Doing Things With Rings:
Working from object to action in a study of late Scandinavian Iron Age ritual life

Abstract: *Doing Things With Rings* investigates a range of rituals involving amulet rings, and how this set of practices can serve as a window onto some of the broader themes at play in late Scandinavian Iron Age religion(s). Though it has become increasingly clear that using 'amulet' or 'votive' rings was a very characteristic form of ritualized activity in eastern Scandinavia during this period, there has been little research specifically dedicated to studying these practices or considering the varied facets of this phenomenon in a holistic way. This thesis addresses these issues by employing a fine-grained 'bottom-up' archaeological approach to analyze a variety of assemblages that incorporate amulet rings from three different case sites located in the Mälardalen region of present-day Sweden: the gravefield designated RAÄ Söderby 28 on the island of Lovö, a 'cult place' discovered at Gruffet in Västmanland, and a late Iron Age farmstead excavated at Viggbyholm, in Täby parish north of Stockholm. The physical evidence at the core of the case studies is in turn explored further in combination with other sources, and through the lenses of new materialist conceptions of ritualization, assemblage, relationality, and affect, in order to flesh out the most detailed and vivid possible picture of the events in question. An image that not only serves to reveal more about specific ritualized actions involving amulet rings, but also allows us to approach something of the lived experiences of the people who carried them out. Through this process of working from apparently static objects all the way through to the dynamic (*intra*)actions that constituted amulet ring practices, an example of the possibilities afforded by taking a more affective and relational approach to the archaeology of ritual is also forwarded.

Keywords: amulet rings, archaeology of ritual, new materialism, Old Norse religion, cult places, mortuary archaeology, Mälardalen, late Iron Age Scandinavia, Viking Age, Vendel Period, Merovingian period, ritualization, assemblage, relationality, relational ontology, new animism, affect