Deictic References in Runic Inscriptions on Voyage Runestones

Kristel Zilmer

Introduction

In the Swedish province of Västergötland, there stands a runestone at Härlingstorp farm, Edsvåra parish, in the district of Skåning (Vg 61), where a mother commemorates her son who died while travelling abroad. The present site of the stone is not far from its assumed original setting; it was found by a ford leading over the nearby Härlingstorp brook.

The monument is of granite and is just over one metre high. The upper right section is missing, but this has been supplied from earlier records. Despite the damage, the design of the monument seems clear: the inscription is fitted into two bands, the outer one forming a continuous frame around the face of the stone. The content of the inscription is thus divided between the two bands. Beginning at the lower left corner, the runes in the outer band (following *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*) read as follows: 

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tula} & \quad \text{sati} \quad \text{sten} \quad \text{þ}... \quad [\text{R kr} \quad \text{sun}] \quad \text{sin} \quad \text{harþa} \quad \text{truk}\quad \text{sa} \quad \times.
\end{align*}
\]

In normalised Runic Swedish, the message (including the suppletion) is thus: 

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tōla satti stæin þ[annsi æft]Ir GæiR, sun sinn, harða gðan dræng} \, \text{“Tola placed this stone after GæiRR, her son, a very good dræng,” concluding with the demonstrative pronoun sā, which introduces the second part of the inscription. This brings us to the inner band, which provides additional information about the deceased:} \quad \text{uarþ} \quad \text{tuþr} \quad \text{o} \quad \text{uastr:uakm} \quad \text{i} \quad \text{uikiku}, \quad \text{varð dauðr a vestrvegum i vikingu} \, \text{“died in the west on a “viking voyage”.”}
\end{align*}
\]

The inscription as a whole contains several noteworthy features, not least in the matter of vocabulary. Thus, we find here one of the three occurrences in the runic material of the phrase *i vikingu*, the other examples are found in
two inscriptions from Skåne, DR 330 and DR 334. According to Jesch, it is not obvious what kind of enterprises the feminine noun *vīking* (Old Norse *víking*) referred to: “the contexts could be expeditions of either raiding or trading (or both)” (2001, 55). Vg 61 and DR 334 were set up to commemorate men said to have died during such Viking activity—in the former case somewhere in the west, in the latter the north. DR 330 follows a more general pattern of commemoration, referring, as far as can be seen, to men who are widely acclaimed on account of their Viking activity. In all three inscriptions the term *vīking* is thus used of the activities of men who engaged in travelling.

The second specifically Viking vocabulary item found on Vg 61 is the well-studied and much more frequently documented *drængr* (ON *drengr*), here modified by sg. acc. *harða gōðan* and characterising the deceased. Travelling has been identified as an activity *drængiaR* engaged in: “taking part in viking or merchant expeditions to other countries seems to have been a commendable task for a *drænger*” (Strid 1987, 312; cf. also Jesch 1993, 170). Jesch (2001, 216–32) offers a fresh insight into the semantic range of the term in various contexts. According to her, its central connotations in runic inscriptions signal in-group identification and/or youth (2001, 229 f.).

The above points illustrate some of the things one may choose to focus on when discussing an inscription such as Härlingstorp. One could equally well stress its importance as an example of an inscription commissioned by a female commissioner on her own. In the present context, though, Härlingstorp serves as a suitable point of departure for yet other reasons.

First, Vg 61 demonstrates how the inscription focuses attention on the monument by use of the wording *stæin þ[annsi]* ‘this stone’—a formulation that carries an extended, extra-linguistic meaning in that it points out the medium for the message in a very direct manner. Looking at the design of the stone we notice that *stæin þ[annsi]* is carved along the top (although the section that carried the latter word is not preserved, apart from the initial þ).

Second, it is interesting to observe the dative plural form *a vestrvegum* ‘on western ways’—carved *uastr:uakm* and placed in the upper right part of the inner band. This piece of information provides a rather broad frame of reference for the young man’s itinerary. The only other runic inscription that mentions *vestrvegR* is Sō 62, but there the reference is singular, and incorporated into the phrase *ī veg varð dauðr vestr* ‘died on the western way’. The designation of the eastern route, *austrvegR*, which is recorded in five runic inscriptions (Sō 34, Sō 126, Sō Fv1954;22, Vg 135†, U 366†), also appears in the singular. In skaldic poetry and saga literature, on the other hand, we also find plural forms of *austrvegR*, showing the ambiguous and gradually changing nature of the label, which, depending on context, could
designate various territories that were considered part of the eastern world (cf., e.g., Jackson 2003, 29–36).

The aim of the current paper is to discuss various types of deictic features in runic inscriptions to do with travelling—of which Vg 61 with its stæin þ[annsi] and á vestrvegum forms one example. In the following I shall clarify what is meant by ‘deictic feature’, identify suitable sources, and justify the approach adopted in the present study.

### Deictic features — What are they?

The term deixis originates from Greek, and its literal meaning is “display”. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, deixis refers to “the pointing or specifying function of some words (as definite articles and demonstrative pronouns) whose denotation changes from one discourse to another”. Deictic words thus derive at least some of their meaning from the situation (i.e. extra-linguistic context); their “use and interpretation depend on the location of the speaker and/or addressee within a particular setting” (O’Grady, Dobrovolsky, and Katamba 1997, 711). In other words, the interpretation of deictic markers varies according to when and where and by whom they are applied.

Typical categories of deixis are person deixis, place deixis, and time deixis (cf. Fillmore 1997, 61f.). Person deixis refers to the participants in the act of communication: the sender, the addressee, and the potential broader audience. Common markers of this type of deixis are personal pronouns, such as I and you. Typical place-deictic terms are this and here (proximal deictic markers) versus that and there (distal deictic markers), which demonstrate closeness to or distance from the sender’s perspective. Time-deictic terms would for example be adverbs, such as now, then and today, and they are linked to the speaker’s perspective through a specific temporal point of reference.

### Runic inscriptions that tell of travels

The source group for the current study includes more than 200 stone inscriptions that date from the Viking Age or Early Middle Ages and can be categorised as of traditional commemorative type. All contain references to travel, usually in the form of named destinations (place- and or inhabitant-names)—often locations where the commemorated person(s) died. Alternatively, the inscriptions may speak of travel in general terms, or contain bynames appropriate to people who travelled to certain destinations.
The total number of runestones referring to voyages cannot be established with certainty, since it can sometimes be hard to determine the nature of the evidence. Fragmentary inscriptions, for example, may not make clear whether the person commemorated died away from home; the same applies to inscriptions that do not specify localities (e.g. those that mention death by drowning).

Voyage runestones have long constituted a popular research topic, and they have been used as sources in a number of connections (there is an overview in Zilmer 2005, 66–72). In general we can distinguish between three main types of study (cf. Zilmer 2005, 67):

(a) general surveys of runic references to voyages to the east or west, or both
(b) discussions of groups of inscriptions with the same or similar historical reference, such as the Knutr/danegeld inscriptions and the Ingvarr inscriptions
(c) studies of voyage inscriptions for the light they shed on contemporary society or vice-versa (e.g. the socio-economic background of the travellers, the political organisation behind the expeditions, or the purpose of the voyages)

A common approach has been to offer general surveys of the reached destinations and try to place the information about travelling in the context of other historical evidence—to connect the recorded journeys with known events, historical figures and practices. In the present study I will approach this group of inscriptions from a different point of view, finding them to be a useful point of departure when discussing particular semantic and contextual features of the runic discourse.

The reason for selecting voyage runestones as source material is the following. We may expect that besides the most common deictic markers—also found on other stones—these inscriptions will contain potentially interesting place- and time-deictic expressions, since they are concerned with mobility in relation to particular spatio-temporal reference points. Although not exclusively, such inscriptions often record death away from home, which in itself requires a certain distance to be marked: the place the commemorated person died is distinct from the memorial site and the home territory of the stone-raisers. Inscriptions on voyage runestones should by their very nature illuminate various ways of presenting the orientational features of language.
Exemplification of deictic features

The following presentation will to a certain extent be based on the terminology used by earlier scholars who have worked in the field. A primary distinction is usually drawn between the standard commemorative formula and various types of supplement (cf., e.g., Thompson 1975, 12–21; Palm 1992, 133–36; Hübler 1996, 39–41, 78–80; Jesch 1998, 463 f.). This is in order to bring out the seeming uniformity as well as the role of variation in runic texts. However, it should be remembered that inscriptions are more than texts: the layout and the way the different elements are placed on the stone adds to the specific experience of runic textuality. In particular I would wish to emphasise the importance of the visual dimension of runic inscriptions (as, e.g., Jesch 1998; Andrén 2000; Øeby Nielsen 2001). Of course, there is always the risk that one may read more into the inscriptions’ visual imagery than is actually there. The approach adopted here is more conservative. I wish simply to direct attention towards some forms of interplay between the content of the inscription and the layout.

The inscriptions studied contain a number of deictic expressions that derive their meaning from the context of utterance and represent the perspective of the people involved in commissioning the monument. A typical example is the phrase already referred to in the introduction to this article—the common phrase ‘this stone’. As we can see, the monument marker is complemented by a demonstrative pronoun with place-deictic function. This focuses additional attention on the medium of the inscription, but also on other components of a monument. More than 125 inscriptions in my corpus make use of this strategy (the number may be even higher if fragmentary inscriptions are taken into account).

Typically we meet the phrase ‘this stone’ in the main memorial formula, as for example in the above-mentioned Härlingstorp inscription, or in Ög 104 Gillberga: Rauðr ræisti stæin þennsi æftir Tök[a], brōður sinn ‘Rauðr raised this stone after Toki, his brother’. As we learn from the supplements in the latter inscription the deceased was a very good drængr, who was killed in England. Sometimes the plural form is used, as in the case of Vs 1 Stora Ryttern (Fig. 1), where the reference to pl. acc. stæina þåsi ‘these stones’ indicates that there was at least one other stone besides that carrying the inscription—indeed, from the same church ruins comes its possible fellow, Vs 2, which is decorated with a cross. Furthermore, Vs 1 includes an additional monument marker, in the form of the rather specific term ‘staff’: Guðlæifr satti staf ok stæina þåsi æftir Slagva, sun sinn ‘Guðlæifr placed a staff and these stones after Slagvi, his son’. ‘Staff’ occurs in the inscription
without its own deictic marker, but the word occupies a central position on the stone, carved into the top part of the inner zoomorphic band. The inclusion of ‘these’ after ‘stones’ serves to point out that several stones were included in the same monument complex. It is also a theoretical possibility that the formulation as well as the design of the carving was modified to take account of the layout of the memorial.

Another interesting feature of the Stora Ryttern inscription is its conclusion—with the identification of the place where Slagvi died carved into the lower left corner of the stone: **austri** • i • ‘east in’ and **karusm** • stand with the bases of the runes facing each other, reminiscent of a mirror image. The interpretation of **karusm** as either **Garðar** (the territory of Old Rus) or Chorezm has been discussed on a number of occasions (cf., e.g., Jansson 1946, 265; Arne 1947, 290–292; SRI, 13: 8 f.; Lagman 1990, 97).

Monument markers other than ‘stone’ can be found in the memorial formula, also accompanied by a demonstrative pronoun. To mention but a few: we meet ‘this bridge’ in Ög 68 Ekeby church (**Svæina gærði brō þessi æftir Øyvind, brōður sinn ‘Svæina made this bridge after Øyvindr, her brother’), thus focusing on the construction of a bridge instead of the runic monument. U 73 Hansta exhibits a somewhat aberrant memorial formula, introduced by the phrase ‘these markers’ instead of the name(s) of the

*Futhark* 1 (2010)
commissioner(s): \(\text{þessun mærki æru gar æftir syni InguR} \) ‘These markers are made after Inga’s sons’. Nor are the names of the deceased mentioned; the additional information offered concerns lines of inheritance and the fact that the sons died \(i\) \(\text{Grikkium}\) (i.e. in Byzantium). However, here we have to consult the second Hansta monument, U 72, which details the names of the commissioners and the commemorated. The Västra Strö monument (DR334) uses ‘these runes’ as a blanket designation for the memorial: \(Faðir\) \(lét hoggwa runar þæssi æftir Azur, broþur sin\) ‘Faðir had these runes cut after Azurr, his brother’. That runestone still stands at its original location, and has to be viewed together with the second Västra Strö monument (DR335), which refers to ‘this stone’, and also commemorates a traveller (more precisely, a person who owned a ship together with the commissioner Faðir). Furthermore, from the same spot several non-inscribed stones and a mound are known, adding significance to the memorial setting. Finally, we could mention the phrases ‘this monument’/‘these monuments’, as for example recorded in Ög 8 Kälvesten that commemorates a traveller who fell in the east: \(\text{Stygur/StygguR gærdi kumbl þau aft Óyvind, sunu sinn \text{Stygur/}}\) Í\(\text{StygguR made these monuments after Óyvindr, his son, and Sö 173 Tystberga that speaks of a man who had been in the west for a long time, and then died in the east with Ingvarr—} at the same time leaving it unclear which one of the two deceased mentions is to be understood by \(\text{hann ‘he’:\text{Myskia ok Manni/Māni lētu læisa kumbl þausi at brōður sinn HrōðgæiR ok faður sinn Holmstæinn}}\) ‘Myskia and Manni/Mani had these monuments raised after their brother HroðgæiR and their father Holmstæinn’. We also meet the monument marker \(kumbl\) in Sö 319 Sannerby, which exhibits an interesting design. Here we can observe a clear distinction between the main content and supplementary information in the layout. Running along the band framing the stone we find the memorial formula \(\text{Finnviðr(?) gærði kuml þessi æftir GæiRbiorn, faður sinn ‘Finnviðr made these monuments after GæiRbiorn, his father’, with kuml þessi placed centrally at the top. The supplementary information concerning the deceased is found in the middle of the stone, arranged more or less symmetrically around the cross: hann varð dauðr vestr ‘he died in the west’}.\)

The monument marker \(kumbl\) has been understood by some to refer to a memorial consisting of more than one element, including the inscription (Palm 1992, 177). Stoklund (1991, 287), however, stresses that the word’s regular plural form in Danish inscriptions need not imply more than a single memorial stone; rather \(kumbl\) (pl.) may function as a collective label designating a stone covered with runes.

So far we have concentrated on the deictic marker “this” as it occurs in the
main memorial formula, but it may be inserted into the supplements as well. Thus, the runestone from Västerljung church, Sö 40 — which speaks of rather shorter travels — contains the phrase ‘these runes’ (rūnaR þāRsi) in the carver formula, whereas in the memorial formula the grammatical object (i.e. the monument) has actually been left implicit (HōnæfR ræisti at GæiRmar, faður sinn ‘Honæf raised after Gæiemaker, his father’). On the other hand, some inscriptions have several parallel foci, each marked by the demonstrative pronoun. For example in Sö 46 Hormesta — commemorating a traveller to England — the memorial formula includes stæin þannsi ‘this stone’, while the supplement identifies the makers of ‘this monument’ (kumbl giærdu þatsi). Sö 55 Bjudby (also after a traveller to England) uses the phrase sg. acc. stæin þenna ‘this stone’ both in the memorial and the carver formula. In the Nora rock inscription U 130, the memorial formula identifies the medium as ‘this rock-slab’ (sg. acc. hælli þessa), whereas in the supplement we find information about ‘this estate’ that the commissioner owns: Er þessi býr þæirða ðål ok ættærfi, FinnviðaR suna á Ælgiastaðum ‘This farm is their allodial and inherited property, the sons of Finnviðr at Ælgiastaðir’. With the impressive rock on which the inscription is carved still preserved in its original setting — close to a river that flows into Edsviken bay — the deictic markers in the text carry an extended extra-linguistic meaning even for us, the modern audience. The farm at Älgesta, located some 30 km away, must have functioned as the centre of the family’s estate, which even included the lands at Nora (see further Zilmer 2005, 103 f.).

It is interesting to analyse the use of demonstrative pronouns in related monuments. The well-known Broby runestones U 135 and U 136 commemorate the same man, the latter inscription revealing that he headed for Jerusalem and died away among the Greeks (uppi Grikkium). U 136 refers to ‘these stones’ (pl. acc. stæina þessa) in its memorial formula; U 135 does the same but includes the additional monument markers ‘this bridge’ (sg. acc. brō þessa) and ‘this mound’ (sg. acc. haug þenna). An alternative approach can be seen in the inscriptions from Sjönhem church, Gotland, G 134, G 135 and G 136†. G 134 begins with the statement Hrōðvisl ok HrōðælfR þaun lēti ræisa stæina æftiR sy[n si[n]a] þrīa ‘Hroðvisl and Hroðælfr, they had stones raised after their three sons’. It then moves to focus on the monument in question (þenna æfti …). G 135 and the lost G 136† begin in a similar way. In other cases, only one of the related monuments makes use of the deictic marker ‘this’ (cf., e.g., U 241 and U 240).

As for the potential motives behind the use of ‘this’, it has been suggested that it could be a type of convention, marking the responsibility of the commissioners for the raising of the runestone:

_Futhark_ 1 (2010)
Så länge ansvaret för en runsten låg på de namngivna personerna i inskriften kunde det kännas naturligare att just ’denna sten’ markerades. Om däremot ansvaret låg på andra personer kunde bestämdheten/konkretionen gärna komma i bakgrunden och själva företeelsen ‘att resa sten’ träda i förgrunden (Palm 1992, 226 f.).

(’As long as the responsibility for a runestone lay with the people named in the inscription, it may have felt more natural to emphasise “this very stone”. If on the other hand the responsibility lay with other people, the definiteness/concretisation could be relegated to the background and the act of “raising the stone” given prominence.’)

However, the nature of the preserved evidence does not of itself allow us to confirm this idea. We have to reckon with the possibility of both regional and carver-related variation here (cf. Palm 1992, 223–28). Individual preferences should not be overlooked either — these could have been steered by the design of the inscription and the physical features of the monument. Conceivably, we may here be witnessing a way in which stone-raisers/commissioners emphasised the significance of a particular monument in relation to the surrounding landscape and/or other components of a memorial, or expressed proximity with regard to a communicative reference point. In the current state of our understanding all such suggestions must remain in the realm of speculation; in order to discover more about the meaning and function of ’this’, the whole available runic corpus must be studied systematically, taking into consideration not only the explicit textual patterns but also the layout, the size and the appearance of the monument and its broader communicative setting.

Whether or not a given commemorative runic inscription uses a demonstrative pronoun, the monument on which the inscription stands can still be observed by the putative reader. To that extent the deictic marker ‘this’ may have a very direct gestural function that is lacking in other contexts. In inscriptions that use the demonstrative pronoun the presumed spatio-temporal proximity to the sender of the message as well as to the site of the memorial is quite apparent, whereas inscriptions that lack the demonstrative pronoun leave us with the impression of a more general and abstract statement. In voyage runestones that simultaneously refer to various destinations away from the location of the stone, ’this’ obviously adds a separate focus on the present point of reference.

The deictic marker ‘this’ belongs to the category of spatial deictics. Other place-deictic terms that figure in the present corpus are ’here’ and ’there’. One such example is to be found in the Lundby inscription, Sö 131: Spiūti,
Halfdan, þæir ræispu stæin þannsi æfti Skarða, brōður sinn. För austr heðan með Ingvari, á Særklandi liggri sunr Øyvindar’Spiuti, Halfdan, they raised this stone after Skarði, their brother. [He] went east from here with Ingvarr, in Særkland lies the son of Øyvindar’. The inscription portrays the journey as leading away from a given point of reference, identified as movement heðan, ‘from here’. Movement that leads to a distant place outside one’s local setting may also be depicted in terms of travelling ‘away/abroad’ and ‘far’, as for example in the supplementary texts of the Gripsholm inscription, Sō 179: þæir fōru drængila fiarri at gulli ok austarla ærni gāfu, dōu sunnarla á Særklandi ‘They went like men far in search of gold and in the east gave [food] to the eagle; [they] died in the south in Særkland’; the Tibble inscription, U 611: Hann úti fioll ī līdi Frøygeirr ‘He fell abroad in Frøygæirr’s band’; the inscription from Tierp church, U 1143: Hann för bort með Ingvari ‘He went off with Ingvarr’; and the Västra Ledinge inscription, U 518: Hann ændaðis ī Silu nōr en þæir andriR út ī Grikkium ‘He died north in Sila, but the others [died] away in Byzantium’. The last example includes references to two different places of death. According to Otterbjörk (1961, 33), the first, ī Silu nōr, forms an antithesis to út ī Grikkium (for comments on the semantics of út i, see Salberger 1997). This view receives support from the layout of the inscription, with the two place adverbials standing almost opposite each other in different lines of the zoomorphic band. With one man dying closer to home, in the sound of Sila (Kolsundet), and the other two in a far-off region, it is indeed natural to emphasise the fact that the latter incident occurred ‘away/abroad’ in Byzantium.

In the Fjuckby inscription, U 1016, it is the adverbs úti ‘abroad’ and hæima ‘at home’ that direct attention towards two different arenas. The statement about the first son perishing abroad is clear: Sā hēt Āki, sem’s úti fōrs ‘He was called Aki who died abroad’ — the interpretation of the rest of the inscription is, however, open to considerable doubt. The problem is how the sequence kuam*:hn krik*:hafnir:haima tu should be understood: according to one version the travelling son came to Grikkhafnirr (‘the Byzantine harbours’), whereas the one son whose name we do not know died at home. Alternatively, the statement concerning the first son is kvam hann Grikkia ‘he came to Byzantium’, while Hafnir renders the name of the second (see further Wulf 1997).

We could also mention the lost G 136†, which was presumably raised after a man the inscription says died at home (dō hæima), whereas the related monuments G 134 and G 135 both commemorate travellers. Another case where the adverb hæima marks a contrast with the setting abroad is
the Bjudby inscription, Sö 55: *Van til Ænglands ungr drængū farinn, varð þā heima at harmi dauðr*’Had gone to England a young man, then died at home greatly mourned’. This statement concerns one and the same person, a *drængū* who had been to England and afterwards—as indicated by the time-deictic word *þā* ‘then’—died at home. Sö 55 shows that information about travelling need not always serve to identify the place of death but can also emphasise a person’s significance. This is the case with one of the Haddeby inscriptions, DR 3, set up after King Sveinn’s retainer: *æs was farin væstr, æn nú warþ døþr at Heþabý*’who had travelled west, but now met death at Hedeby’. Here it is the time-deictic word ‘now’ (*nú*) that emphasises the contrast between the two arenas of action—the west and the (local) surroundings of Hedeby. The distinction is supported by the layout—the front of the monument is reserved for the memorial formula, the supplement about travelling, and the words *æn nú*, which form a link to the second part of the inscription, while the statement about the retainer’s death is found along the edge of the stone.

Place-deictic features are also used in connection with verbs of motion, which usually represent the perspective of the speaker (stone-raiser) and signify movement away from that point of reference. The typical scheme is: personal pronoun + the verb *fara* + various adverbs/directional indicators and/or place-names. However, it should be noted that not all voyage runestones focus on movement; often they simply state that death occurred somewhere away from home (e.g. *hann varð austr dauðr* ‘he died in the east’). Occasionally, an interesting mixture of distal and proximal features occurs, as we have already seen in the case of U 1016. There the memorial formula is supplemented with information about the son who perished abroad, and it is also stated that he steered a ship and came (*kvam hann*) to Byzantium. Normally the verb ‘come’ would signal movement towards the speaker; here it is used in connection with a distant destination that the traveller was able to reach, thus shifting the point of reference.

The frequent references to journeys to the east and west can themselves be considered distal deictic markers. The statement: “He travelled to the east/died in the east” means, in other words: “He went there (and hence died away from here)”. Often only the general terms *austr/vestr, austarla/ vestarla, austrvegR/vestrvegR* are used and the exact destination is left unspecified. For example, ten inscriptions record the term *austr* without any additional details that might identify where the deceased was headed (Ög 30, Sö 92?, Sö 308?, Vg 184, Vg 197, U 154, U 283†, U 504, U 898, DR 108). In other inscriptions, too, only the direction term *austr* is used, but these
contain supplementary references—for example the name of the leader of the expedition, as in the case of the Ingvarr inscriptions—that may point to a particular place or at least region.

Vestr occurs in eight runic inscriptions without any further information about the event or the destination (Ög Fv1970:310, Sö 53†, Sö 159, Sö 319, Vg 197, U 504, DR 3, DR 266). But as in the case of the “eastern” inscriptions, there are also instances where the general indication of travel to the west is combined with supplementary details (cf. Ög 68, Sö 14, Sö 260, U 668, G 370).

Sometimes, of course, we find that the east/west marker is used in combination with a specified locality; for example, vestr figures in two or perhaps three inscriptions together with the destination England (Sö 166, Gs 8, possibly Sm 104), while we often encounter austr in connection with the destinations Garðak and GrikkiaR. On the other hand, these and other places can be given as destinations without the inclusion of directional guides (cf. Zilmer 2005, 223–32).

At the same time, all such designations reflect the orientational map of the speaker—the directional guides ‘east’ and ‘west’ are most probably used in agreement with the (explicit or implicit) destinations that were regarded as located in a particular part of the world. The way they are defined proclaims geographical knowledge and awareness of common travel routes.

As an illustrative example we could look at one of the Aspa inscriptions, Sö 137, which seems to tell of travels to the east. The stone stands at the side of a road. The district around Aspa is known for other runestones as well (Sö 136†, Sö 138, Sö 141, Sö Fv1948;289), and its proximity to the important medieval communication route of Eriksgata has been stressed. The runestones at Aspa must have been connected with an early centre of some sort, as the content of the inscriptions also indicates. Sö 137’s inscription is divided between the northern and the southern side of the stone, and consists of a memorial formula in prose and an alliterating supplement. On the northern (possibly front) face there is a single band of text, with the inscription running upwards: Þōra ræisþi staþr þ[ann]si at ßpi, bōanda sinn ‘Þora raised this stone after ØpiR, her husband’. The statement of relationship comes at the top. On the southern face the inscription continues up the middle text band and then down along the band on the right (there are also some runes on the left, but their reading is highly uncertain): Stæinn sārśi standr at Øpi ā þingstaði at Þōru ver. Hann vestarla væknti(?) karla ‘This stone stands after ØpiR at the assembly place, after Þora’s man. In the west he armed [his] men’.

On this stone, a woman thus commemorates her dead husband, who is said (apparently) to have armed his men in the west. The site of the stone
at the local assembly place is emphasised. Further significant features are: the repetition of the deictic marker ‘this’ on both sides of the stone; the change to present tense in the statement about the location of the stone at the assembly place; and the visual prominence given to that part of the inscription as well as to the relationship between raiser and deceased. The supplement about the western activities of Øpir employs the directional guide *vestarla*, which is carved along the right edge of the monument.

A similar focus on the location of the monument is found on a further Aspa stone, Sö 138, which now stands opposite Sö 137 on the other side of the road. The memorial formula (also in the present tense) is introduced by the place-deictic term *hiar*, ‘here’: *Hiar standr stæinn at góðan Øpis arfa ok Þorunnar, Gyllu brōðurs ‘Here stands the stone after the good heir of Øpir and Þorunnr, brother of Gylla’.*

We shall now take a closer look at the deictic features of the tenses used
on commemorative runestones. Tense as a device to indicate past, present and future is in essence deictic, since temporal reference is defined according to a given time of utterance. Because there are various ways of expressing past, present and future, the understanding of temporal categories is necessarily somewhat complex. The tense system in the Old Scandinavian languages (and in the modern ones for that) distinguishes past from present by means of inflections, whereas for the marking of other tense categories constructions with auxiliary verbs are used.

Runic inscriptions present information in a predominantly retrospective manner, using past tense constructions. Following the commemorative convention, the commissioners state that they raised the stone or had the stone raised in someone’s memory; supplements often explain what the person did or was known for. With the recording of such statements, the commissioners were in a way already distancing themselves from the act of raising a stone. It was perhaps the symbolic moment when the stone was engraved (i.e. the point at which the inscription was encoded) that served as the point of reference. Alternatively, we may regard the inscription as orientated towards its future decoding—the past tense in the memorial formula would feel natural to potential viewers who would view the monument when it was already in position.

However, runic monuments also allow for the shifting of viewpoints, and the inclusion of statements that are related to a present or future moment. The alternation of temporal categories sometimes places emphasis on the “here and now” aspect—as already illustrated in some of the examples above—which simultaneously signals the permanent value of the monument (or its message) in the future (cf., e.g., Sö 137 and Sö 138, as well as U 130). The present tense is often used to refer to permanent and timeless circumstances, as in the Galteland inscription, N 184: *Einn er Guð* ‘God is one’.

We also find the present tense in supplements describing the circumstances of a person’s death. To cite a few examples: in Sö 131, discussed above, the commemorated person is said to lie in Serkland (ā Særklandi liggR sünk Øyvindar); the Spånga inscription (Sö 164) explains that the deceased lies inhumed in the west (liggR vestarla of hulinn?); the Valleberga inscription (DR 337) commemorates two men who lie in London (æn þer liggia i Lundunum); and the Schleswig inscription (DR 6) is made in memory of a man who rests at Skia in England (A Ænglandi i Skiu hwilis). The use of the present tense projects the speaker’s perspective over to a distant setting—where the commemorated persons died and lie buried now and for ever. With the help of the commemorative inscription on a runestone raised at home the physical distance is overcome—indeinitely.
Other examples of alternation between different temporal horizons may be noted. In the now missing Stäket inscription (U 605†), the self-honouring formula probably used the past tense, whereas the supplement referred to the woman’s intention to travel east to Jerusalem (hon vill austr fara ok үt til lәrsala). The Österberga inscription (Sö 159) is set up by two men after their father, who is said to have been in the west for a long time (Hann vestr hafr of vaRit længi). The last statement does not make the fact of death explicit but since it says that the man has been away for a considerable amount of time, we can deduce that he is now most likely considered dead (cf. U 344 and U 343†). On the other hand, the phrase ‘he sits in Garðar’ (sitr Garðum) in the Gårdby inscription (Ol 28) does not imply the person’s death; the inscription simply seems to focus on the fact that he is not present.

Typical examples of prospective utterances are the frequent Christian prayers for the soul of the deceased (of the type Guð hialpi sālu/and hans ‘God help his soul/spirit’) and appeals to the potential viewers of the monument to read/interpret the inscription/the runes (cf., e.g., Ol 28). These and similar statements introduce a broader temporal and spatial dimension into the runic texts, expressing expectations that reach from the moment of the inscription’s production into an unlimited future.

We conclude this exemplification of deictic features with a few short comments on the use of personal pronouns. Runic inscriptions function mostly as third-person mini-narratives. Normally the textual context allows us to understand who the inscription refers to through the use of third-person pronouns, although the reference is not always clear. Occasionally we find first- or second-person pronouns. A good example is provided by the runestone from Gåsinge church (Sö 14) that tells of travels in the west. The monument is set up by a woman and her two daughters after their husband/father. The inscription consists of the memorial formula, a prayer and a supplement about the deceased. In that last part of the inscription the first-person form is used: Væit iak, þæt vaR Svәi[R]n vestr með Gauti/ Knúti ‘I know that Svәi[R]n was in the west with Gauti/Knutr’. Who is this ‘I’ who claims that he/she knows that the man was in the west? Is this the voice of one of the commissioners, the carver, or perhaps the memorial itself—which thus participates in a symbolic conversation with its potential viewers? In support of regarding this ‘I’ as a reference to the carver, one could cite the carver formula in the Varpsund inscription (U 654; commemorating a man who was killed in the east with Ingvarr), where the first-person pronoun is used: AlrikR(?) rәist-ek rʊnaR ‘Alrik, I carved the runes’. Nevertheless, the ‘I’ we meet in Sö 14 may in fact represent an abstract voice, perhaps that of the tradition that speaks through the runic monument.
As noted earlier, in order to understand the meaning of deictic references, we have to relate them to their extra-linguistic context. With runic inscriptions this is not at all an easy task, indeed it may be impossible. Important bits of information often remain hidden, which makes the inscription appear unanchored, despite the fact that it may contain specific references. Consider for example the inscription from Dalum churchyard (Vg 197): Tōki ok þæiR brôðr ræistu stæin þennsi æftiR brôðr sīn. Er varð dauðr vestr, en annarr austr “Toki and his brothers raised this stone after their brothers. He died in the west, but another in the east’. We learn that a man and his brothers have raised the stone in memory of their brothers, and that one died in the west, and the other in the east. However, the names of the dead brothers are not given, nor are we told who died in the west and who in the east — or, for that matter, even where that “west” or “east” was.

Conclusions

Although runic commemorative inscriptions predominantly follow the principles of retrospective mini-narrative in the third person, the deictic expressions used and various features of layout show that they are tied in a unique manner to what could be called their original moment of utterance, fixed in the horizon of the people who once commissioned and produced the monuments. Thanks to the durability of stone these bygone moments of utterance can still be experienced at first hand, and they have at the same time taken on an image of monumentality and permanence. Seen in this light the mode of expression of runic commemorative inscription could even be called a kind of materialised and visualised speech.

The study of place- and time-deictic references draws attention to the interplay between the proximal and distal aspects of the language of commemorative runestones. It can further be argued that as a result of their immediate gestural function, proximal deictic features create an image of orality in the mode of expression applied on runestones; there emerges a kind of encounter between the original commissioners of the memorial and the potential audience (more about this in Zilmer 2010). In the case of voyage stones under study here we observe the interaction between the perspectives of ‘here and now’ and the ‘there and then’. Something that is physically distant may in fact be presented as (psychologically) close, or vice versa — this accords with the overall commemorative purpose of the stones. The differences of being ‘away’ as opposed to staying at home are also well marked.

The analysis of deictic features in voyage runestones is but one way to
show that, despite their seemingly uniform textual composition, commemorative inscriptions exhibit a number of individual features that should be taken into consideration. The insertion of deictic markers is one obvious linguistic strategy for creating variation in the structure and content of the inscriptions and focusing on various topics. Furthermore, in terms of their extended extra-linguistic nature, the deictic markers also point at different levels of contextuality around runestones. For one, the study of runic textuality can benefit from the analysis of the design of the inscription on the monument; the placement of particular pieces of information on the stone can carry visual significance even when it is not intentional and simply results from the applied schemes of layout. In addition, the physical features of the monument and the communicative setting around it must also be taken into account as far as possible. The text itself is merely one part of the visual, physical and communicative whole. Indeed, the manner in which the components of the inscription are arranged on the stone or the stone placed in a particular setting also carries an extended deictic meaning. We are dealing here with a gestural function of the inscription/monument—the inclusion of a particular content element, or the setting of the stone, draws attention to something in a direct and visual manner.

I believe that further study of different types of deictic reference in the whole corpus of runestone inscriptions may cast light on the significant role of variation in the language of commemorative runestones. Deictic references reveal one way of how to vary the applied formulations, and at the same time they anchor the runic monuments in particular settings. To be able to approach these settings it is necessary to acknowledge and appreciate the many individual features of the inscriptions—which may be found in their textuality, layout patterns and the environment in which many of them still stand.

Bibliography


Arne, Ture Algot J. 1947. “‘Austr i Karusm’ och Särklandsnamnet.” *Fornvännen* 42, 290–305.

DR + number = inscription published in *Danmarks runeindskrifter*, i.e. *DR*.

*DR* = *Danmarks runeindskrifter*. 3 vols.: *Text; Atlas; Registre*. By Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke. København 1941–42.


G + number = inscription published in *Gotlands runinskrifter*, i.e. *SRI*, 11–12.


Sö + number = inscription published in Södermanlands runinskrifter, i.e. SRI, 3.

U + number = inscription published in Upplands runinskrifter, i.e. SRI, 6–9.
Vs + number = inscription published in Västmanlands runinskrifter, i.e. SRI, 13.
Vg + number = inscription published in Västergötlands runinskrifter, i.e. SRI, 5.


Ög + number = inscription published in Östergötlands runinskrifter, i.e. SRI, 2.
Öl + number = inscription published in Ölands runinskrifter, i.e. SRI, 1.