
Rune Stones Create a Political Landscape

Towards a Methodology for the Application of Runology to Scandinavian Political History in the Late Viking Age: Part 1¹

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Introduction²

Runology, the study of the runic alphabets and inscriptions that were first used in the 2nd century CE, has flourished since its inception in early modern times, and shown development in both methodology and the analysis of runic material.³ The two pioneers of runology were a Dane, Ole Worm (1588–1655), and a Swede, Johan Bure (1568–1652), both of whom began to collect runic material in the 16th century.⁴ The 19th century witnessed great changes in the methodology for the interpretation of material across a vast range of sciences, and runology also took on new clothes at this time. The “new runology” of the 19th century was considered a part of the emerging field of historical linguistics, which the great German scholars like Jacob Grimm promoted eagerly.⁵ Consequently, interest in runology has, until recently, been restricted to the study of various linguistic problems: identifying the birth place of

1 This paper is Part 1 of a two-part article; Part 2 is forthcoming.

2 This article follows the numbering of the Danish runic inscriptions in the present standard edition: L. Jacobsen & E. Moltke, *Danmarks Indskrifter*. 2 vols. København 1941–42 (Later DR). Most of the newer inscriptions discovered after this edition was published can be seen in E. Moltke, *Runes and their origin. Denmark and elsewhere*. København 1985. Some of the most recent inscriptions are documented in a periodical, *Nytt om Runer*, published in Oslo every year.

3 My general information about the runes comes from the following books: K. Düwel, *Runenkunde*. 3 Aufl. Stuttgart 2001; J. Knirk, M. Stoklund & E. Svärdström, *Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, in: P. Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York 1993, pp. 545–55; H. Arntz, *Handbuch der Runenkunde*. 2 Aufl. Halle/Saale 1944.

4 A brief history of runology in the early modern era can be found in G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung: Geistesgeschichtliche Betrachtung der Auffassungen im 16.–18. Jahrhundert*. Berlin/Leipzig 1937.

5 Runes were used not only in Scandinavia proper, but also in Germania during the Roman age and the early Middle Ages. The earliest runes have been enthusiastically studied by German scholars since the 19th century. The standard edition of the elder *futhark* is: W. Krause & H. Jankuhn, *Die Runenschriften im älteren Futhark*. 2 Bde. Göttingen 1966.

runes and the reason for their emergence⁶; exploring the transition from the elder *futhark* of 24 letters to the younger one of 16 letters⁷; attempting a phonological reconstruction of the runes etc.⁸

The field of historical science, which also arose in the 19th century, paid little attention either to runic inscriptions as historical sources (with the exception of a few famous examples), or to runology as one of the indispensable tools for analyzing Scandinavian society of the period, at least until recently. Scholars have seemingly been blind to the possibility that the data provided by runic inscriptions, interpreted by runology, might contribute towards historical science.

In this article, then, I would like to offer a new methodology, designed to facilitate the historical analysis of rune stones and so contribute to our understanding of political history in late Viking Age Scandinavia. The chapters are as follows. 1. Rune stones as historical sources 2. General information about Danish rune stones 3. The process of making a rune stone.

1. Rune stones as historical sources

1.1. What is a rune stone?

Before beginning the methodological discussion proper, we need to touch upon what a rune stone actually is. A rune stone is a memorial object, comprising runic inscriptions formed on the surface of a stone. According to one recent theory, the custom of creating rune stones stemmed from the existence of late-Roman carved grave inscriptions in the area around the Rhine.⁹ One of the earliest rune stones is the Tune stone, which was discovered in Østfold, Norway; the inscription found on this stone seems to date back to the late 4th century, or around 400 CE.¹⁰ Other famous early

6 Since the time of Ole Worm, Danish scholars have claimed that Southern Denmark was the birthplace of runes (Moltke, *Runes and their origin*, pp. 38–73). However, there is a recent tendency to explain the emergence of the runes from the broader viewpoint of the relationship between the German tribes and the Romans in the Roman empire. See, for example, T. Looijenga, *Texts and Contexts of the Oldest Runic Inscriptions* (The Northern World 4). Leiden 2003.

7 A. Liestøl, The Viking runes: the transition from the older to the younger *Futhark*, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research* 20 (1981), pp. 247–66.

8 A good number of linguistic works are available to us. For example, A. Bammesberger & G. Waxenberger (hrsg.), *Das futhark und seine einzelsprachlichen Weiterentwicklungen. Akten der Tagung in Eichstätt vom 20. bis 24. Juli 2003* (Ergänzungsbände zum RGA 51). Berlin/New York 2006; E. A. Makaev, *The Language of the Oldest Runic Inscriptions: A Linguistic and Historical-philological Analysis*. Stockholm 1996; E. H. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions* (Sprachstrukturen A. 3). Tübingen 1975; W. Krause, *Die Sprache der urnordischen Runeninschriften*. Heidelberg 1971.

9 T. Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions*. Oslo 2005, p. 35.

10 An interesting interpretation of the Tune stone is that it is a legal text declaring an individual's inheritance rights; see Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes*, pp. 35–42. According to Spurkland, side A of the stone says that “I, WiwaR, in memory of WoduridaR the master of the household, made these runes”, while side B says that “I entrusted the stone to WoduridaR. Three daughters arranged the funeral feast, the dearest / most devoted / most divine of the heirs.”

examples are the Eggja stone, discovered in Sogne in Norway,¹¹ the Björketorp stones (still standing in Blekinge),¹² and the Rök stone in Östergötland, which is famous for having the longest and most complicated inscriptions of all the rune stones in Scandinavia.¹³

Why did the rune stones first emerge and become prevalent throughout Scandinavia? Because of our lack of knowledge of the circumstances in which the earliest rune stones were raised, the question is difficult to answer with any conviction. However, an important clue is offered by the contemporary historical context: the period when the rune stones began to emerge almost everywhere across the Scandinavian landscape, i.e., the 8th and 9th centuries, almost exactly coincides with the time when the Carolingian and British rulers both extended their own territories and broadened their power base, while the Scandinavians progressed out into the world beyond their homeland.¹⁴ The period from the end of the 8th century to the 9th century is characterized as the first Viking Age, a time which led to fundamental changes in both Scandinavian and European society.

The number of rune stones exploded around the year 1000: according to the catalogue by B. Sawyer, about 200 stones remain in Denmark, 50 in Norway and 2500 in Sweden, most of which were created in Uppland.¹⁵ The cause of this abrupt increase in the number of rune stones reflected the social changes taking place in Scandinavia. Needless to say, the period in which this type of rune stone was raised was at the zenith of Viking expeditions into the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. Can we suppose that there is no relationship between these two phenomena, namely, the act of raising rune stones and the embarking on expeditions into foreign lands by the Scandinavians?

Moreover, it is worth considering the most important characteristics of the rune stones of this time. Almost all of the stones raised around 1000 have formulaic inscriptions, i.e., “X raised the stone in memory of Y”. Where X would have been a sponsor who could afford to invest in making a rune stone, Y would have been someone deceased, who had had some familial or social connection with X. The simple fact that almost of all the rune stones had the same sorts of inscription would have made those who witnessed them at the time more respectful of their purpose.

11 Judging from the context of the Tune stone, archaeologists and art historians suggest that the date of raising the stone is as far back as 650–700, whereas historical linguists have insisted on a date around 900. Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes*, p. 70.

12 Looijenga, *Texts and Contexts*, pp. 177–79.

13 This stone dates back to the early 9th century. H. Katz, Rök stone inscription, in: Pulsiano, *Medieval Scandinavia*, pp. 558–59.

14 The best introduction to the history of the Scandinavians in England is by D. M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England. Settlement, Society and Culture*. Manchester 2006; For an international perspective, see B. Crawford, the Vikings, in: W. Davies (ed.), *From the Vikings to the Normans* (Short Oxford History of the British Isles). Oxford 2003, pp. 40–72. Compared with the significant number of works devoted to the “Scandinavian problem” in the British Isles, there is scope for many more studies of the interaction between the Scandinavians and the Continent. A good general survey is still J. L. Nelson, The Frankish Empire, in: P. Sawyer (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*. Oxford 1997, pp. 19–47.

15 B. Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stone: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia*. Oxford 2000.

1.2. Rune stones and history

In the introduction I made the bold claim that historical science has not paid proper attention to the runes, at least until recently. This is, perhaps, a slight exaggeration, because the disciplines of runology and historical science have influenced one another: some runologists have provided historians with helpful research data, and some historians have used the runic inscriptions in order to better understand the history of the late Viking Age.

Historians' interest in runic inscriptions has so far concentrated on the so-called "historical" runic inscriptions.¹⁶ These inscriptions testify to the names of persons who can be found in other written sources, such as those on the two Jelling stones in Denmark, one of which was raised by Gorm the Old (DR41) and the other by Harald Bluetooth (DR42), both of whom were kings of the Jelling dynasty in late 10th-century Denmark. In such cases the information given by the historical runic inscriptions can be very valuable, because the inscriptions sometimes include information about historical events that cannot be found in any other sources; regrettably, however, the information they provide is often limited to the merest essentials.

In addition to events associated with the individuals, the inscriptions sometimes contain expressions of social rank and epithets that accompany the personal names, all of which have provided historians with useful information about the social structure of late Viking Age Scandinavia. We will return to the problems associated with these expressions later. For now, the important thing to note is that the inscriptions help historians to identify individuals and associate them with historical events; this is made easier by the fact that the events that the deceased Vikings experienced in their lifetimes usually appear in several different inscriptions. The inscriptions themselves can be organized into distinct categories, thanks to detailed studies by historians.

For instance, we often encounter inscriptions that tell of expeditions launched by the Viking named in the inscription.¹⁷ Several stones say that the Danes preferred to go westwards, while the Swedes attempted to go eastwards, often only to die abroad and perhaps even be buried there, far from their homeland: one of the most famous such expeditions was the voyage of Ingvar the traveler.¹⁸ In addition, the rune stones

16 For general information about historical runic inscriptions, see E. Wessén, *Historiska runinskrifter*. Stockholm 1960; L. Jacobsen, Vikingetidens "historiske" danske Runcindskrifter: Bidrag til Sprøgsmålet om Runestenenes Tidsfæstelse, *Scandia* 5 (1932), s. 103–47.

17 See K. Zilmer, 'He drowned in Holmr's Sea—his cargo-ship drifted to the sea-bottom, only three came out alive'. *Records and Representations of Baltic Traffic in the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages in Early Nordic Sources*. Tartu 2005; J. Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse*. Woodbridge 2001; M. G. Larsson, *Runstenar och utlandsfärder. Aspekter på det senvikingtida samhället med utgångspunkt i de fasta fornlämningarna* (Acta Archaeologica Lundensia 18). Lund 1990.

18 Many studies have been devoted to the rune stones bearing the name of Ingvar, who can also be found in *The Saga of Yngvar the Traveler*, written at the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 14th century. See M. G. Larsson, *Ett ödesdigert vikingatåg: Ingvar den vinfarnes resa 1036–1041*. Stockholm 1990; J. Shepard, Yngvar's expedition to the East and a Russian inscribed stone cross, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research* 21 (1984–85), pp. 222–92.

have taught us that the Scandinavians often built bridges.¹⁹ It may seem unusual that the runic inscriptions would refer to something so seemingly mundane as bridge-building, but building bridges was a very important activity for the Scandinavians, because there were much larger areas of fenlands and waterways across Scandinavia than there are today.²⁰ By providing this sort of specific information, then, the inscriptions contribute to historians' overall understanding of this period of Scandinavian history.

Clearly, almost all of the studies that we have looked at in this chapter are text-centered works, confirming the fact that both historians and runologists have focused on interpreting the texts themselves, with their exact philological eyes fixed on the surface of the rune stones. This has yielded considerable rewards, but it is now time for a different methodological approach, one that sees beyond the textual surface of the rune stones.

1.3. From a textual to a contextual approach

Birgit Sawyer is a significant figure in the development of runology as a discipline, in part because she connected runology with historical studies to a much greater degree than had ever been attempted before. Her great insight was to focus upon the circumstances in which rune stones were raised, rather than on the text of the runic inscriptions, which is what had interested all preceding generations of scholars. Her most significant article, published in 1991, was entitled "Viking-Age Rune-stones as a Crisis Symptom", in which she argued that, in the late Viking Age, rune stones functioned not only as memorials of the dead, but also as physical representations of property inheritance.²¹ In this way she tried to explain why rune stones were raised, by linking their appearance to the changing society of Scandinavia. Clearly, the series of studies that she has published up to the present time adopt an historical rather than a linguistic approach, and her research has had the effect of shifting the methodological approach to rune stones from the textual to the contextual. It is this contextual approach to the study of rune stones in the late Viking Age that also informs this article.

Before we continue, however, one issue does need to be considered. Sawyer's argument seemingly treats Scandinavia as one historical space, and she analyzes the phenomenon of the raising of rune stones from a purely Scandinavian perspective. Of course, her strategy in choosing Scandinavia as a regional framework for analysis is

19 The most important studies of Viking bridge-building are by K. Zilmer, *Kristne runeinnskrifter i dynamisk sammenheng: tekstuelle utviklingslinjer og kulturhistorisk kontekst. En studie med utgangspunkt i broinnskrifter* (Nordistica Tartuensia 6). Tartu 2002 and B. Sawyer, Women as Bridge-builders: The Role of Women in Viking-Age Scandinavia, in: I. Wood & N. Lund (eds.), *People and Places in Northern Europe 500–1600*. Woodbridge 1991, pp. 211–24.

20 N. Hybel, *The Danish Resources c. 1000–1550: Growth and Recession*. Leiden 2007, pp. 8f.

21 B. Sawyer, Viking-Age Rune-stones as a Crisis Symptom, *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 24 (1991), pp. 97–112. Long before she advanced the argument expressed in this article, she had regarded rune stones as the means of understanding property inheritance in the late Viking Age. See B. Sawyer, *Property and Inheritance in Viking Scandinavia: The Runic Evidence*. Alingsås 1988.

entirely understandable, given that the process of expansion and movement that marked the late Viking Age, and which was followed by Christianization, could be seen throughout Scandinavia, and therefore it is no exaggeration to call it a Scandinavian phenomenon, as many scholars, including B. Sawyer, have also argued.²² Nonetheless, it must not be forgotten that, as R. Palm and even B. Sawyer have acknowledged in their books, there are regional differences in Scandinavia, both in the chronology and distribution of rune stones (Map 1).²³ Even if Sawyer's argument that the phenomenon of raising rune stones is a "crisis symptom" were accepted, we would then need to discover what kind of "crisis" occurred in each region of Scandinavia.

At this point, I would like to introduce some historical context into my argument. Scandinavia had never experienced more drastic change than it did in the late Viking Age: on the one hand there was expansion and movement, both westward and eastward, in the form of raiders, traders, and settlers; on the other hand, states were being formed, with administrative systems and territories established in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Certainly, these three political units shared broad similarities in every aspect, but the historical and geographical contexts in which they were created meant that they became new states, with distinct identities. The new dynasties of the three states each had their own "national" hero: the Jelling kings of Denmark,²⁴ the two Olafs in Norway,²⁵ and Eric the Victorious and his descendants in Sweden²⁶; around 1000 they began to develop diplomatic relationships with neighboring powers

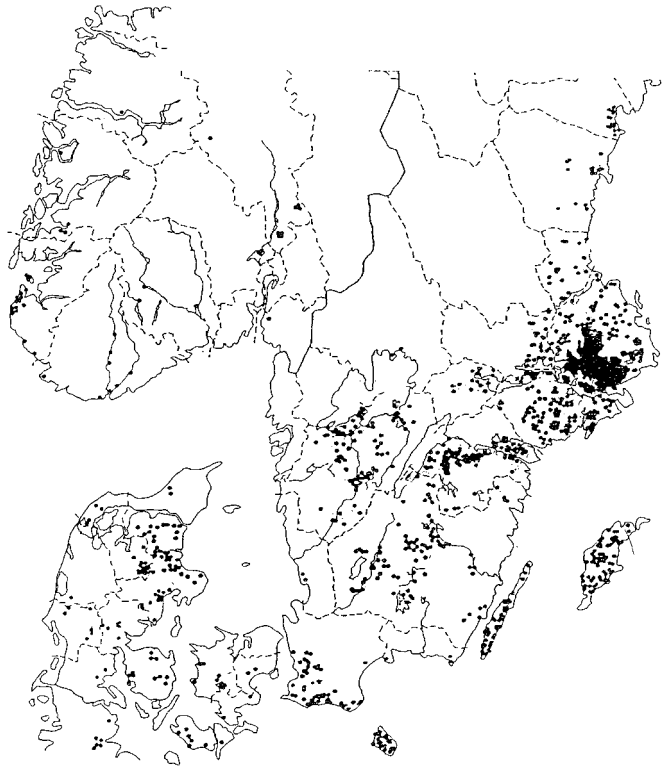
22 Research on Christianization in Scandinavia is now progressing at a great rate. It is worth mentioning two recent books, one by historians and the other by an archaeologist, which adopt a comparative perspective and concentrate on the role of rulers in the process of Christianization: N. Berend (ed.), *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c.900–1200*. Cambridge 2007 (Denmark by M. H. Gelting, Norway by S. Bagge & S. W. Nordeide, and Sweden by N. Blomkvist, S. Brink & T. Lindkvist); A. Sanmark, *Power and Conversion—A Comparative Study of Christianization in Scandinavia* (Occasional Papers in Archaeology 34). Uppsala 2004.

23 R. Palm, *Runor och regionalitet: Studier av variation i de nordiska minnesinskrifterna*. Uppsala 1992.

24 Works on the Jelling kings can be found on the shelves of every library, but the historical role played by the Jelling dynasty needs to be reconsidered. See, for example, P. H. Sawyer, *Da Danmark blev Danmark. Fra ca. år 700 til ca. 1050* (Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie 3). København 1988; E. Roesdahl, *Viking Age Denmark*. London 1982; K. Randsborg, *The Viking Age in Denmark: The Formation of a State*. London 1980; A. E. Christensen, *Vikingetidens Danmark paa oldhistorisk baggrund*. København 1969. Canute the Great, the ruler of the three kingdoms, should be given a special position in the historiography of the Jelling kings: see A. Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut. King of England, Denmark and Norway*. London 1995; M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century*. London / New York 1993; L. M. Larson, *Canute the Great and the Rise of Danish Imperialism during the Viking Age*. New York / London 1912.

25 S. Bagge, The Making of a Missionary King: The Medieval Accounts of Olaf Trygvason and the Conversion of Norway, *Journal of English and German Philology* 105 (2006), pp. 473–513; Id., Christianization and State Formation in Early Medieval Norway, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 30 (2005), pp. 107–34; C. Krag, *Norges Historie. Fram til 1319*. Oslo 2000; P. Sveas Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av landet 800–1130* (Handbok i Norges historie 2). Oslo 1977.

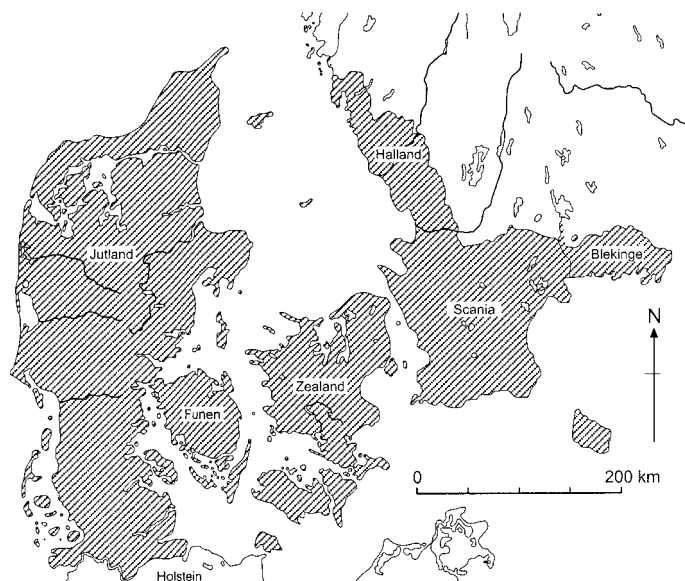
26 A lack of sufficient sources makes reconstructing the earliest history of Sweden difficult. Concerning Eric the Victorious, see M. OZAWA, Eric the Victorious and Baltic politics at the end of the first millennium, *Shigaku-Zasshi* 113–7 (2004), pp. 1–36 (in Japanese with English summary). See also Ph. Line, *Kingship and State Formation in Sweden 1130–1290* (The Northern World 27). Leiden 2007, pp. 34–68.



Map 1: Distribution of rune stones in Scandinavia (Palm, *Runor och regionalitet*, s. 73)

in Northern Europe. If the diversity of these political circumstances is accepted as a starting point for my argument, then the phenomenon of the raising of rune stones in these three regions needs to be understood in the specific political context of the time, which may correspond with the specific “crisis” mentioned by Sawyer.

In this article, therefore, it would seem reasonable to confine my analysis to the limited political space of the emerging Denmark of the Jelling dynasty, because it represents a representative regional framework for analysis. The Denmark of the Jelling dynasty was a larger territory than modern Denmark, and consisted of three sectors, namely the Jutland Peninsula, the archipelago (including two large islands, Funen and Zealand), and the southernmost part of the Scandinavian Peninsula (Scania, Halland, and Blekinge) (Map 2). Furthermore, this considerable territory was actually created during the very period of the Jelling dynasty. The corpus of materials for analyzing the territory includes 168 rune stones, which, according to Sawyer’s catalogue published in 2000, can be reliably allocated to Jelling Denmark around 1000.



Map 2: Denmark in the late Viking Age (Hybel & Poulsen, *The Danish Resources*, p. xxiii)

2. General information about Danish rune stones

2.1. Who raised the rune stones?

As I have already indicated, each rune stone has the stereotyped formula “X raised the stone in memory of Y”. Thereby, one would be inclined to think that X raised the stone himself. However, X would not normally have been the maker of the rune stone, but its sponsor, and so he would probably not have been able to take part directly in the process of making the rune stone on which his name was inscribed. Thus, the question is, who actually performed the physical work of making each rune stone? As will be discussed in Chapter 3, making a rune stone was a large undertaking, and the construction process was complex. Therefore, we can assume that many different specialist workers would have contributed to each stage of the process of making even a single rune stone.

At this point another question arises: who sponsored the rune stones? Very few of the stones tell us anything of the social rank of their sponsors, but some exceptional stones do give us this information²⁷: the sponsor was a king (konungr) for the Jelling stone 1 (DR41) in North Jutland,²⁸ the Jelling stone 2 (DR42) in North Jutland.²⁹ and

27 Here I am following the English translation of the titles provided by Mindy McLeod. See, Sawyer, *Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, p. 174.

28 DR41: sideA: kurmR : kunukR : ? : k(ar)þi ...

29 DR42: sideA: haraltr : kunukR : baþ ...

the Heddeby stone (DR3) in South Jutland³⁰; a chieftain (goði) for the Helnæs stone (DR190) in Funen³¹; a retainer (heimþegi) for the Hällestad stone 3 (DR297) in Scania³²; an estate-steward (landhirðr) for the Ravnkilde stone (DR134) in North Jutland³³; and—interestingly—a smith (smiðr) for the Hørning stone (DR58),³⁴ the Grensten stone (DR91),³⁵ and the Kolding stone (DR108),³⁶ all in North Jutland.³⁷ In spite of the diversity of their titles, these men all had one thing in common: they could afford to pay enough reward to all those involved in the process of making a rune stone. As we will see, raising a rune stone involved a considerable investment of labor and reward, because the construction process was not simple. Regrettably, however, we cannot know how much was paid to the people who made the stones, because this information was not recorded in any inscriptions or written sources.

2.2. Chronology and distribution

Many scholars have challenged the modern reconstruction of the chronology of rune stones; this is partly because—as one might imagine—attempting such a reconstruction has been, and remains, a very difficult task. The reason for this is that no rune stones bear any record of the date when they were raised. Some clues as to a definite date for individual stones are provided by the so-called “historical” rune stones (so named because of their links to the historical context identified by their inscriptions),³⁸ but these are the minority. Regarding the Swedish rune stones, and especially those found in Uppland, the scholar Anne-Sofie Gräslund attempted the elaborate task of dating the stones on the basis of their ornamentation, i.e., the styles used in the

30 DR3: sideA: suin : kunukR : sati ...

31 DR190: rhuulfRsatistainnuRakubi ...

32 DR297: ausbiurn : him : þaki : tuka : sati ...

33 DR134: asurlat : hirþir : kukis : sun : raist ...

34 DR58: tuki : smiþir : riþ ...

35 DR91: tuki smiþr risþ ...

36 DR108: tysti risþi ... smiþr asuiþaR.

37 These three examples may suggest that smiths were of relatively high rank in late Viking Age Denmark. Judging from the many surviving artifacts bearing complicated and beautiful ornamentation from this time, there is good reason to believe that smiths deserved high esteem and high incomes in the late Viking Age. With regard to the variety of late Viking Age artifacts, see J. Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts: A Select Catalogue*. London 1980. It does seem strange that we can only confirm the presence of the title of smith in Swedish inscriptions, even though approximately 2500 stones from across Sweden have survived up to the present time. See, smiðr, in: L. Petersen, *Svenskt runordsregister* (Runrön 2). 3 uppl. Uppsala 2006 (<http://web.telia.com/~u13403587/rundata/Runordsregister.pdf>).

38 Of course, the most important case is the Jelling stones (DR41 & 42). If we accept the interpretation that the deceased, who was translated from the Northern mound in Jelling to the church, was buried in 958, i.e., the date established by dendrochronology, and if we accept that he was Gorm the Old, then DR41 was raised sometime before 958, and DR42 between 958 and 987, the year Harald Bluetooth died.

backgrounds to the runic inscriptions.³⁹ However, it seems unlikely that Gräslund's innovative approach could be applied directly to the Danish rune stones, because they do not have as much ornamentation as the Swedish ones. Another scholar, Marie Stoklund, has attempted to reconstruct the chronology and typology of Danish runic inscriptions, including those on rune stones, on the basis of their linguistic character.⁴⁰ Once her research is finally complete, we will be able to apply this new dating method.⁴¹ Until then, however, we are forced to follow the traditional chronology set out in Sawyer's catalogue.⁴²

Next, we need to turn to the distribution of the rune stones. According to the catalogue established in the standard edition by Jacobsen and Moltke in 1941–42, Denmark can be divided into 8 districts in the late Viking Age, i.e., South Jutland, North Jutland, Funen, Lolland-Falster, Zealand, Scania, Halland, and Blekinge. It is interesting to note that the distribution of the 168 rune stones mentioned in the catalogue is uneven throughout the districts of Denmark: there are 5 in South Jutland, 80 in North Jutland, 7 in Funen, 8 in Lolland-Falster, 9 in Zealand, 54 in Scania, 1 in Halland, and 4 in Blekinge. Clearly, most of the stones are concentrated in two districts, namely North Jutland and Scania. What is the reason for this distribution pattern? Although we cannot answer this question with any real confidence, it may be significant that both districts with a dense distribution pattern lay some distance from the central areas of political influence, as defined by an emerging Jelling dynasty which was at first situated in central Jutland.

2.3. How many rune stones were raised?

Although I will restrict myself to commenting on the 168 stones mentioned in the catalogue, this is not the exact number of stones raised in Denmark in the late Viking Age. Naturally we must assume that, as with medieval charters, many rune stones have been lost through the ages. Take the example of the Hunnestad monument in Scania. Today, three of the monument stones are standing, but the *Monumenta runica*, published by Ole Worm in 1643, tells us that 8 stones, including ones without runes, comprised the Hunnestad monument in the 17th century (Fig. 1). The other 5 stones have thus been lost for three centuries. Similar cases certainly occur everywhere

39 A.-S. Gräslund, Dating the Swedish Viking-Age Rune Stones on Stylistic Grounds, in: M. Stoklund et al. (eds.), *Runes and their Secrets: Studies in Runology*. København 2006, pp. 117–39; Id., Runensteine. Late Viking Age Rune Stones: Ornamentation and Chronology, in: *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*. 2 Aufl. Bd. 25 (2003), S. 585–91; Id., Runstenar—om ornamentik och datering I & II, *Tor* 23 (1992), s. 113–40 & 24 (1994), s. 177–201; Sawyer, *Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, pp. 28–35.

40 M. Stoklund, Chronology and typology of the Danish runic inscriptions, in: Stoklund, *Runes and their Secrets*, pp. 355–83.

41 Stoklund is preparing a new edition of the Danish runic inscriptions, to replace the standard one by Jacobsen and Moltke (<http://www.danskeruner.dk/>). Once the task is complete, it will reflect her new chronology of Danish runic inscriptions from the Iron Age to the end of the Middle Ages.

42 Sawyer, *Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, p. 196. This chronological division follows the one by Jacobsen and Moltke: 1. before c.960; 2. 960–1050; 2a. 960–1050; 2b. 1020–1050; 3. 1050–1100; 3a. 1050–1070; 3b. 1070–1100; 4. after 1100.



Fig 1: Hunnestad monument by Worm in 1643 (DRAt. 670)

throughout Denmark. Sawyer's catalogue itself confirms that 18 stones of the corpus of 168 are now lost, even though other documents testify to their existence in the past.⁴³

If we take the fact of lost stones into consideration, how can we reliably estimate the original number of rune stones which were raised in Denmark in the late Viking Age? There is good reason for believing that the number of stones was originally much higher than the figure cited in the catalogue; the question is, how many stones were raised in the late Viking Age? Regrettably, I have been unable to find any study that attempts to estimate the original number of rune stones. The reason for this is partly geographical: compared to the Uppland, for example, where many rune stones remain on their original sites, the Danish landscape has changed drastically, resulting in the disappearance of many rune stones.⁴⁴ Why did they disappear? One reason involves the disintegration of the value system which esteemed rune stones as memorials. A second reason follows on from the first: the rune stones no longer needed as memorials were taken down and re-used to build churches or houses. A third reason is that the lands originally used as memorial sites were converted to settlements or farmland. Those stones that have sometimes been luckily discovered, during road construction or the restoration of a church, may be just a few of the many used in such ways.

Finally, to reiterate a point that I made earlier, all we can know at present is that

43 Sawyer, *Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, pp. 200–05; DR78, DR79, DR84, DR85, DR90, DR196, DR149, DR154, DR188, DR189, DR201, DR227, DR265, DR272, DR282, DR283, DR293, DR323, DR351, DR365.

44 The conversion of a landscape from one sort of use to another was a very big problem, not only for the mental attitudes of the people at the time, but also for historians attempting to reconstruct the age. The rapid clearing of woodland for cultivation and the drainage of fenland marks the distinction between the Danish landscape before and after the Middle Ages. See N. Hybel, *The Danish Resources*, pp. 8f.

the number of rune stones was originally much higher than the number cited in the catalogue. As an analogy: in a famous study, Michael Clanchy showed us that the original number of royal charters produced in England after the Conquest was much higher than the number extant today⁴⁵; this may well be true, albeit to a lesser extent, of the Danish rune stones. Given this fact, the greatest regret is that we have not yet found an effective way to estimate the original number of stones.

2.3. Single stones and monuments

Generally speaking, rune stones were raised in one of two ways: as single stones or as components of monuments consisting of several rune stones.⁴⁶ A considerable number of rune stones seem to have been single stones, but the sources attest to the existence of many multi-stone monuments, which are my principle focus here. As we have seen, the Hunnestad monument consisted of 8 stones up until the 17th century. Worm's sketch shows us that there were 2 rune stones—one showing a man with an axe (Fig. 2) and the other bearing a picture of cross (Fig. 3). There were also 3 picture stones—one with a giantess mounted on a wolf (Fig. 4), one with a wolf in front of a mask, and one depicting a great beast, and 3 stones with no inscription or picture.⁴⁷ In Worm's sketch, 5 stones are standing and 3 stones are lying on the ground. Here we need to be careful about the context in which the monument was prepared, because we cannot reconstruct either the original setting of the monument or its construction process. The Hunnestad monument is certainly a very fascinating object to scholars, but if the context of the monument is not reconstructed properly, then we will not arrive at any convincing conclusions.



Fig 2: Hunnestad stone 1
(DRA. 674)



Fig 3: Hunnestad stone 2
(DRA. 676)



Fig 4: Hunnestad stone 3 (DRA. 678)

45 M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2 ed. Oxford 1993.

46 A monument in the late Viking Age often means a complex consisting of rune stones, and either mounds, burials etc. Of course, this type of monument will be discussed later, but this chapter focuses on monuments composed of a combination of stones.

47 Here I follow Moltke's interpretation of the animals found in the Hunnestad monument. Moltke, *Runes and their Origin*, p. 251.

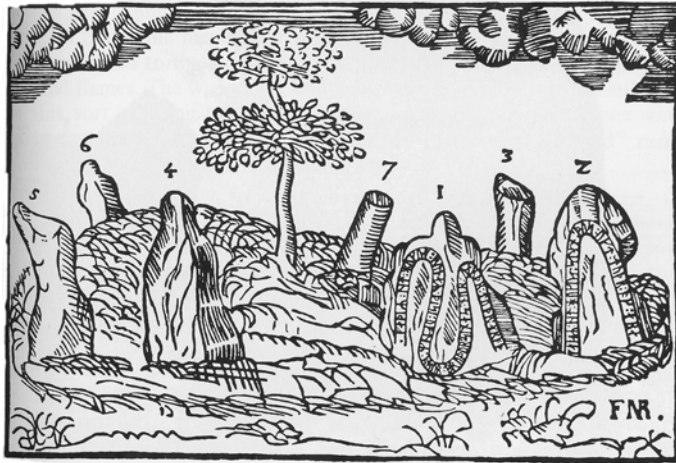


Fig 5: Västra Strö monument by Worm in 1643 (DRAt. 767)



Fig 6: Västra Strö monument (DRAt. 770)

Another example is the Västra Strö monument (Fig. 5) . Unlike the Hunnestad monument, the Västra Strö monument, also from the region of Scania, is now preserved intact, at least as described by Ole Worm in the 17th century (Fig. 6) . There are 7 stones in all, 2 of which have runic inscriptions (Fig. 7 & 8); the remains have no surface inscriptions. The monument surrounds a tree, an arrangement which probably had great significance at one time; a significance difficult to reconstruct nowadays. Most of the monuments in connection of some stones, whether or not they are inscribed with runes, can be found in Denmark.

What are the differences between single stones and monuments? First of all, monuments naturally involved the investment of much more labor and reward than



Fig 7: Västra Strö stone 1
(DRAt. 772)



Fig 8: Västra Strö stone 2 side A (DRAt. 774)

single stones. The sponsors of the Hunnestad or Västra Strö monuments would belong to the richest and most eminent class of persons in late Viking Age Denmark. The significance of the construction of monuments will be discussed in later chapters.

3. The process of making a rune stone

How were rune stones made in the late Viking Age? A rune stone is, as the name suggests, fabricated from a single large stone. I have indicated that the sponsor of a rune stone did not make the stone by himself; the rune stone that we see today is the final result of a collaboration between several participants in the construction process. I will now briefly reconstruct this process.

Essentially, a rune stone is a memorial for the dead. Therefore, we can assume that the raising of a rune stone was in some way connected with a series of funeral rites in the community. Because of a lack of detailed written sources, it is difficult to reconstruct the rituals connected with death in late Viking Age Denmark,⁴⁸ but there is little doubt that the form each ritual took would depend upon the social rank to which the deceased person belonged before his death.

After the funeral rite was completed, and the deceased had been placed in a

48 A fundamental study of death rituals in the late Viking Age has recently been published: F. Svanberg, *Death Rituals in South-East Scandinavia AD 800–1000* (Acta Archaeologica Lundensia Series in 4o No. 24). Lund 2003. The only, but very detailed, description of Viking Age Scandinavia was written by a Muslim traveler, Ibn Fadlān. In 922 he witnessed the funeral rites of a Rus' chieftain, culminating in a so-called ship burial along the Volga. See the English translation in R. Frye, *Ibn Fadlān's Journey to Russia. A Tenth-Century Traveller from Baghdad to the Volga River*. Princeton 2005, pp. 63–71. For a bibliographical and philological study of the same, see J. E. Montgomery, Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah, *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000), pp. 1–25 (<http://www.uib.no/jais/content.3.htm>).

burial chamber, those who had some familial or social connection with the deceased would need to discuss the raising of a rune stone in his memory. If we accept the above argument about the link between the rune stones and ceremonies for the dead, then clearly we need to contextualize the raising of rune stones within the framework of a series of funeral rites. However, in order to focus the issue more clearly, the following analysis will be restricted only to the process of making a rune stone, and is organized into 4 stages: 1. drafting the text 2. acquiring the stone 3. carving the inscription 4. drawing or painting the ornamentation.

3.1. Drafting the text

The formulaic nature of the rune stone inscriptions has already been discussed. If the inscriptions on the surface of a rune stone were limited only to the formula, it would be easier to answer many of the questions that arise about the nature and function of rune stones. However, as we will see, each runic inscription is unique, because it consists not only of the stereotyped formula, but also of other additional elements of expression. For example, the Århus stone 5 (DR67) in North Jutland has a very simple text, “Kæld raised the stone in memory of his father Inge,”⁴⁹ whereas the Århus stone 6 (DR68) in North Jutland has a much more detailed text, “Toste and Hove, with Frebjørn, raised the stone in memory of their companion and brave dreng Asser Saxe. He died the strongest warrior. He had a ship with Arne.”⁵⁰ The latter text adds the stereotyped formula “X (Toste and Hove, with Frebjørn) raised the stone in memory of Y (Asser Saxe)” to the phrases “their companion and brave dreng” and “He died the strongest warrior. He had a ship with Arne”. Although these two rune stones can both be found in Århus, they have very different texts from each other.

The question is, who drafted these texts so differently? Two possible choices present themselves. The first is, of course, that it was a sponsor, who could draft a better text to commemorate the deceased than the one in the original inscription. The other possibility is that it was the deceased man himself, who may have ordered a would-be sponsor to have a rune carver inscribe the kind of text that he hoped for. In either case, there would have been some discussion about what kind of text was going to be inscribed, and we can assume that any improvements to the text would have been agreed upon before the text that we see today was inscribed by a rune carver.

3.2. Acquiring the stone

A rune stone is a single stone of considerable size. What kind of stone is it? Regrettably, nearly no research has been done into the type of stone used. At this point, we have to consider the Danish landscape. Unlike in Norway and Sweden, in Denmark there are no stone quarries which could reliably supply stones suitable to become rune stones.

49 DR67: kitil : riþti : stin : þansi : uftiR : ika : faþur : sin.

50 DR68: side A: xusti aul hufi þiR frebiurn risþu stin þansi eftiR asur saksa filaka sin harþa;
side B: kuþan trik saR tu mana mest uniþikR saR ati skib miþ arna.

Thus the question arises, where did the Danes acquire such stones? One possibility is that they imported them from the lands outside Denmark. If we accept this hypothesis, then we still do not know from which region the Danes imported them. In any case, this remains a hypothesis. Meanwhile, we are forced to wait for the material analysis of the rune stones in Denmark to be completed.

Another way in which they might have acquired the stones is, however, suggested by the text of a rune stone. The famous Glavendrup stone (DR208) in Funen contains a curse on side C, which says:

May he become a *ræte* who damages this stone or drags it in memory of someone else⁵¹

The focus of attention is the expression “damages this stone or drags it in memory of someone else”, which seems to suggest that stones may well have been re-used by being raised as memorials to someone else. In addition to the Glavendrup stone, we can find a similar curse formula on other stones, such as the Skjarn stone (DR81)⁵² and the Sønder Vinge stone (DR83), both in North Jutland.⁵³ These three examples suggest that rune stones would almost certainly have been re-used in late Viking Age Denmark.

Once the correct stone had been acquired, it needed to be shaped into a form appropriate for a memorial. In order for it to be inscribed, some of the faces of the stone needed to be rendered smooth, a difficult process undoubtedly requiring teams of workers. Interestingly, unlike the memorials of Ancient Greek or Rome, many rune stones retained their natural form, and were not cut into lineal or geometrical shapes. Did the Danes prefer the natural to the artificial form? Judging from several artifacts and other archaeological remains discovered in late Viking Age Denmark, the Danes seem to have been quite familiar with geometrical patterns in everyday life. Why, then, did they prefer rune stones to have a more natural shape? Of course, it is not easy to answer this question, but my suggestion is that this preference might have reflected a collective attitude based on religious practice or the aesthetic sensibilities of the Danes in the late Viking Age.

3.3. Carving the inscription

In all probability, the sponsor of a rune stone would not have been able to read the runes, and even more rarely been able to write them. Estimates as to the numbers of those literate in runes in the late Viking Age are not that high, and it is likely that a limited number of specialists in the inscription of runes worked as rune carvers. They inscribed the runes on the surface of the stone with some sort of iron tool.⁵⁴

Most rune stones in Denmark were not autographed, but a few examples tell us

51 This English translation is after Sawyer, *Viking-Age Rune-Stone*, p. 95: DR208: side C: **at rita sa uarþi is stain þansi ailti iþa aft anan traki**; probably *ræte* (rita) means an outlaw.

52 DR81: ... **sip̃i : sa : manr : is : þusi : kubl : ub : biruti**.

53 DR83: ... **sip̃ : r(a)(t)i : saR : manr : ias : auþi : mini : þui**.

54 E. Moltke refers to a heavy, short-handled pick. Moltke, *Runes and their Origin*, p. 36.

the names of rune carvers. According to Sawyer's catalogue, the Heddeby stone (DR4) in South Jutland was signed by Gorm,⁵⁵ the Slesvig stone (DR6) in South Jutland by Gudmund,⁵⁶ the Langå stone (DR85) in North Jutland by Tore,⁵⁷ the Bjerregrev stone (DR99) in North Jutland by Tord,⁵⁸ the Hælne stone (DR190) and the Fremløse stone (DR192) in Funen by Overv,⁵⁹ the Glavendrup stone (DR209) both in Funen by Sote,⁶⁰ and the Jealev stone (DR239) in Scania by Gunne and Amund.⁶¹

We cannot know what kind of life the rune carvers in Denmark lived, nor how they worked.⁶² The Glavendrup stone (DR209) contains the informative expression about the rune carver that "Sote cut these runes in memory of his lord."⁶³ According to this text, Sote, a rune carver, had his own lord (dróttin), and the work was paid for by him. Of course, this example does not prove that all rune carvers had their own lords and were fed by them. Some carvers would have done, certainly, whereas others wandered throughout Denmark and elsewhere.

Compared to Denmark, much more research has been done on rune carvers in Sweden, especially in Central Sweden, largely thanks to the richness of the sources.⁶⁴ One of the most famous rune carvers was called Öpir, whose signature was found on the rune stones around Uppland in Central Sweden.⁶⁵ According to a recent study, however, the question as to whether Öpir was a real person, or the name of a workshop, remains to be solved.⁶⁶

3.4. Drawing or painting the ornamentation

Some Danish rune stones are carved with ornamentation that forms a background to the text. Although this ornamentation seems to be distinct from the runic inscription, in actual fact the two features should really be treated together, because of the high likelihood that the same carver undertook both processes by himself. For simplicity's sake, however, in this article I will demarcate the process of ornamentation from the one of inscribing the runes.

Ornamentation can be divided into two distinct types. The first was a layout style of carving, with ornamentation inscribed around the central text. This is a motif

55 DR4: side C: *kurmR raist run(aR)*.

56 DR6: side B: *kupmuntr : þaR [: r]...*

57 DR85: *þura : h ...*

58 DR99: *ian þurþr : rist : runaR þansi*.

59 DR190: ... *auaiR faþi*; DR192: ... *asAiRfaaþi*.

60 DR209: ... *suti raist runaR þasi ar þasi aft rtutin sin ...*

61 DR239: *iaksataru(na)ri(t) kuniarmutRkr(b)xxxxxx*.

62 What little information there is about Danish rune carvers is, see Runeristene, in: L. Jacobsen & E. Moltke, *Danmarks Runeindskrifter. Text*. København 1942, col. 930–35.

63 See the note 60.

64 For example, P. Stille, *Runstenar och runristare i det vikingatida Fjädrundaland. En studie i attribuering* (Runrön 13). Uppsala 1999; J. Axelson, *Mellansvenska runristare. Förteckning över signerade och attribuerade inskrifter* (Runrön 5). Uppsala 1993.

65 M. Ahlén, *Runristaren Öpir. En monografi* (Runrön 12). Uppsala 1997.

66 L.-K. Åhfeldt, Öpir—a Viking age workshop for rune stone production in central Sweden? A study of division of labour by surface structure analysis, *Acta Archaeologica* 72 (2001), pp. 129–57.

of the winding body of serpent—probably the Midgard serpent—and is sometimes connected with plant or animal ornaments peculiar to North Germanic art since the era of the Invasions.⁶⁷ According to the traditional view of art historians, the chronology of this type of ornamentation can be divided into 5 distinct styles, namely the Jelling style, the Mammen style, the Ringerike style, the Rune stones style, and the Urnes style.⁶⁸ A leading art historian Signe Horn Fuglesang shows us some different divisions of style: 1. Style III:E 2. Style III:F 3. The Oseberg style 4. The Borre style 5. The Jelling style 6. The Mammen style 7. The Ringerike style 8. The Urnes style 9. The transitional Urnes style.⁶⁹ As we have seen, the dating of rune stones by Anne-Sofie Gräslund was based on the differences between these styles.

The second type is a picture carved outside the layout ornamentation. According to Sawyer's catalogue, 19 Danish stones have pictures accompanying the text, pictures that include a mask (Fig. 9),⁷⁰ a great beast (Fig. 10),⁷¹ Christ,⁷² a man riding a horse,⁷³ a ship,⁷⁴ a large deer,⁷⁵ a cross,⁷⁶ and a flower (?).⁷⁷ Occasionally, different pictures have been carved on the same stone (DR42). The number of stones with pictures—19 out of the 168 stones in Sawyer's catalogue—does not seem very high (11.3%); this moderate number suggests that it was not common in Denmark to commission one or more pictures to decorate a rune stone.

The Hunnestad monument in Scania is an interesting example. As we have seen, this monument consisted of 8 stones; two of the rune stones had pictures (a man with an axe, and a cross), but three other stones had pictures but no runes (a giantess mounted on a wolf, a wolf in front of a mask, and a great beast). How this monument came to be constructed remains a mystery, but the pictures that adorn it undoubtedly have great significance. The relationship between text and picture in both rune stones and monuments needs to be examined much more keenly in the future.⁷⁸

Who, then, drew these ornamental borders and background pictures? As I have stated, some of the rune carvers could also have drawn the ornaments or pictures. The ornamental borders, especially, which were so closely connected with the inscriptions, would probably have been made by the same carver. Nevertheless, a considerable number of rune stones in Denmark have a layout style without ornamentation. This fact tells us that there were rune carvers able to draw ornamentation, and ones unable to do so, which in turn suggests that there would have been differences between rune

67 For example, J. Hubert, J. Porcher & W. F. Vorbach, *L'Europe des invasions* (L'Univers des formes 12), Paris 1967.

68 A detailed summary of the study of Viking Age ornamentation can be found in: H. Christiansson, *Sydskandinavisk stil. Studier i ornamentiken på de senvikingatida runstenarna*. Uppsala 1959, s. 11–31.

69 S. H. Fuglesang, Viking art, in: Pulsiano, *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, pp. 694–700.

70 DR62, DR66, DR81, DR258, DR314, & DR335.

71 DR42, DR271, & DR280.

72 DR42.

73 DR96 & DR282.

74 DR120, DR328, & N7.

75 DR123 & DR264.

76 DR212.

77 DR343.

78 L. Gjedssø Bertelsen, On Öpir's pictures, in: Stoklund, *Runes and their Secrets*, pp. 31–64.



Fig 9: Västra Strö stone 2
side B (DRAt. 778)



Fig 10: Tullstorp stone
(DRAt. 650)



Fig 11: Jelling stones (DRAt. 116)

carvers according to the extent of their abilities. Who would suggest that rune carvers (or workshops) of equal ability made the two Jelling rune stones (Fig. 11), one of which is very simple (sponsored by Gorm the Old (DR41)), and the other of which is highly elaborate (sponsored by Harald Bluetooth (DR42))?

There is one final element to bring to this discussion. Originally, the rune stones would have been colorfully painted, but this color faded over time. According to Guðrún's song II in the *Poetic Edda*, the runes were first inscribed and then painted

red.⁷⁹ Of course, the ornaments or pictures on the rune stone would have also been painted in other colors: as Sven B. F. Jansson states, the painting of a rune stone made it more impressive to the viewer.⁸⁰ Unfortunately we do not know the arrangement, combination and symbolism of the colors of a rune stone in any detail, but this alerts us as to what remains to be done.

The four processes for the creation of a rune stone outlined above are thought to have been necessary to having a rune stone raised by a sponsor just after the death of the one commemorated by the stone. Of course, our reconstruction of the process of making a rune stone is an *Idealtypus*, i.e., a process reduced to the simplest possible level; I have assumed that, in most cases, a single sponsor raised a single rune stone in memory of a single deceased person. If the number of sponsors or deceased persons was greater, or if a group of stones were made into a monument, then the making process would have been longer and more complex than is demonstrated in this chapter.

Two important facts can be drawn from the reconstruction of this process: 1) creating a rune stone involved a large number of people, either specialists or non-specialists (e.g., creators of the draft text, porters of the stone, rune carvers, illustrators, painters etc.), who would have been under the command of a sponsor. Furthermore, rune stones may have been commonly produced, even if not mass-produced. In which case, there would have been a temporary or permanent workshop for the production of rune stones somewhere in or around Denmark. 2) When a sponsor decided to raise a rune stone, he needed to have been able to invest enough labor and reward to accomplish the above-said process in its entirety.

The second part of this article, which is forthcoming, will aim to describe the various distinct elements that comprise each rune stone. The uniqueness of each stone is clearly recognizable. How did individual sponsors contribute to the originality of each stone? In what ways did the specific requirements of these sponsors contribute to the political history of the late Viking Age? The remaining chapters are as follows: 4. Differences between rune stones 5. Textual differences 6. Different types of stones 7. Differences between sites 8. How rune stones created the political landscape.

(To be continued)

79 G. Neckel & H. Kuhn (hrsg.), *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. 3 Aufl. Heidelberg 1962, S. 228; Guðrúnarqviða (önnor), 22: Vóru í horni hvers kyns stafir / ristnir oc roðnir—ráða ec né máttac-, / lyngfiscr langr, lanz Haddingia / ax óscorit, innleið dýra.

80 Sven B. F. Jansson, *Runes in Sweden*. Värnamo 1987, pp. 153f.; Moltke, *Runes and their Origin*, pp. 35–36.