or bars into hacksilver—objects of payment and validation—is

SMALL THINGS – WIDE HORIZONS

Hoards with dirhems	Coins	Whole ornaments				Fragmented ornaments	References
		<i>Spiral- striated neckrings</i>	<i>Spiral rings</i>	<i>Bracelets (armbygel)</i>	<i>Other ornaments</i>		
Hässelby, tpq 796/7	3	-	-	-	2 ingots	Sa1, bars, ingots, rods	Sbg 90, CNS 1.3.3
Hammars, 804/5	8	-	1 Sp	-	-	bar, rods	Sbg 175, CNS 1.4.6
Norrgårda-Norrby I, 818	27	-	-	2 Ab var	19 bracteates (gold, silver, bronze)	ingot (gold), bracteat	Sbg. 38, CNS 1.2.9
Norrgårda-Norrby II, 833	62	1 Sa1 (bent)	3 Sp (bent)	3 Ab var (bent)	8 glass beads	bars	Sbg 39, CNS 1.2.10
Norrgårda-Jakobssons, 842/3	59	2 Sa2	-	-	-	-	Sbg 37, CNS 1.2.8
Runne, 859/50	894	2 Sa2	-	-	-	-	Sbg 457
Spillings III, 867	c 5100	many	many	40-50 Ab1, 2 Ab4 etc	35ingots, ringmoney etc	few	TN 62A
Spillings IV, 870/1	c 9100	many	many	190 Ab1, 7-9 Ab4 etc	45 ingots, ringmoney etc		TN 62A
Hemmor 870/1	316			1 Ab1		Sa1	Sbg 391
Asarve, 871/2	2	20 Sa1	10 Sp	15 Ab var	18 ingots	Sa1	Sbg 293
Dals, 880/1	47	-	-	4 Ab1	-	-	Sbg 208
Kinner, 883/4	301	-	-	1 Ab1	-	-	Sbg 346.
Lilla Hammars, 903/4	281	-	-	1 Ab var	-	-	Sbg 339
Stora Vellinge, 910/1	2674	-	-	1 Ab1	-	-	Sbg 83, CNS 1.2.38
Ockes, 911/2	260	-	-	1 Ab1	-	Sa1 ¹	Sbg 615
Fardume träsk, 921/2	1162	3 Sa1	-	-	-	-	Sbg 280
Nyhagen, 922/3	117	-	2 Sp	-	-	-	Sbg 305
Asa, 928/9	17	1 Sa1²	1 Sp	-	-	-	Sbg 336
Broa, 932	99	-	4 Sp	-	-	-	Sbg 176, CNS 1.4.5
Halvans, 932/3	275	-	1 Sp	-	-	-	Sbg 187
Spillings II, 936/7	394	-	-	2 Ab1	1 arm ring	rods	Sbg 410
Sandäskes, 936/7	113	-	-	-	-	spiral	Sbg. 459
Stockvik, 939/40	18	-	-	-	-	neckring, braided rods	Sbg. 621
Västris, 939/40	1084	-	3 Sp	1Ab var³	-	spiral rod	Sbg 531
Nors, 940/1	337	-	2 Sp	1Ab1	-	rod, spirals	Sbg. 372
Utoje, 942/3	465	-	-	1 Ab1 + 1 Ab var	-	-	Sbg 155, CNS 1.4.10
Gannarve(Lokrume), 944/5	894	-	2 Sp	-	-	-	Sbg 340
Tänglings, 945/6	314	-	1 Sp	1 Ab1 + 1 Abvar	1fingerring	p-brooch, spirals	Sbg 144, 147, CNS 1.3.37
Takstens, 945/6	327	1Sa ar	3 Sp⁴	-	-	-	Sbg 360, 362
Nystugu, 947/8	133	-	-	1 Ab2 + 2 Ab3 + 1 Ab var	-	fingerring	Sbg 286

1. Broken into two pieces
2. The Permian neckrings was broken into three parts, one part now lost.
3. Bracelete without hourglass shaped pattern
4. Two spirals now lost

TABLE I. COMPOSITION OF MIXED HOARDS ON GOTLAND WITH UNMINTED OBJECTS AND COINS CA. 800–950.

not only a mechanical destruction into minute proportions but also at the same time represents an annihilation of its monetarian connotations that seem linked to current value concepts in society. The destruction of such a thing may thus concomitantly symbolize an objection to the world view and mythologies, embedded and materialized in the object (Kilger 2008b). Fragmentation or the damage even of single objects in hoards mediates also a sensation that there is something at stake which has to be articulated and rejected. On the other hand wholeness of an object from this perspective as opposed to fragmentation could symbolize matters of reinforcement, assurance, belonging and identity. Looking through eyeglasses which strengthen the gaze on shape, ornamentation, composition and morphology invites the observer to ponder on the composition of the early dirham hoards on Gotland.

Early Viking Age mixed hoards from Gotland

The following table lists all 9th and early 10th century mixed hoards (tpq 796/7—947/8) on Gotland containing both minted and non-minted silver (Table I) and offers an overview on fragmentation, the presence and amount of whole ornaments. However this conspectus—by no means complete¹—has to be handled with care because the numerous hoards with minted silver only from this period are not listed. There exists also a considerable amount of pure ornament hoards which has not been taken into consideration. A more comprehensive investigation remains to be done in the future and is not in the scope of this paper.

The earliest hoards dated between c. 800 to 840 reveal a mixture of both unfragmented and fragmented ornaments and ingots, but also in some instances a mixture of precious metals of gold, bronze and silver.

With the increase of dirham silver in the second half of the 9th century there is a change in the composition and also the treatment of unminted objects. Fragmentation of unminted silver ceases, ingots disappear and there is a limited range of ring types. These rings seem to have been handled with care. They show no signs of fragmentation or damages. In some cases there have been recognized traces of wear. Another conspicuous feature of these ring hoards is a fixed pattern of combination, either containing spiralarings, usually in pairs, or bracelets only, usually one. Some few hoards contain three or four rings or bracelets respectively. This pattern is changing again in hoards with tpq in the mid-930s, after which in some instances spiralarings also combine with bracelets. There is also a tendency of fragmented ornaments appearing again.

There seem to have existed a common concept on Gotland in furnishing dirham hoards with ornaments by adding one, two or several rings. This way of composing objects

in a recurrent and stereotype fashion reminds of another category of Viking Age hoards consisting of carefully chosen objects belonging to the female dress. Common for all these hoards, which beside silver often also contain ornaments of gilded bronze, glass beads and in exceptional cases also gold is the presence of brooches which were visibly worn on women's chests (Kilger 2008c). The observation of hoards with "fixed set" of jewelry is not a phenomenon confined to the Viking period but continues into the Middle Ages. Brooches with a strong Christian symbolism are a conspicuous component in some coin hoards from the turn of the 13th century and later (Myrberg 2009b, 163ff.). However in contrast to the "brooch hoards" the "ring silver hoards" display a different repertoire of shapes and forms, which is presented shortly below.

Rings as serpents

One conspicuous group of earliest ring ornaments in the Gotlandic hoards are the so called Permian neckrings (Sa 1), spiral striated rings with a catch formed by a polyhedric or faceted knob and a hook (Hårdh 2006, 143; 2008, 108; Stenberger 1958, 123ff.). Permian rings, a term labeled by Scandinavian archaeologists refer to their main concentration area west of the Ural Mountains. Fragments of Permian rings are already represented in the earliest dirham hoards on Gotland (Table I). As remarked by Birgitta Hårdh (2006, 143) the Permian neck rings have been wound into arm rings in Scandinavia, whereas in Russia they are kept as neck rings. Another important observation is that Permian rings were obviously standardized both in their design and weight. Adapted to a common weight standard in units of 400, 300, 200 and 100 grams which seem to correspond either with the Russian pound and *grivna* or the Scandinavian *mark* they seemed to have been used as currency or money in big units (Hårdh 2006, 144ff., tab. 1). Stamped ornamentation is present on some of the rings found in Scandinavia and around the Baltic but almost unknown in Russia (Fig.1).

Usually the Permian rings appear as fragments in hoards in Scandinavia. Complete rings are mainly found on the islands of Gotland and Öland. The fact that these rings were handled as whole objects may indicate that they were valued differently on the Baltic islands than in other parts of Scandinavia.

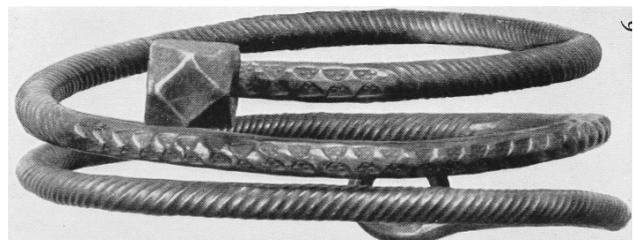


FIG. 1. SPIRAL STRIATED NECKRING OF PERMIAN TYPE WITH STAMPED ORNAMENTATION, ASARVE (TPQ 871/2). AFTER STENBERGER 1947, PL. 6.

¹ This list is based on Stenbergers catalogue and not all new hoards discovered after 1947 are listed here.

SMALL THINGS – WIDE HORIZONS

A related type of spiral-striated rings probably produced in Scandinavia in the 9th century are the so called Duesminde rings with thinner rods and swan neck shaped terminals (Sa 2) (Munksgaard 1963; Stenberger 1958, 128f.). Judging from the hoard evidence the Duesminde rings appear in the second quarter of the 9th century such as Sønder Kirkeby on the island of Falster in Denmark (tpq 846/7) and Norrgårda-Norrby (tpq 842/3) on Gotland.² (Table I). In contrast to the Permian type the Duesminde rings are not present in Russian hoards. They are mainly found in southern Scandinavia and on Gotland. Also the Duesminde rings seem to follow a weight standard in smaller units around 100 and 50 grams, which corresponds to a half resp. a quarter mark or four and two ounces. A further ornamental development consequently executed among these Scandinavian copies is the triangular hour glass shaped pattern or stamp decoration covering the rods on the outside (Fig. 2). As already noted some of the Permian rings found in Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea region show the same ornamental pattern.

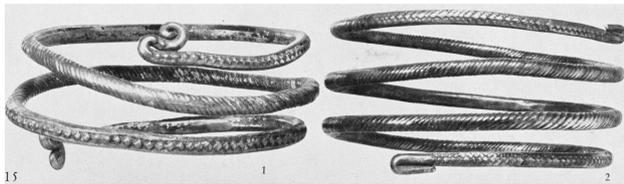


FIG. 2. SPIRAL STRIATED RING OF DUESMINDE TYPE WITH STAMPED ORNAMENTATION, NORRGÅRDA-JAKOBSSONS (TPQ 842/3). AFTER STENBERGER 1947, PL. 15.

Finally to be mentioned here are the bracelets or bangels (sw. *armbyglar*). “Armbygels” are horseshaped bangels made of a broad rod who were worn around the wrist. The “armbygel” belongs to the most common non-minted silver objects in Gotlandic silver hoards which has contributed to its iconic status as typical Gotlandic jewelry (Stenberger 1958, 104). Evidence that the silver bracelets have been produced on Gotland is provided by a miscast recovered at the Viking harbor settlement of Häffinds in Burs parish on south-eastern Gotland (Gustafsson 2013, 59, Cat no. 23) and by a fragment of a mould which has been discovered in a workshop at the harbor of Fröjel on the west coast of Gotland (Gustafsson & Söderberg 2007, 101f., fig. 3). The silver “armbygel” was probably modelled on bracelets made in bronze, common ornaments in the female dress costume of the Vendel period (Nerman 1969, pl. 187, 239, 284; 1975, 57, 69, 80) and early Viking period on Gotland (Thunmark Nylén 2006a, 169ff.). In contrast to the bracelets in bronze which display a variety of shapes and ornamentations, the silver bracelets are more uniform in their design. Weight studies show considerable regularity in weight distribution 47–52, 66–68 and 99–101 grams. This might correspond to units of a quarter, a third and a half mark (Thunmark-Nylén 2006b, 704).

² However the hoard was not discovered in its entirety. The coins and the bracelets were handed in separately on several occasions (Stenberger 1947, 24). It is thus not entirely certain that the rings belong to this hoard.

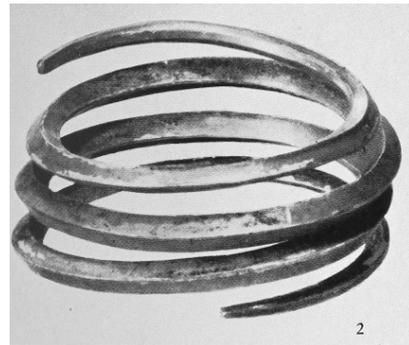


FIG. 3. SPIRAL RING WITH RHOMBIC CROSS SECTIONS, TAKSTENS (TPQ 945/6). AFTER STENBERGER 1947, PL. 22:2.

The earliest type and one of the most common bracelets in the Gotlandic hoards from the Early Viking period is Stenbergers type Ab1 (Fig. 4). This type is represented regularly in coin hoards from the 870s onwards and the first decades of the 10th century which indicates that this type of bracelet was reproduced again and again over a longer period of time (Table I). The uniformity in shape, ornamentation and weight in the same way as the spiral striated rings reinforces the impression that also these bracelets were used as currency. Ab2 and Ab3 belong to the Late Viking Age and appear first from the 950 onwards (Table I). Those two types will not be in the scope of this paper.



FIG. 4. GOTLANDIC SILVER BRACELET (SW. ARMBYGEL) WITH STAMPED ORNAMENTATION, MOJNER. AFTER STENBERGER 1947, PL. 29.

Looking more closely on ornamentation the Gotlandic silver bracelets, especially Stenbergs types Ab1 and Ab2 seem to copy the body and the colour pattern of a serpent, more distinctively the image of a coiling adder, also known as the European viper (lat. *Vipera berus*) (Fig. 5). As seen on the bracelet from the hoard of Tänglings the hourglass shaped triangles covering the outside of the bracelet in several parallel rows are imitating the distinctive dorsal scales encircling the body of the serpent (Fig. 6). The pointed triangles may refer to the keeled scale which is the ridge on the center of each scale. Even the terminals of the bracelet imitate the head of a snake, with eyes and jaws. With this in mind it could be argued that the hour-glass shaped pattern clearly visible on the Duesminde rings and some of the Permian rings were also intended to imitate the armored scales of a living serpent (Fig. 1–2).



FIG. 5. EUROPEAN VIPER (LAT. VIPERA BERUS), HANSTA, SWEDEN. PHOTO BY LENNART PETTERSSON, STOCKHOLMS HERPETOLOGISKA FÖRENING.

Summing up the observations made on composition, morphology and ornamentation of silver rings and bracelets of the coin dated early mixed hoards on Gotland: The appearance of the “ring silver hoards” seems to be linked to the increased import of dirham silver from Eastern Europe during the second half of the 9th century. This change correlates also with the abandonment of fragmentation of unminted objects. Another observation is the development of silver crafting in this period in southern Scandinavia and on Gotland as evidenced by the Duesminde neck rings and the armbygel on Gotland. When crafting silver developed and dirhams were melted casted into new objects, the shape of a serpent or a snake was targeted. This may highlight the need of creating a formal language in silver with a repertoire of recognizable shapes.

The snakes land

Animal art has a long history in pictorial representations in Scandinavia. It is represented on pictures stones from the Migration period, on Viking Age rune stones and as depictions of dragons on various scenes on stone sculptures in Romanesque churches. In contrast to the monumental and visible public use on monuments depictions of the snake are also very common on Iron Age ornaments worn on the body, which may be regarded more as personal items, signifying different associations with its bearers. Various aspects on the meaning and use of serpents and dragons in pictorial representations have been discussed on several occasions and related in new ways to aspects of gender, landscape, warfare and cosmologies in Scandinavian Iron Age societies (e.g. Domej-Lundeborg 2009; Hedeager 2004; Johansen 1997; Kristoffersen 2010).

In the following I want to address the presence of effigies of animals in the “ring silver hoards” and the connection between snakes and silver. Language, etymology and the use of words in medieval text written in Old Norse, especially poetic texts—even though expressed in a Christian and western Scandinavian context—offer to my

mind immediate avenues to Iron Age mentalities. *Baugr* is the word for bracelet which holds a prominent place in Old Norse poetic texts. In skaldic poetry *baugr* is used as an element in kennings signifying a wide specter of different metaphors. Referring to its circular shape the skalds use *baugr* as a poetic compound denoting round objects, weapons such as the shield or the shieldboss, jewelry such as the neckring or as a metaphor for the shield bearing warrior, the generous gift giver or prince (Engeler 1991, 92ff.). Another group of *baugr* kennings employs the curved nature of the ring to evoke the image of a coiled snake, more specifically as a metaphor for the Midgard snake which at the bottom of the ocean encircles the inhabited world. In this context the kenning *vallar baugr* first mentioned by the skald Hárekr Eyvindarson in the 11th century is translated as “ring of the land” or “ring of the world” picturing the snake as a metaphor for the ocean encircling the land (Engeler 1991, 98f.).

An interesting twist of the *baugr*-as-snake kenning is offered by the skald Björn krepphendis homage to the Norwegian king Magnus Barfot in his *Magnusdrápa* dated to around 1100. The king is priced as the hater of gold *vallbaugs vengis hati*, meaning literally the hater of the land of the ring of the world. As exemplified earlier the ring of the world is a poetic expression for the snake. The land of the snake, rather the land which is guarded by the snake is a metaphor for gold, referring the old but well known story of the golden treasure guarded by the snake Fafnir. The *baugr*-as-snake kennings appear rather late in skaldic poetry in the 12th and 13th centuries.



FIG. 6. GOTLANDIC SILVER BRACELET (SW. ARMBYGEL) WITH POINTED TRIANGLES AND ZIG ZAG PATTERN, TÄNGLINGS (TPQ 945/6). AFTER STENBERGER 1947, PL. 39:8.

The connection between rings and snakes is a popular theme in poetry. *Baugr* alludes in different ways to the image of a coiling and watching snake. There is also a connection with water: the Midgard snake resting on the bottom of the ocean and the dragon Fafnir guarding his treasure in the boggy marshes of Gnita-heath. Another aspect is that the snake as compound in several kennings refers to the image of land which is enclosed by the body of the animal. The “land of the snake” is a poetic expression of the hoard which is guarded by the snake. Furthermore the metaphor stresses also the agency of an apotropaic animal, guarding, owning and defending the hoard.

SMALL THINGS – WIDE HORIZONS

Serpent rings on top of things

The presence of the serpent rings in silver hoards from Gotland maybe understood in this context as a material image and visual performance of “snakeland”. The sinuous silver snake seems in various ways connected to current concepts of wealth in Gotlandic society. The role of material culture as a means of literally telling stories has recently been proposed (e.g. Price 2010). According to Neil Price Viking Age graves were painstakingly furnished in open daylight for public display and burying the dead were considered as mortuary dramas, as a means of telling stories and reenacting mythologies. However it seems unlikely to me that the “ring silver hoards” were involved in rituals for display in the same manner as burials vividly portrayed by Price. Ring silver hoards contain personal items and seem more connected to issues of ownership, kinship and hereditary affairs. There are reports that ring ornaments seem to have been placed with care in the hoard container. One of the early 9th century dirham hoards on Gotland with two spiral striated rings (Table I) was found in the infields of the farm at Runne (Stenberger 1947, no. 457; 1958, 182f). According to the eye-witness account the hoard was concealed in a ceramic pot which was destroyed by the plow. At least one of the rings seems to have been deposited on the top of the container.

From the perspective of ownership the rings could have had legal significance, which was used as a symbolic device for closing the hoard. Placing rings on top of things was an act of sealing off and making the fortune, which means the coins became inaccessible to others. This interpretation has of course many connotations with a key and a vault. There are of course other options to interpret the presence of the rings. The act of sealing off the hoard/vault, and using the snake as a symbolic key is portrayed in a photography of Stora Velinge I (tpq 910/11), one of

the biggest dirham hoards from the early Viking period contains over 2,600 mostly unfragmented dirhams and only one bracelet (Stenberger 1947, pl. 19). The tension between the mass of dirhams and the single coiling bracelet is reinforced by the photography originally published by Stenberger (Fig. 6). It is not clear if the serpent bracelet hovering on the top of coins was placed there intentionally by the photographer. However the picture visualizes the tension between the mass of the coins and the odd single snake ornament in the hoard.

Final conclusions

The mutual connections of silver to ownership, wealth and commodification in the Viking Age are still elusive and the challenge remains to understand which impact flows of silver had on society. Scholars interested in the economies of the Viking Age and early medieval periods are pushing forward new perspectives stressing the entanglement between material culture, exchange and different systems of value. Current interpretations are focused on the meaning content of the things exchanged, what makes things valuable, what enables exchange. An interesting perspective recently articulated—rejecting the modern and in archaeological interpretations entrenched view of individuality and personhood—views the Viking world as upside down where things and persons are interchangeable. Rather people owning things, it is things that are in charge. The agency of female ornaments and valuables is stressed, linking together families through ages and connecting past and present (Melander 2014). Understanding hoards and silver objects from this direction stresses the agency and the clockwork of the material world, structures and mind sets whose threads stretches far beyond the living world. This view has also consequences in understanding the ownership of silver hoards. The rings angled from this



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FIG. 7. THE WATCHING SNAKE, THE ONE AND ONLY BRACELET (AB1), STORA VELINGE I (TPQ 910/1). AFTER STENBERGER 1947, PL. 18.

perspective might rather be understood as embodiments of kinship and not ownership.

In this paper the aspect of morphology and ornamentation of the earliest ring types on Gotland have been discussed and developed. A common feature is that these rings imitate snakes in different ways, in shapes and ornamentation. The snake appears in poetic expressions in Old Norse texts such as skaldic poetry and eddaic verse which links it with hoarding and wealth. As noted earlier the resemblance of these objects with snakes may highlight their emblematic appearance and protective meaning as the hoard's guardians. Putting the evidence together it can be stated that the production of early ring ornaments in Scandinavia started in the wake of the great influx of dirham silver into the Baltic Sea zone. The appearance of the ring ornaments, imitating snakes may emphasize the need of finding "paths" for valuing silver. The resemblance with serpent animals may also reflect a morphological search for a bodily manifestation channeling and reinforcing up earlier but still current concepts of value. The "ring silver hoards" and the rings allude in different ways to standardization. In some instances the serpent bracelets show considerable signs of wear which might indicate that they were personal items. As personal items the serpent bracelets were not reentering the pool of silver circulation and became deposited with the hoard probably as the last object put in the hoard.

Whole spiral striated rings and Gotlandic snake bracelets surface in coindated silver hoards in the middle of the 9th century. This might be an coincidence but it also may highlight that silver has become an issue in people's daily life, either weighed and valued as hacksilver in minute proportions with scales and weights at buzzing trading and commercial urban sites, or transformed into rings, carried as personal ornaments on Gotland.

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Abbreviations

- CNS = *Corpus Nummorum Saeculorum*. Catalogue of Coins from the Viking Age found in Sweden. Kungliga vitterhets-, historie- och antikvitetsakademien. Stockholm, 1975–
- Sbg. = Stenberger 1947
- TN. = Thunmark Nylén 2006, III:2