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## Messages in Stone: Runes and Runic Inscriptions

[Text in red refers to presentation pictures. Please view accompanying PDF:s.]

I come before you as a stranger. Before I ask you to listen to me for an hour on a topic that may seem esoteric and even irrelevant to some of you, although I hope that by the end of the lecture I will have convinced you otherwise, perhaps I should begin by saying a few words about myself and how and why I became interested in runic inscriptions. I am born and bred in Sweden but came to the US for a year in 1976–77 as an exchange student to live with a family in the small town of Utica, Ohio. It was just after the bicentennial and the year when Walter Mondale was elected vice president. I became a Minnesota Vikings football fan, graduated from high school and went back to Sweden to finish my senior year there and then to begin my studies at Uppsala University.

In 1983–84 I worked as a Teaching Assistant at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and during that year I visited Minnesota and the Swedish-American community in Chisago county. Strangely enough, it was during my year in Illinois, thousands of miles from home, that I became interested in runes when studying with the Danish-American professor Elmer Antonsen. Runic inscriptions are common enough in Scandinavia. It took distance to see the uniqueness and exoticism of runes and runestones. Ever since then I have been fascinated with runology and I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the subject twenty years ago.

The academic year 1997–98 I spent at the University of California at Berkeley to do research in Old Swedish and to teach a course of runology. In 2002 I was invited to the Northern Lights Scandinavian immigrant symposium at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks outside Los Angeles to give a talk on the Kensington runestone. I had become interested in this stone already during a three-month stay at Augustana College in Rock Island back in 1988. But it wasn't before my invitation to speak that I really sat down and studied the pros and cons of the debate. I was asked then, and I am sure to be asked now, if I believe in the Kensington stone. I would answer that the problem of how the Kensington stone is to be dated is scientific, not one of belief or non-belief. It is nothing wrong with being intensely

engaged in the debate about this stone, as long as you remember that it is not the same at rooting for the Vikings, or even for the Alexandria Cardinals for that matter.

Science can be passionate, at least it's more more that way, but it must always remain objective. You do the research right, establish the facts impartially and then let that direct you to the conclusions. Don't look for quick, easy fixes. Science is no less complex than anything else in life, as we all should know. Keep your standards high, ask for the real facts and do not let some magician shuffle the cards so quickly that you cannot keep track of the queen of hearts. Look behind the aims people have when they are trying to make you buy something, especially a certain truth. Always remember that common sense saying: "If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is!" And, finally, don't believe implicitly everything you watch on TV.

When, for example, investigating an object as fraught with controversy as the KRS, you need to keep your head cool. In science you can determine things, either by conducting experiments according to set protocols that, if correct, allows other researchers to reach the same results by repeating the experiments. In human science, especially when dealing with historical artifacts, it is a little bit more difficult. So what you do here is to establish patterns to see if a certain phenomenon fits in or not. Mind you, we also need to allow for the atypical and sometimes even unique occurrences, but in those cases there has to be benefits in the form of explanations of other things. The establishment of patterns is still always the starting point.

I would like to remind you that America is not usually where we find runic monuments, and to judge the ones that we do find here we need to compare them with those from the runic heartland of Scandinavia. [MAP OF SCANDINAVIA](#) There, we have over 6,000 runic inscriptions, [TABLE OF INSCRIPTIONS](#) almost 60% of which are from Sweden, 25% from Norway and 15 % from Denmark. But the type and age of the inscriptions also vary. In the earliest times Denmark leads, in the Viking age Sweden dominates hugely, and in the Middle ages Norway has the upper hand.

	Pre-Viking 100–750 AD	Viking 750–1125 AD	Medieval 1125–1500 AD	Σ
Denmark	158	453	351	962 (15,5%)
Norway	66	138	1445	1649 (26 %)
Sweden	45	2923	660	3628 (58,5 %)
Σ	269	3514	2456	6239

There are also some 300 Scandinavian inscriptions on the Atlantic islands including Britain, where you also find 80 or so Old English runic inscriptions, roughly the same number as Non-Scandinavian inscriptions in the rest of Europe.

But I talk here as if everyone knew what a runestone or and even runes. To start with the runes themselves they are simply letters, used as we do our own alphabet and in fact derived from the Roman letters around 2,000 years ago. The runic letters are not originally listed in alphabet order, however, but rather in a sequence peculiar to themselves. The rune-row is called the futhark after the first six letters. The oldest futhark contained 24 letters **OLDEST RUNES** but the Viking age one was reduced to 16. **VIKING RUNES** The medieval runes were influenced by latin writing and are sometimes organized as an alphabet. **MEDIEVAL RUNES** There are many runic variants and local customs.

Runic inscriptions from the earliest period are rare and very enigmatic. There are short and almost always hard to interpret. Runes seem to serve other purposes than merely the communicative, but there is no reason to believe that they were inherently magical, rather their use manifested high status by a person initiated or even associated with the art of writing. The first runic inscriptions are like the static between the stations on the radio. Sometime you can hear weak voicing whispering in unknown languages. Sometimes you can make out a few words and see the glimmer of a message. Let us strain our ears to hear the faint echos of the first recorded words of our common ancestral language of both Swedish and English, more than 1,500 years ago, even before the Anglo-Saxons moved to Britain.

### **SKÄRKIND STONE**

This ancient runestone stands outside a countryside church, almost indistinguishable from the gravestones surrounding it. But it is from the 5th century and bears the inscription of a single man's name, *Skinþa-Leubaz*. **SKÄRKIND STONE LEGEND** One might think this is all we can tell, and it'd be neat enough I think if we at least know what someone was called a millenium and a half ago. But "What's in a name?", as Shakespeare's Julia said. In this case a lot. *Skinþa-Leubaz* consists of two parts, the first meaning 'skin' and the second 'lovely'. The man's name was really *Leubaz* and he as given the prefix *Skinþa-* because he traded in skins and hides, just like any Minnesota trapper. We know there was a trading route through Sweden where slaves, amber and skins were transported south to be sold to Roman merchants. *Skinþa-Leubaz* must have done well in this business, and those who raised the customary monolith for his honor came up with a really bright idea: mark it with the dead man's name in the rather new-fangled runic writing and perhaps more than a few generations will remember for whom it was erected. Well, I guess they were right.

This is a single word on only one of almost 7,000 runic objects of which each has a story to tell. Just imagine what we would learn if we fully understood them all! I wish I could even show you a fair number of inscriptions, but I have time for barely a handful. Among them I

cannot withhold at least a picture of the most famous English runic inscription, that on the Franks casket, a 10-inch casket of whalbone covered in carved pictures and runes, alluding to several stories, some of which we know little about. **FRANKS CASKET**

Most people who have seen any runic inscription at all is likely to have come across a Swedish runestone from the Viking Age, and no wonder since these are so common and conspicuous. **MAP OF SWEDEN** Half of them are found in Uppland, the province north of Stockholm. This is what awaits you on almost any tour in the country or even in the cities. Here **ÖRBY STONE** is a stone standing in the park outside the Uppsala University Main Building, incidentally a few hundred feet from where I live.

Many stand at their original site in nature. **MÅSTA STONE** This stone, for example, is found close to a small road 10 miles south of Uppsala. At first sight it might not look really impressive, but you should never let a superficial impression guide your appreciation of ancient monuments. This, after all, is a thousand year old original piece of art and the work of a professional rune carver. It sports a wing- and footless dragon with mouth and ears, as well as three smaller serpents of which one has legs. The dragon body serves as a text band for the runes. The message **MÅSTA LEGEND** is slightly damaged but easy to figure out anyway. It reads: “Fastbjörn and Þórunnr had [this stone] erected [and] the bridge made in memory of Ingifastr, their husbandman. May God help his spirit. Ásmundr carved the runes.”

The stone still stands next to the watercourse where the bridge mentioned was constructed. And the road traversing the bridge was no simple cow path, but the main highway from Uppsala, where the kings of Sweden were elected, to the south. The kings had to travel this road to be ratified by the people of the other provinces and the highway even had its own name, the *Eriksgrata* meaning ‘the road of the one who rules alone’. Many runestones stand along this highway.

As you can see from the prayer and also the cross this is a Christian memorial, as are almost all Viking age runestones.

Sweden’s greatest runestone, however, is an exception. It is very early, 9th century, and mentions the god Thor. **RÖK STONE** It has over 720 runes on its five surfaces, stands over 7 feet above ground and five feet under, and weighs five metric tons. It is so filled with riddles and cryptographic challenges that it takes days just to go through the reading and superficial interpretation of this queen of all runestones. I will not do that here.

The Rök stone is a unique cultural heritage and constitutes for peninsular Scandinavia a high profile phenomenon that never fails to impress tourists and non-politician Scandinavians alike. What would Sweden be without its Vikings and its runestones now that Swedish sin,

the welfare model, Björn Borg and Abba no longer make the headlines? Shall we be content that our fame is limited to the untrue belief that Sweden is the suicide hot-spot of the world?

But, however famous runes and runestones are, with over 4.5 million results of an Internet search for the word *runic* alone, it is not one of the Scandinavian monuments that proves to be the most famous of all, but rather a rune-covered stone slab found in Kensington, Minnesota. **KENSINGTON STONE** Whereas an Internet search for “Rökstenen” yields 22,300 results, a search for “Kensington runestone” (KRS) yields no less than 66,900 results (Alltheweb search Sept. 7, 2010). The latter monument seems to be exactly thrice as famous as the former.

In my opinion the Scandinavian-American community has every reason to stay concerned about the KRS, not only because its fame. It is without doubt a part of the past with ties to the present. I would also claim that whatever the history of the KRS before 1898, its primary importance is as a contemporary object with a history richer than most. All the KRS facts and all the fiction blends to make the stone a cultural icon, perhaps the foremost among similar phenomena. Its disputed authenticity only serves to make it more interesting and more symbolic. The question is only whether this icon will be a concern for merely commercial and special interests or not. I would personally rather that it became the catalyst for discussion of several things, of how we use ethnic symbols and to what ends, of how academics and other people have interacted when debating the authenticity of and place for the KRS, and of how this interaction should ideally have been.

I have read a great deal of the literature on the KRS and it strikes me how partial almost all of the authors are, not just the lay proponents of a medieval origin, but also the critics. No one seems really that interested in finding out the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The facts are these. In spite of claims even from the start no evidence of any kind has ever surfaced that ties the finder of the stone, Olof Ohman, with its making. There has been a rumor of a deathbed confession by a neighbor who claimed to have cooperated with Ohman, but it does not stand up to scrutiny. Nor has the find history been proven false, although we do have to rely on statements of those involved only. There is no archaeological or other tangible evidence disproving that the KRS was found in the claimed location or circumstances, nor any proving it either for that matter. Historical arguments have raged on the possibility and probability of a 14th century journey from Scandinavia to Minnesota, but nothing is proven either way. Nor is the geological questions solved. The first geologist working on the stone, Newton H. Winchell, found the inscription to be old, and his judgment has been seen as vital by some. It may, however, be affected by the recent information that Winchell also authenticated supposedly Stone Age tools from the Kansas valley that are obvious fakes.

Recent geological work on the KRS has iterated Winchell's results, but has not been scientifically published or peer-reviewed. Let me take a minute to explain what peer review means. I found an excellent definition on Wikipedia: "**Peer review** is a generic term that is used to describe a process of self-regulation by a profession or a process of evaluation involving qualified individuals with[in] the related field. Peer review methods are employed to maintain standards, improve performance, and provide credibility". In science there are different ways of ensuring that results are really valid. It used to be that you published something and the peer review process consisted in other scientists expressing their support of your work. Now, this support has to be independently published and by recognized authorities in the field, and only after they themselves having tested your methods and results. This kind of peer review is still the standard in human sciences.

In the natural sciences it is much more common nowadays that the peer-reviewing is done in advance. You submit your work to a scientific journal or book company. They take upon themselves to send out your work for review to usually at least three authorities on the subject who write reports on the procedures and validity of your work. If you claim scientific credibility, you must go through one of these processes. Your research must be made public and available in a set format, and you must be able to show how your work has been peer-reviewed, either by mentioning who has reviewed it in a publication or by it having been published in a recognized scientific medium.

All scientific study of the KRS, properly conducted, should be encouraged, and one recent contribution of great value is a 3-dimensional documentation of the stone surface. But much other work also remains to be done. The analysis of the language and runes on the KRS is far from complete. The history of the stone since its discovery is incomplete and many documents connected with its travels and display need to be collected and investigated. There is no full and unbiased publication establishing all the facts of the the KRS and its inscription, after 112 years we do not even have a conclusive reading of what the runes actually say.

This is a task for a fully trained runologist, versed in how to distinguish what is writing and what is not, as well as interpreting that writing. It is *not* a task for archaeologists, geologists or historians. The runes were carved by *people*, for people to read. Doing so is a human activity, not a technical one. When you get a hard-to-read postcard from your grandmother, you ask someone used to old handwriting for help, not an expert on different kinds of paper!

I came 10,000 miles to finally determine what the KRS inscription really says. This morning I was going to the Runestone Museum to do just that. Incredibly enough I was not allowed access with my previously agreed-upon team, including Dr. Richard Nielsen who

carried out the 3-dimensional I mentioned before and was to be a necessary consultant during the inspection. I am shocked and grieved that my wonderful welcome in the rest of America and Douglas County came to such an abrupt stop.

The way of ascertaining the age of the KRS text is primarily by studying its language and its runes. And what may come as surprise to some, the basis for this study has changed a great deal, in some ways even drastically, since around 1950 when most of the academic scholars proclaimed the KRS to be modern.

It is easy to see that the KRS language looks a lot more like 19th century Swedish, possibly with some Norwegian elements, than any of the Old Scandinavian dialects. One problem here is that you need to know both modern and ancient Scandinavian, and how many of the people interested in the KRS are that lucky? Hence, most have to trust the authorities, who then better be right. And here we have a problem. It is a fact that earlier Scandinavian scholars knew the old language mainly from handbooks and published literary and legal texts. But the language of the KRS is most likely not so classical and is best compared with the texts we know as charters, **OLD SWEDISH CHARTER** medieval letters mostly dealing with the sale of real estate and other transactions. These have been very little investigated, and it does not help that the Old Swedish charters after 1355 were not published until the 1970's and onwards. Hjalmar Holand tried to use the material published in his time and did find some interesting forms, but it was not until Richard Nielsen went through the now published charters from 1355–1375 with a fine comb that someone really struck gold. In spite of earlier claims Old Scandinavian words *can* with some important exceptions look reasonably like what you find on the KRS. You only have to pick forms from all over the area and sometime select rare forms occurring in one or a few of tens of thousands of documents. If I may quote myself:

It is a fact that most of Nielsen's suggested parallels turned out not to be valid, but the ones that really did showed that it is not as easy to disprove the medieval origin of the KRS as academic scholars have claimed. In fact, only a few lexical items may be judged impossible and they are nicely balanced by the few that are likewise very hard to give a 19th century explanation. The question is no longer if the medieval origin of the KRS inscription is possible, but rather if it is probable or not.

This is the all-important distinction: possible or probable. To make the KRS medieval you have to accept a certain number of very unusual or even unique traits. Let me mention one

problem, the word **oppagelsefarþ**. **oppagelsefarþ** It looks a lot like Modern Danish *opdagelsefærd* ‘journey of discovery’, and it has been used as one of the strongest arguments that the KRS cannot be medieval, since there is no such word in Old Scandinavian. But there is a way around this. The letter **þ** stands for *d* in the KRS, but since no word begins with *t*-, there is a possibility of **þ** standing for that letter, as well. Then we would have the equivalent of an Old Swedish *uptakilsefärdh*, literally ‘up taking journey’ which may be given the translation ‘acquisition journey’ and as such it is now rendered by the proponents. How good is this? Well, there is no such word in Old Swedish, but there is a word *uptaka* that can mean ‘clear land or take land in possession’. The word *uptakilse* also exists, but not with the meaning we are looking for. *Uptakilsefärdh* does not exist, but *-färdh* is a rather common second element of Old Swedish words, so why could it not be combined with *uptakilse*? Although, we would have to explain the vowel **a** instead of **ä** in **farþ**. Yes, it is *possible* to hypothesize the existence of the Old Swedish word *uptakilsefärdh* with the supposed meaning, is it also probable?

If you think the problem I have just presented is complex, remember it is only one word out of 65 on the stone, almost every single one beset with problems and in need of very detailed and technical discussion. In some cases, such as with **oppagelsefarþ**, a single word contains a multitude of separate complications dealing with runes, sounds, meaning and word composition. It is impossible for me to go into a full discussion here, and I doubt many of you would want me to. Suffice it to say that no single word absolutely proves that the KRS cannot be medieval. A text, however, does not consist of individual words but is rather a whole. In my best judgment as an expert in the field I cannot find that the KRS inscription looks like any medieval Scandinavian text I have ever come across.

But if it is not medieval it must be 19th century, and most of the words certainly look to belong to that century rather than to the 14th. There are exceptions, however, and among those which are impossible or extremely difficult to reconcile with 19th century Swedish or Norwegian are **of**, **rise** (twice), **äptir** (twice) **illü**, and **mans**. **NON-19th CENTURY SCANDINAVIAN** The first has been explained as English *of*, but I do not think any native speaker of that language would accept this. It is still unresolved and as difficult to give a modern explanation as a medieval one. The same goes for **rise**. The three final examples certainly look medieval, especially **äptir** and **illü** of which I have found no trace in Modern Scandinavian. If you presume a forger, you have to show how the medieval words found their



way to Minnesota in the 1890s. And you are not allowed to make the random claim that the forger had access to specialist literature in Scandinavian linguistics.

It turns out, however, that there was a book available with interesting information, an 808-page encyclopedia by Carl Rosander, which was available to Minnesotans. **ROSANDER** Olof Ohman owned a copy for example, dated 1891, and if he did, so could others. The words *Aptir* and *manss* are found on p. 62, **ROSANDER P. 62** and the Lord's Prayer ending *frælse os af illu*, dated to 1300 by Rosander, on p. 64. Is it a coincidence that we find exactly those three words which look like pure Old Scandinavian in the KRS also in this book within a couple of pages of each other under a section entitled "The history of the Swedish Language" (*Svenska Språkets Historia*, p. 59)?

However, I have tried to show that the evidence against a medieval origin of the KRS inscription is not as clear-cut as some believe. Many of the supposedly impossible words and forms have been shown to exist or to be at least possible in Old Swedish. Even though the case for a 14th century origin leaves much to be desired, I should also want to point out that the linguistic case for a 19th century origin is not complete.

If the linguistic situation has changed a lot in the last 60 years, it's nothing compared to the runological. This is where the proponents of the medieval origin of the KRS have had their strongest arguments, at least in my opinion. The runes on the stone are, to be sure, quite different from those found from other times and places. But if the KRS is a forgery, the proponents argue, why did not the forger borrow the runes from some easily obtainable source, such as Rosander? **ROSANDER P. 61** The established runologists have claimed that the forger independently invented a new runic set, but this is hogwash if you'll excuse my French.

The second weakness in the arguments of the early runologists was the lack of runic material from the late 14th century with which to compare the KRS. The many runestones from the Viking age with which most of them were familiar have little or nothing to say about runic practices in the 1360s. The medieval material that did exist then was often badly published and even worse known. Even so, we could start by looking at this material to see if the KRS inscription looks at all like contemporaneous examples in Scandinavia, especially when comparing with one of the richest find spots of 14th century runic inscriptions on stone, i.e. the Baltic island of Gotland with perhaps as many as 90, 70 of which are grave-slabs in churches. Gotland has repeatedly been named the starting place for the KRS expedition and one writer (Wolter 2009, p. 253) even claims that: "[n]umerous linguistic, runic, grammatical and dialect traits found in the Kensington Rune Stone inscription are also found in medieval

runic inscriptions on Gotland. Interpretation: The carver of the Kensington Rune Stone was likely educated in these aspects of the Old Swedish language on the island of Gotland.”

Actually I can *prove* that the KRS was not carved by anyone from Gotland since the inscription itself tells us this. The belief is obviously that the eight “Goths” mentioned means ‘Gotlanders’ (cf. Wolter p. 60), but it does not. The word **göter** means ‘people from Götaland’ (the southern part of mainland Sweden). **GÖTER** The word meaning ‘people from the island of Gotland’ would be **guter** in the spelling of the KRS (Williams 2010, p. 143).

Thus it should come as no surprise that KRS inscription shows no specific ties to Gotland, and if we compare it with one contemporaneous typical inscription from that island, the grave-slab from Grötlingbo (G 36) **GRÖTLINGBO 1, 2** we find that none of the special runes **GRÖTLINGBO 3** on the KRS have any correspondence on G 36

KRS	G 36
X	†
‡	ƿ
‡	ŋ

and that the **s**-rune **GRÖTLINGBO 4** so typical of medieval Gotland is not found on the KRS.

KRS	G 36
h	ſ

Nor does the language tally; on Gotland diphthongs **GRÖTLINGBO 5–6** are preserved, in fact this is the Swedish area where they have been kept the longest, but are they missing on the KRS,

KRS	G 36
<b>sten</b>	<b>stain</b>

which also lacks the case endings present on G 36.

KRS	G 36
<i>skip</i>	<i>Vetaburgum</i> (dative plural)

And the “weakening” of final *-a* to *-e* **GRÖTLINGBO 7–8** typical of the KRS is lacking on G 36.

KRS	G 36
<b>fiske</b>	<b>altra</b>

The difference could hardly be greater.

Someone might object that it's hardly fair to compare a lying-down grave-marker from a church to an erected memorial left by an expedition in trouble thousands of miles from home. The problem is there is very little to compare such an inscription with. The only standing runestone which might be from the 14th century that I know of is the Norwegian Egge stone. **EGGE STONE** It is a border-marker, but there are no runic traits that point towards the KRS. Neither are any found on the tiny Kingittorsuaq stone shard from Greenland, **KINGITTORSUAQ STONE** even though this is the Scandinavian colony closest to America and this inscription has been connected with the KRS.

There were no Greenlanders as far as we know in the KRS party, the great majority of which was Norwegian. The inscription is also informal, and perhaps we should not compare it with Scandinavian runestones or grave-markers at all. Fortunately there is now a rich material of runic inscriptions on medieval everyday objects, almost of which have been found in Norwegian cities since 1955. In all, there are 130 medieval inscriptions that may stem from 14th century Norway. In none of them are there any specific ties to the KRS. One example should suffice the rune stick from Bergen. **NORWEGIAN RUNESTICK** Neither language nor runes comply with that on the Minnesotan stone.

As has been seen, there are no counterparts to the KRS language and runic usage in Scandinavian inscriptions of that period. This has to some extent also been accepted by the proponents, but their argument has then been that the KRS is the product of a learned author versed in Roman scribal practices but in this case writing with runes. That cannot be ruled out. But by incredible chance we actually do have an example what it looked like when a person with book-learning in the mid-14th century chose to write runes, *viz.* the manuscript of the provincial law of Scania (Skåne), in the extreme south of present-day Sweden. **CODEX RUNICUS** The runes are again exactly what we would expect at the time and nothing specific connects it with the practices on the KRS. It thus seems that this stone stands totally alone in the context of other 14th century runic artifacts of Scandinavian origin. It then remains to be seen if a 19th century runic context would fit better.

Until recently this was definitely not the case. The Kensington runes deviated as much from the runes known in the 19th century, in authentic use or from books, as they do from medieval runes. But in 2004 a sensational find was made at the Institute for Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research in Umeå (DAUM). It changed everything. Two sheets of paper were found, the sheet dated to 1885 written by the Dalecarlian tailor Edward Larsson as a copy of the 1883 sheet by his senior brother Carl Emil Larsson. **LARSSON 1**. The older document first lists lower- and upper-case letters from the old-style alphabet being phased out

in Sweden at the time, then the medieval runes, followed by a set of stranger-looking runes. Finally we have a so-called Secret Style, which is a not uncommon code from later times, used by journeymen to communicate with their traveling fellows. The alphabets are followed by some “old digits”.

It is evident that the deviant Larsson runes comprise a system of characters closely related to that used on the KRS. **LARSSON 2** There are also important differences, especially regarding **n, o, p, r, and t**, **LARSSON 3** and in these cases the KRS system is the more archaic, showing older forms which were not, however, unknown at the time. This ties in nicely with the only other find with these runes that we know of, on a carrying-yoke from the province of Dalecarlia. **MÅNSTA YOKE** It is dated with pentadic digits to 1907 and could have been inspired by the KRS, but the Larsson runes from the 1880s probably means that the inscription on the yoke is genuine. The Dalecarlian connection indicates that the KRS-type runes were developed in that province in the 19th century, possibly earlier. The Larsson papers indicate that they, too, were used as a code used by journeymen to communicate with each other. And this explains why scholars, and most other people too for that matter, have not been made aware of their existence until this decade.

Allow me to summarize. The KRS inscription looks like no other Old Scandinavian text we know of, but no single word proves absolutely that it could not have existed in this form in the Middle ages. The runic artifact as such has no parallel in the Old World and does not as a whole conform to what we know about medieval runic practices. The runes themselves incorporate some very unexpected and deviant forms that again have no parallel in medieval runic inscriptions. But they do appear on a farm implement from 1907 and in two documents from the 1880s with ties to the Swedish province of Dalecarlia.

The KRS carries an exceptional inscription - exceptional in being remarkable, fascinating and worthy of study, but also exceptional in the sense that it consists to a large part of exceptions. For many of its 65 words special pleading is required if we are to accept the text as a 14th century product. The question is whether we are prepared to accept such a degree of exceptionality.

My presentation should have demonstrated at least four points. Firstly, that whoever devised the KRS inscription, there is no evidence that Olof Ohman did it, rather there are linguistic and runic indications of the opposite. Secondly, that the KRS is a fascinating artifact full of mystery, controversy and with a quite long and very interesting history. Thirdly, that there is a huge number of unanswered questions left to be settled, if ever, only by renewed

and continued study by human and natural scientists of all kinds. Fourthly, that whereas it is much easier to reconcile the KRS with a 19<sup>th</sup> century context than with a 14<sup>th</sup> century one, some problems in connection with dating have not been solved conclusively. Most importantly, regardless of when the KRS was carved, it is probably the most famous runestone in the world, an effective catalyst of scientific debate and thus of great value. But why would anyone want the stone to be anything more than it already is? The KRS is indeed important and those who have cherished it should continue to do so, and those who have dismissed it out of hand should change their minds and realize that it has taught us more by its very existence than any implications of its inscription might do.

A runestone is not just a monument, it is a portal into the past which allows us to hear the very words of people's mouths and read the thoughts in their minds. The study of runes is unendingly fascinating, and to be a bit risqué I'll paraphrase a fellow scholar: Show a moderately curious person a runic inscription and he or she is invariably smitten, drawn towards its peculiarity, its message, the miracle of its existence. Verily I say unto you: Those who deny themselves the opportunity to work with runes are losing out on one of the greatest pleasures they can have with their cloths on.

But runology is a very small discipline with an insecure future and only a handful of qualified practioners, of which I am lucky to be one. Scandinavians and people with roots in North Western Europe have an obligation to keep up the competence in reading and interpreting runic inscriptions, this our oldest writing. It can only be done by ensuring that the small trickle of runologists doesn't dry out altogether.

And now I'd like to turn to presenting my "partner in crime", as it were: Dr. Richard Nielsen. We met in 2002 for the first time, and our contacts have been rather intense in the years in between. Dick and I agree on a number of important issues connected with the KRS and with all runic inscriptions for that matter. The facts are what count! On his homepage Dick writes "I wish to be known as an investigator who strove to find the truth about the runic inscriptions found in North America". This I respect him for, and although we draw different conclusions from the proof at hand, we are unanimous in our mission to establish all the pertinent evidence, and nothing else. Eventually, we both hold that "The truth conquers all."