Edmund Crosby Quiggin (1875-1920) was the first teacher of Celtic in the University of Cambridge, as well as being a Germanist. His extraordinarily comprehensive vision of Celtic studies offered an integrated approach to the subject; his combination of philological, literary, and historical approaches paralleled those which his older contemporary, H.M. Chadwick, had already demonstrated in his studies of Anglo-Saxon England and which the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic continues to seek to emulate. The Department has wished to commemorate Dr Quiggin's contribution by establishing in his name, and with the support of his family, an annual lecture and a series of pamphlets. The focus initially was on the sources for Mediaeval Gaelic History. Since 2006 the Quiggin Memorial Lecture is on any aspect of Celtic and/or Germanic textual culture taught in the Department.

Rune-stone Inscriptions and Queer Theory

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E. C. QUIGGIN MEMORIAL LECTURES 10

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Rune-stone Inscriptions and Queer Theory

DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Rune-stone Inscriptions and Queer Theory

HENRIK WILLIAMS

If Viking-Age Scandinavia is well known for anything these days, it would probably be for the two major contributions to world literature by the Icelanders: the Sagas and The Poetic Edda, both professedly dealing with Viking-Age matters. At least the sagas are still read, more than eight hundred years after they were first authored, and the study of Old Norse is still intense in many countries outside Scandinavia. If ancient Iceland is still popular, the same cannot be said for the rest of Viking-Age Scandinavia. And some would say: 'Why should it be? There is nothing there to compare with the Icelandic texts, except some short and seemingly uninteresting rune-stone inscriptions.' But others would say 'Runes? Aren't they popular these days?' And I would answer, 'Yes, but not the genuine kind.' The search term *runes* on the Internet gets more than 5.2 million results, the vast majority of which deal with the would-be magical properties of the runes. The same is true for books, with very few telling you what runes in fact are and what runic inscriptions actually say.

This lecture has a two-fold aim. The first is to give you a very brief introduction to runes in Viking times and to explain why runic inscriptions are important to our understanding of the society of the time. The other aim is to demonstrate why it is vital that we leave no clues unexplored in our quest for a deeper understanding of what Viking-Age people were like, and what they cared about. Let us first briefly define our setting in temporal and geographical terms. The time is the period between ca. 800 and 1150, which we usually refer to as the Viking and Missionary periods of the early Middle Ages. And the place is Continental Scandinavia, today's Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. We know of almost 3,000 Scandinavian runic inscriptions from the Viking Age. In the most recent inventory of the Scandinavian runic-text database at Uppsala University,[1] these inscriptions are distributed in the following manner

[1] See: www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm.

within the borders of present-day countries: Sweden – 2,270; Denmark – 400; Norway – 138; The Faroes – two; Great Britain and Ireland – seventy-six.

Runes are thus unevenly distributed within northern Europe. To honour E. C. Quiggin I shall start in Ireland, but its total of sixteen runic inscriptions is not that impressive and eleven of the sixteen are found in Dublin. In Britain the numbers are higher and the impact greater. Of the 124 British inscriptions (including post-Viking-Age inscriptions) sixteen are found in England, thirty-four on the Isle of Man, fifteen in Scotland, seven in Shetland and no less than fifty-three in the Orkneys.

As an example we might take the early eleventh-century London runestone from St Paul's Cathedral (now in the Museum of London). It is a limestone slab originally 72 cm high, 57 cm wide and 10 cm thick and has traces of original blue and red colouring. Its text reads as follows (in transliterated runes, rendered into Old Norse, and translated into English):[2]

: k-na : let : legia : stin : þensi : auk : tuki :

G[i]na(?) *lét leggja stein þenna ok Tóki*

'Gína(?) had this stone laid down together with Tóki.'[3]

In England there are sixty to sixty-five epigraphic inscriptions using Old English runes dated to before the tenth century.[4] I will not discuss these runic inscriptions further since they fall outside my inquiry in this context.

I will instead turn to the obvious runic hot spot, Scandinavia, and focus on the Viking and Missionary periods. In Norway there are no concentrations to speak of; runestones occur throughout inhabited areas. In Denmark there are centres in north-eastern Jutland and Southern Scania (Skåne in today's Sweden), as well as on the island of Bornholm. On Modern Swedish soil the majority of memorials were erected in the Mälar provinces (and most of those between Stockholm and Uppsala), although Östergötland, Västergötland, Småland, Öland and Gotland also provide evidence of about a hundred or more stones each.

[2] Transliterations throughout this lecture follow the source cited with the Old Norse versions and English translations adapted by the author.

[3] Michael P. Barnes and R. I. Page, *The Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of Britain*, Runrön: Runologiska bidrag utgivna av Institutionen för nordiska språk vid Uppsala universitet 19 (Uppsala, 2006), pp. 285-288; compare Henrik Williams, 'Till tolkningen av personnamnet **kina**', in *Blandade runstudier* 3 (Uppsala, 2004), pp. 77-86. See also Henrik Williams, Review of Barnes and Page, *The Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of Britain*, *Namn och bygd* 95 (2007), 115-118.

[4] David N. Parsons, *Recasting the Runes. The Reform of the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc*, Runrön: Runologiska bidrag utgivna av Institutionen för nordiska språk vid Uppsala universitet 14 (Uppsala, 1999), p. 79.

This, then, is the extent of monumental writing in mainland Scandinavia a thousand years ago. But we must add runic inscriptions on more perishable materials such as wood and bone, which must have vastly outnumbered the mighty runestones. And artifacts of metal must also have been common at one point, even if not many are preserved today. Even so, contact with written texts must have been quite rare compared with today. A very select group of people would have had contact with Roman letters, nothing like the degree of familiarity evidenced by the wealth of manuscripts in both Latin and the vernacular in contemporary England and Ireland. I remember being shown a stunning manuscript in the Corpus Christi Library by Professor Ray Page a decade ago. I was almost shocked by the realization that this exquisite example of advanced book culture was contemporaneous with the runestones I was so fond of. The demands of literacy must have been vastly different for a Welsh monk sitting in his library, bent over some vellum tome for hours pondering its theological intricacies, compared with a Swedish matron and her company encountering a runestone by the road on their way to the trading post, resting by the memorial for a short while, trying collectively to make out is meaning while cleaning off the moss and lichen growing on its surface.

Let us hold this picture in our minds while contemplating what constitutes a typical Viking-Age runestone from the heartland of central Sweden. The one I have chosen as an example stands at Vik in the district of Vallentuna north of Stockholm (see Illustration 1, page 16) and its inscription reads:[5]

giulakr lit raisa stain eftiR sun ı sin ı ingifast ı auk ı inguaR ı (u)(k) ı at ı broþur ı sin ı in ı ybiR [ri]sti ı runa

Kjallakr(?) *lét reisa stein eptir son sinn Ingifast, ok Ingvarr ok*(?) *at bróður sinn, en Œpir risti rúnar.*

'Kjallakr had the stone raised in memory of his son Ingifastr; and Ingvarr also, in memory of his brother. And Œpir carved the runes.'[6]

The stone has a Christian cross on it, a dragon with ears and feet and the usual interwoven pattern of a dragon body bearing the text band along with minor, reptilian ribbons (see Illustration 1). I will take the Vik stone as my point of departure for a short introduction to runology.

[5] U 287; see Elias Wessén and Sven B. F. Jansson, *Upplands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* 1:1 (Stockholm, 1940-1943), pp. 464-466.

[6] It is a point of incidental interest that the name of the father, 'Kjallakr', might be borrowed from Old Irish *Cellach*.

This is just a brief text, yet it is of average length for a runestone. It contains two of the most common formulas encountered on these monuments. The first, the memorial formula, seems to be mandatory, or virtually so, and reminds us of the ogham inscriptions of the Celts. The memorial formula follows a set pattern. First, the name or names of whoever commissioned the inscription are mentioned. Then the verb and the object follow, the latter usually being the word 'stone', for obvious reasons. Following that, the name of the deceased person and their relationship to the person initially mentioned is provided. At the end a prayer may be found – an obituary honoring the deceased or some mention of the circumstances of death –before the final element, a signature.

Most stones only carry the memorial formula, which proves that this was not only the necessary, but also the sufficient content of a runic text. If you managed to include that, you had accomplished the main mission of runestone raising. Therefore the contents of the memorial formula must be of imperative significance. Let us ponder this for a moment. Why was it so important to convey the simple message that so-and-so had raised a stone after so-and-so, and their relationship to one another? We know that reckoning kinship is a primary function in many societies. Stefan Brink has amply demonstrated the nature of horizontal communication in societies that are primarily oral: the need for seemingly endless repetition of who is related to whom and how.[7]

But even though runestones exist in an almost entirely oral culture, they themselves are exponents of early literacy and are in fact better compared to modern-day obituary notices, very common in Swedish daily papers. These (Sw. *dödsannonser*) share many common traits with the Vikings' memorial monuments. As an example I have constructed a hypothetical obituary notice in English, based on a genuine Swedish notice from 2007 (see Figure 1).

Here we find a frame delimiting and enclosing the message, presumably with a similar purpose to that of a runic animal. Within the frame we have at the top a symbol, just as there is a cross on the runestone. In the actual text we find: 1) the relationship of the deceased to the survivors, 2) her name, 3) the dates of her birth and death, 4) a euphemism for her demise 'has *left us* in inexpressible sorrow', 5) the names of the survivors in descending order of importance and in such a way that we understand their relationship, 6) a poem about the deceased, and 7) circumstances of the burial ceremonies. With the exception of the dates, all the other elements may be found on a Viking-Age

[7] Compare Stefan Brink, 'Den förkristna muntliga kulturen i Norden. Till frågan om det kollektiva minnet', *Saga och Sed* 2003, 71-81.

runestone, the main difference being the order in which the information is presented. Back then, the name of the person who commissioned the runestone preceded that of the deceased, proving that this is a monument that deeply involves the status of the survivor. The fact that some runestones are actually raised by people for themselves, while still alive, proves that this is a textual genre emphasizing the monumental even more than the memorial.

†

My beloved Wife
Our beloved Stepmother

Jane Doe

* July 20, 1934
† November 30, 2007

has left us in inexpressible sorrow

JOHN
ANN WILLIAM MARY
with families,
relatives and many friends

You leave us
but are not gone.
in our thoughts
you still live.

The funeral will take place at S:t Paul's,
Friday December 10, 1pm.
Please remember The Cancer Fund,
Tel. 123-456789.

Figure 1. Hypothetical obituary notice.

On the Vik stone described above there was also a signature, in this case that of Œpir, the most productive of all the professional rune carvers. He probably made as many as a hundred of the Swedish runestones, although for some reason he did not sign them all. It is not by chance we find a sample of his work in the region between Uppsala and Stockholm, since this is the area most densely crowded with runestones, as I pointed out earlier. This means that the inhabitants of Uppland were far more likely than anyone else to encounter a public monument of this kind. Their literacy should therefore be the highest of all contemporary Scandinavians.

At this point, I leave off the introduction, hoping that it has not been too basic. I turn now to the question of literacy, a hotly debated topic during recent decades (66 million hits on an internet search). And this is an area in which runologists may contribute, and have indeed contributed a lot. There are few historic cultures in the world which present the same almost laboratory-like set-up for the study of orality and literacy as Viking-Age Scandinavia, when there was a virtually oral society, yet texts were produced using a home-grown and peculiar writing system evidencing little influence from other writing systems. And this situation lasted for centuries! I should point out that it is not a question of complete isolation from other languages or scripts; the Scandinavians just seemed content to restrict themselves severely in matters of literacy. This, of course, makes whatever they *did* write all the more important. All brands of historians depend on runic inscriptions as the only primary sources available for the period, and this emphasizes the significance of the runestone evidence. But to linguists and philologists the value of runestones is found in their very existence: vernacular texts with indigenous letters, apparently without any standardized spelling system or formalized schooling supporting their production. What may we not discover about genuine language usage when studying these texts?

I will concentrate in this lecture on a small group of inscriptions that have been to some extent overlooked by previous runologists, a group of what we might call 'substandard' inscriptions. This group is not very easy to define, and furthermore, it is made up of smaller subgroups, the most important of which consists of nonsense inscriptions. These are runic texts that we have simply been unable to interpret and that are now assumed to be impossible to decode.

Let us choose one example from Hjälsta, also in Uppland.[8] It seems to be a fairly regular runestone, but the impression changes when the inscription is read:

fas(t)...(R) + þuliak × oaRtþioi × atiurai × fasatiR + þaloi + oaRfsai

If anyone recognizes the language please let me know. There has been an attempt to identify the language of a Danish runestone inscription as an exotic

[8] U 811; Elias Wessén and Sven B. F. Jansson, *Upplands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* 3:1 (Stockholm 1949-51), pp. 419-421.

one, namely Basque,[9] but such a hypothesis disregards complications like communication purposes and audience. There has also been an attempt to interpret the Hjälsta inscription in the conventional language of Swedish runestones,[10] but this leaves us without any credible names, the most important prerequisite for a runic text. If you cannot understand by whom the stone was commissioned or for whom, the inscription does not fulfill one of its most basic purposes, that is, to communicate the linguistic elements with the highest functional load. The number of nonsense texts is not large, less than 4% in Uppland, even if we include only partially interpretable inscriptions. This low number should indicate a fairly high degree of literacy, at least in this province. That even nonsense inscriptions were produced again suggests that the monumental function sometimes outweighed the memorial function.

Not all remaining runestones are considered properly part of the corpus, at least not by the editors of the national corpora. Take the Salmunge stone for example, published in 1946 by the eminent philologist Elias Wessén.[11] He is able to make out the following:

> **· iubrn : uk × ini : riti × iþrn : iftiR + iRbrn : faþur : isin : þuliR · iuk · runar × þisi × isikuþ +**
>
> *Jóbjǫrn ok ... réttu ... eptir* [*G*]*eirbjǫrn*(?), *fǫður sinn. ... hjó rúnar þessa ... Guð ...*
>
> 'Jóbjǫrn and ... erected ... in memory of Geirbjǫrn(?), their father. ... cut these runes ... God ...'

He writes about the inscription as follows (my translation):

> The carving contains an odd mixture of normal word forms and runic sequences hard to interpret. One can recognize several words which are usual in inscriptions [...]. [...] **kuþ** [*God*] is, no doubt, taken from the prayer formula, which is common in inscriptions [...]. There has not been room for anything more within the text band. It is thus obvious that the carver has composed his inscription according to a standard pattern. He knows well the shape of the runes and masters the carving technique. He carves evenly and confidently. But the inscription also contains bewildering errors. And it is

[9] Stig Eliasson, '"The letters make no sense at all ....": språklig struktur i en "obegriplig" dansk runinskrift?', in *Nya perspektiv inom nordisk språkhistoria. Föredrag hållna vid ett symposium i Uppsala 20–22 januari 2006*, ed. Lennart Elmevik (Uppsala, 2007), pp. 45-80.

[10] Gösta Holm, 'En runsvensk afatiker?', in *Afmæliskveðja til Halldórs Halldórssonar 13. júlí 1981*, ed. Guðrún Kvaran, Gunnlaugur Ingólfsson and Svavar Sigmundsson (Reykjavík 1981), pp. 106-109.

[11] Elias Wessén and Sven B. F. Jansson, *Upplands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* 2:1 (Stockholm 1943-46), pp. 379-385.

> difficult to decide whether it represents a true memorial inscription with interpretable meaning or perhaps only an attempt to try to create a decorative memorial of the traditional type, ornamented with runes. [...] One asks oneself if he has followed a model which he could only figure out partly, that is, if he has only been knowledgeable in runes but not literate. When the model deserted him, he filled in some runes of his own choice. In the same way one could understand a couple of other peculiarities in the inscription. [...] When there was no more space it was irrevocably finished. The carver has consequently not cared much about the inscription giving any linguistic sense. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the names are difficult or even impossible to interpret.[12]

Later runologists have been little kinder to the Salmunge carver, and why should they, considering the standing of Elias Wessén. Claiborne Thompson in an article on nonsense inscriptions counts the carver of the Salmunge stone among inferior 'spellers'[13] and Jan Meijer includes the inscription among those executed by carvers listed as 'poor spellers and reasonable semi-literates',[14] even if he generously considers including it among inscriptions executed by carvers 'whose literacy is more dubious'.[15] He continues: 'Though Wessén's comment seems to point towards a real illiterate, I think one or two things may be said in favour of the runographer as a poor speller or a semi-illiterate.'[16]

Elias Wessén is also dissatisfied with the ornamentation on the runestone since it is without precedent and deviates from what is usual in this part of Uppland.[17] Even though Wessén cannot point to any real ornamental

[12] Wessén and Jansson, *Upplands runinskrifter*, pp. 381-82: 'Ristningen innehåller en egendomlig blandning av normala ordformer och svårtolkade runföljder. Man igenkänner flera ord, som äro vanliga i inskrifter [...]. [...] **kuþ** är utan tvivel hämtat från den böneformel, som avslutar många inskrifter [...]. Mera har icke funnits plats för inom slingan. Det är sålunda tydligt, att ristaren har format sin inskrift efter sedvanligt mönster. Han känner väl till runornas former och behärskar ristningstekniken. Han hugger jämnt och säkert. Men inskriften innehåller också förbryllande fel. Och det är svårt att avgöra, huruvida den utgör en verklig minnesinskrift med tolkbar mening eller kanske endast ett försök att skapa ett dekorativt minnesmärke av traditionell typ, prytt med runor. [...] Man frågar sig, om han har följt en schablon, som han endast delvis kunnat tyda, m.a.o. om han har varit endast runkunnig men icke skrivkunnig. Då schablonen lämnade honom i sticket, har han fyllt ut med några runor efter fritt val. På samma sätt skulle man kunna förstå ett par andra egenheter i inskriften. [...] Då platsen var slut, blev det oåterkalleligen slut. Ristaren har följaktligen ej bekymrat sig mycket om att inskriften skulle ge språklig mening. Det är under sådana förhållanden ej ägnat att förvåna, att namnen är svåra eller omöjliga att tolka.'

[13] Claiborne Thompson, 'Nonsense inscriptions in Swedish Uppland', in *Studies for Einar Haugen Presented by his Friends and Colleagues*, ed. E. S. Firchow *et al.* (The Hague–Paris, 1972), pp. 522-34, at p. 523.

[14] Jan Meijer, 'Literacy in the Viking Age', in *Blandade runstudier* 2 (Uppsala, 1997), pp. 83-110, at p. 97.

[15] Meijer, 'Literacy', p. 98.

[16] Meijer, 'Literacy', p. 98.

[17] Wessén and Jansson, *Upplands runinskrifter*, p. 382.

abnormalities, his description concludes with a harsh judgment: 'There are, to be true, no reasons to surmise that the stone might emanate from recent times. But the peculiarities of the inscription find a natural explanation in that the carver was not an experienced master and in that his mission was not to execute a memorial in the usual sense.'[18]

There are some significant vocabulary choices in Wessén's description of the Salmunge stone. He speaks of its carver as 'only knowledgeable in runes but not literate', but at best this may only be a partial truth since even Wessén was able to interpret eleven of the fifteen words. And he understands that two of the remaining words represent names; he just does not know which ones. Wessén also claims that the carver's 'mission was not to execute a memorial in the usual sense'. By this I suppose he means that the Salmunge stone should be included among the nonsense inscriptions. I think this is a bit unfair considering that most of the inscription is, as we have seen, intelligble. But it is quite clear that Wessén never gives this runestone a fair chance of being included among the certified monuments, and another little quote from him gives us a clue as to why this is: the ornamentation 'is without precedent and deviates from what is usual in this part of Uppland'. The operative word here is *deviates* (Swe. 'avviker'). This is obviously what has awoken Wessén's irritation.

Let me start by pointing out that the Salmunge stone can quite easily be fully interpreted, if one tries a bit harder than Wessén did. All of the names may be convincingly interpreted, which I propose to demonstrate in a future work. And the interesting thing is that even George Stephens was able to make out the closing prayer[19] even though he did not know of its existence in other runic inscriptions in Scandinavia (texts which were available to Wessén, had he bothered to check). In fact, the entire text on the Salmunge stone may now be read:

> 'Jóbjǫrn and Enni erected the stone in memory of Eir-Bjǫrn, their father.
> Þulir cut these runes. May God see (him).'

[18] Wessén and Jansson, *Upplands runinskrifter*, p. 383: 'Det finns visserligen icke några skäl att antaga, att stenen skulle härröra från senare tid. Men inskriftens egendomligheter finna en naturlig förklaring i att ristaren av allt att döma icke varit någon erfaren mästare och att hans uppgift kanske inte varit att utföra en minnesvård i vanlig mening.'

[19] George Stephens, *The Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England, Now First Collected and Deciphered* 2 (London and Copenhagen, 1867–1868), p. 776.

The Salmunge stone is thus quite easily interpreted as a regular Viking-Age runic monument, and I presume that the same was true for contemporary readers. All that you need is a bit of positive attitude toward all runestones. Their number, their concentration, their location, their nature, their size, and the scope of their inscriptions all indicate that they were meant to be seen and presumably read by all who were literate in runes.

Why did Wessén fail? The answer is prejudice: the Salmunge stone does not conform to his expectations; it 'deviates'. Fortunately, there is now a theory dedicated to studying the 'deviating': so-called Queer Theory. It was originally applied to gender patterns and sexual behavior, conventionally perceived to be so deviant that they were given no place within prevailing definitions. But borders are constantly changing, and what was once considered by most as existing outside the established norms of society, and hence to be non-existent, is later often gradually integrated, as this short explanation of the theory describes:

> Queer theory emerges from gay/lesbian studies' attention to the social construction of categories of normative and deviant sexual behavior. But while gay/lesbian studies, as the name implies, focused largely on questions of homosexuality, queer theory expands its realm of investigation. *Queer theory* looks at, and *studies*, and has a political critique of, *anything that falls into normative and deviant categories*, particularly sexual activities and identities. The word 'queer', as it appears in the dictionary, has a primary meaning of 'odd', 'peculiar', 'out of the ordinary'. *Queer theory concerns itself* with any and all forms of sexuality that are 'queer' in this sense – and then, *by extension, with the normative behaviors and identities which define what is 'queer' (by being their binary opposites). Thus queer theory expands the scope of its analysis to all kinds of behaviors*, including those which are gender-bending as well as those which involve 'queer' non-normative forms of sexuality. Queer theory insists that all sexual behaviors, all concepts linking sexual behaviors to sexual identities, and all categories of normative and deviant sexualities, are social constructs, sets of signifiers which create certain types of social meaning. Queer theory follows feminist theory and gay/lesbian studies in rejecting the idea that sexuality is an essentialist category, something determined by biology or judged by eternal standards of morality and truth. For queer theorists, sexuality is a complex array of social codes and forces, forms of individual activity and institutional power, which interact to shape the ideas of what is normative and what is deviant at any particular moment, and which then operate under the rubric of what is 'natural', 'essential', 'biological', or 'god-given'.[20]

Queer theory has lately been applied to all phenomena which have been defined as deviant, and the theory is also a critique of the conceptual distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal'. But in this case, my intention is not to 'queer' the Salmunge stone and others like it, but rather to look at the reaction of traditional runologists towards that which they consider deviant. I am interested in what this may contribute to our understanding of the discipline itself and how we may learn more about each and every Viking-Age runestone. The scarcity of the texts makes this imperative. But I would also like to stress the creativity of this approach and its methodological advantages. Instead of excluding a number of runic inscriptions, leaving them in a sort of limbo, all runestone texts are incorporated in one and the same framework, in this case one that recognizes gradients of literacy. From the wonderful Vik stone to the unintelligible stone from Hjälsta, there is a sliding scale from perfect literacy to complete nonsense.

To test this method further I wish to apply it to what may possibly be the world's ugliest runestone at a small farm called Väringe in the province of Södermanland, south-west of Stockholm (see Illustration 2, page 17).[21] No wonder it has received virtually no attention throughout the years. Erik Brate who published the inscription back in the 1930s was able to make out the following text:[22]

× aiti × ris × isn : a=þis iR a=ta isbiun × hiu

... reisti ... ... eptir .... Ásbjǫrn hjó.

'... raised ... ... in memory of .... Ásbjǫrn cut.'

Elias Wessén wrote in a supplement to Brate's contribution: 'Not a real runestone; the inscription makes no linguistic sense. No doubt a copy of a runestone [...], made by a person not knowledgable in runes. Many of the runic characters are malformed in a way that you never find on proper rune-

[20] See Mary Klages: www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/queertheory.html (accessed Jan. 12, 2005 [italics added]).
[21] Sö 133. Erik Brate and Elias Wessén, *Södermanlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* 1 (Stockholm 1924-1936), p. 100.
[22] Brate and Wessén, *Södermanlands runinskrifter*, p. 100.

stones.'[23] In spite of the brevity of Wessén's comments they give rise to a number of questions. How do you define a 'proper' or 'real' runestone? What are the limits of this category and in exactly what way does the Väringe stone fail to qualify as a member? Is 'linguistic sense' an absolute concept, that is, must an inscription be completely intelligible for it to be considered having linguistic sense, or does Wessén believe that this monument lacks such meaning entirely? What does it mean to be 'not knowledgable in runes': not being able to read and write runic characters of standard shape and texts according to established models?

As with the other cases I have looked at, later runologists have agreed with Elias Wessén's judgement. Mindy MacLeod, for example, writes 'it is far more reasonable to regard the text as the work of an illiterate carver seeking to emulate runic letters or words', and further, 'the stone is probably best regarded as an unsuccessful copy of a runic inscription with no discernable lexical message.'[24] There seems to be an almost total consensus that this runestone is not genuine and that it cannot contribute even slightly to our understanding of Viking-Age language and society. To address this problem we cannot rely solely on linguistics in a restricted sense. Runology is in my view runic philology, and philology utilizes whatever means necessary to put a text in context and thus render it meaningful. In this case such an approach fits well with the new paradigm called New Philology, which is interested in all kinds of texts, no matter how imperfect they may seem.[25] But taking this deeper look means bringing in entirely new material.

In contrast to most other written documents, runestones are also at the same time archaeological remains, and as such they are listed in The National Heritage Board's registry of scheduled ancient archaeological monuments.[26] By consulting this registry it is immediately apparent that the Väringe stone (in this context referenced as Lid 37:1) is not isolated in the ancient landscape, but rather contained in an environment of numerous and interesting archaeological monuments. As the archaeologist Mats G. Larsson points out in his study of ancient settlements in Central Sweden, within a hundred feet of it

[23] 'Ingen riktig runsten; inskriften har ej språklig innebörd. Utan tvivel en av en icke runkunnig person gjord efterbildning av en runsten av samma typ som Sö 140. Flera runtyper är missbildade på ett sätt som man aldrig finner på verkliga runstenar.' Erik Brate and Elias Wessén, *Södermanlands runinskrifter*, p. 399.
[24] Mindy MacLeod, *Bind-runes. An Investigation of Ligatures in Runic Epigraphy* (Uppsala, 2002) p. 149.
[25] Compare M. J. Driscoll, 'The words on the page: Thoughts on philology, old and new': www.staff.hum.ku.dk/mjd/words.html (2007), pp. 3-6.
[26] See: www.fmis.raa.se/cocoon/fornsok/search.html?tab=3&objektid=10034500370001.

there is a burial ground from the late Iron Age,[27] exactly the setting one would expect for a Viking-Age runestone. It is fortunate that this very environment has been analyzed in considerable detail by Larsson. In the sixteenth century Väringe was a taxation unit subordinated to Stora Lundby, a big farm with several burial grounds, of which one is large and once contained a ship barrow and a monumental barrow, as well as one of the finest runestones of the province.[28] This stone is marked with a cross and carries a memorial inscription one hundred runes long, which ends with a poem for a man who died in Saracenia together with the Viking chieftain, Ingvar, famous from a score of other runestones and an Icelandic saga. Stora Lundby must, according to Larsson, 'still have had high status during the end of prehistoric time', namely, the Viking age.[29]

Väringe has been seen as an insignificant and fairly late partition from Stora Lundby. The name *Väringe* itself is recorded as late as the middle of the sixteenth century,[30] and is registered in 1575 as newly settled, according to Larsson,[31] who seems to consider the name to be a young one. If so, it would be a new name for an old settlement. The archaeological monuments prove instead that 'the oldest settlement around [the lake] is Väringe, judging from the number of archeological remains as well as types of graves'.[32] By the late Iron Age the other settlements north of the lake had been established,[33] and it is Stora Lundby which was partitioned from Väringe.[34] I conclude that the primary abode of the farm was moved at the same time from Väringe to Stora Lundby.

It is thus evident that Väringe is by no means a late, secondary and insignificant settlement where you might expect to find an inferior, or even a fake runestone. Instead, the farm was the nucleus of a small district and obviously very old. Even if the place-name *Väringe* is recorded late in official documents, it is not young but ancient. Typologically it is the oldest of all the

[27] Mats G. Larsson, *Från stormannagård till bondby. En studie av mellansvensk bebyggelseutveckling från äldre järnålder till medeltid*, (Lund, 1997), p. 137.
[28] Larsson, *Från stormannagård till bondby*, pp. 135-139.
[29] 'haft en hög status ännu under forntidens slutskede'; Larsson, *Från stormannagård till bondby*, p. 139.
[30] Kaj Janzon, *Byar, gårdar och jordägare i Rönö härad under medeltiden och fram till ca 1575. En rapport från Det medeltida Sverige* (Stockholm, 2001), p. 40.
[31] Larsson, *Från stormannagård till bondby*, p. 138.
[32] 'Den äldsta bebyggelsen runt Glottran förefaller av såväl fornlämningstal som gravtyper att döma vara Väringe'; Larsson, *Från stormannagård till bondby*, p. 138.
[33] Larsson, *Från stormannagård till bondby*, p. 139.
[34] Larsson, *Från stormannagård till bondby*, p. 138.

place-names north of the lake.[35] The primary importance of the place is therefore only further enhanced.

It seems we must return to the Väringe stone with a different attitude. Brate had been able to make out the memorial formula, which does, after all, occur in 99 % of the inscriptions and is therefore not unexpected. And if any later runologist had only bothered to check they would have found that the names in the inscription are quite easy to identify, too. The first one is *Etti* and the second *Atti*. Both these male names are known from other runestones.[36] The Väringe stone is thus genuine and fulfills the minimum requirements of communicative purpose. Even so, we must acknowledge that it must be at the lowest end of the literacy scale.

When Mindy MacLeod deals with the Väringe stone, she expresses her doubts that we will ever be able to tell what motivated a carver such as this to waste time and energy on creating seemingly unintelligible inscriptions.[37] Such a defeatist attitude will produce no constructive results. Firstly, we need to remember that not all carvers had the same qualifications, either in terms of training, talent or the materials available to them. Secondly, the very fact that quite a few carvers were willing to 'waste time and energy' indicates that they thought the effort worthwhile. The drive behind even nonsense inscriptions is actually not hard to guess at: the desire for manifest display. To choose a modern parallel: there is obviously a market for fake Rolex watches, even if they are inferior in function or do not work at all. If you want to be able to boast of the ownership of an object which may be mistaken by the ignorant for the genuine article, you must be willing to spend some money.

Two groups may be ready to settle for shoddy merchandise: people who cannot get hold of the real stuff and people in straitened circumstances. Since the Väringe stone is centrally placed, the first explanation does not hold. This is not a peripheral area where no proper rune carvers were available. But the other explanation might fit. If the Väringe stone has its origin among people in a poor socio-economic group, presumable also of low status, it would explain its substandard quality.

Larsson discusses why certain prehistoric settlements had higher status than others. The difference in size is not explanation enough. Instead he proposes that social status may be tied to the concept of *óðal*, 'a freehold; property held by udal, or allodial, right':

[35] Svante Strandberg, 'Väringe i Lid', *Saga och Sed* 2006, 155-60, at pp. 157-59.
[36] Lena Peterson, *Nordiskt runnamnlexikon*, 5th ed. (Uppsala, 2007), pp. 34 and 266, respectively.
[37] MacLeod, *Bind-runes*, p. 146.

> In early Scandinavian society [...] the standing of the individual in society, as well as his ownership of the land, was tied to the number of generations back in time that his ancestors had been able to claim a particular social status. The descendant of a liberated slave was thus according to the law of Frostating [...] completely free of the dependency relationship of his former owner only when he could count four free ancestors back in time and he himself was the fifth. And for land to be reckoned as *óðal* the law of Hulating [...] demanded that five generations of forefathers who had owned the land should be listed together with the sixth who possessed the land both as property and *óðal*.[38]

In the case of Stora Lundby a leading family makes its ownership manifest by means of a high quality runestone. At the time Väringe had assumed a secondary status as a settlement, but the farms were still intimately connected. It cannot be proven, but it is possible that Väringe or parts thereof were made available to someone who moved from Stora Lundby. In the passage quoted above, Larsson mentions the case of liberated slaves who remain in a state of dependency.

The Väringe stone fits well into this scenario. Everything points towards a lack of resources. The people mentioned in the inscription must have been poor and probably belonged to the lowest social stratum, whose members could not presume to raise a runestone. The names *Ætti* and *Atti* themselves actually indicate low status as does the inferior quality of the inscription and the rather small and poorly carved stone. The placement of the monument on the outlying land of the neighboring rich farm fits this hypothesis, of why and by whom it was raised, well. Here, we get an exciting early example of social climbing and the Väringe stone thus contributes to a nuanced picture of the meaning of runic monuments in Viking times. Not only owners of big properties and chieftains were involved in raising them; those who took their first steps as free men may also have.

[38] 'I det tidigmedeltida nordiska samhället [...] har såväl individens ställning i samhället som hans äganderätt till jord varit knuten till hur många generationer tillbaka i tiden hans förfäder har kunnat hävda en viss social ställning. En frigiven träls efterkommande blev således enligt Frostatingslagen (IX 10) helt fria från avhängighetsförhållande till den forne ägaren först efter att han kunde räkna upp fyra fria förfäder tillbaka i tiden och själv var den femte. Och för att jord skulle betraktas som *óðal* krävdes enligt Hulatingslagen (266) att fem generationer förfäder som hade ägt gården skulle uppräknas tillsammans med de sjätte, vilken innehade jorden som både egendom och odal.' Larsson, *Från stormannagård till bondby*, p. 178.

'The medium is the message' said mass media theorist Marshall McLuhan. Everyone desires to make manifest their own claim to a position in society. The most efficient medium in the Viking Age, and hence the strongest message, was a runestone.[39]

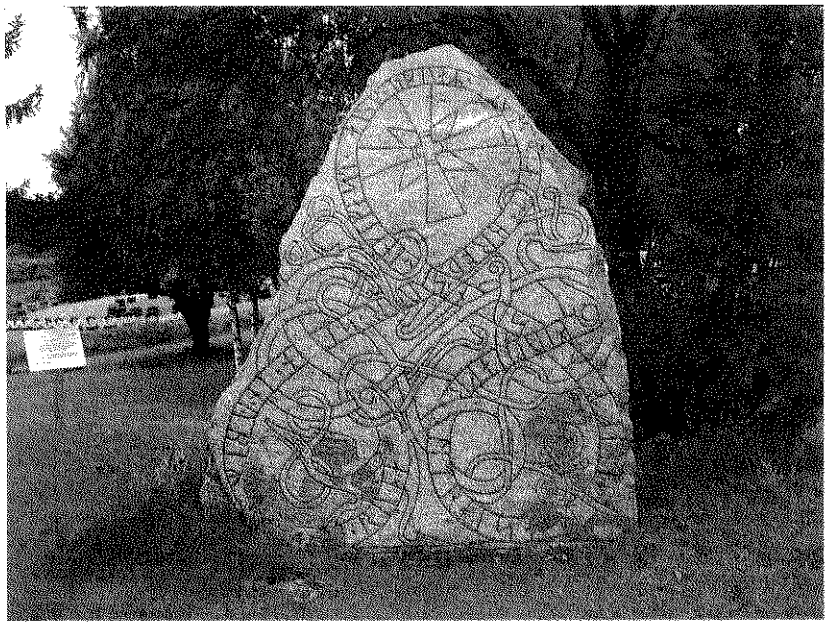

Illustration 1: The Vik runestone. Photograph by Magnus Källström, 2008.

[39] I wish to thank Dr. Judy Quinn and other faculty and staff members of the Department for the honour of being invited to give the Quiggin Memorial Lecture for 2007 and for the warm welcome and generous hospitality during my visit in Cambridge.

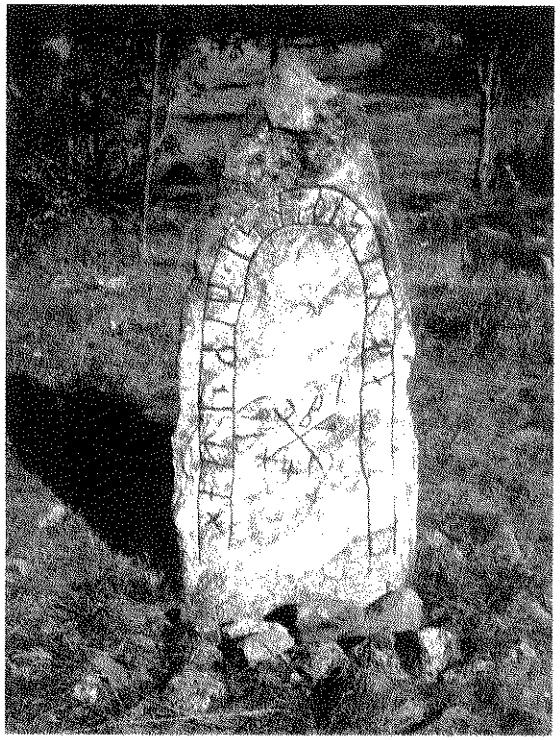

Illustration 2: The Väringe runestone. Photograph by Thorgunn Snædal, 1993.

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