

# People, Runestones and Landscape in Västergötland

Two Examples from Larv and Nöre

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## Abstract

*Runestones in the province of Västergötland have been studied quite thoroughly, but there has until recently been a lack of in-depth individual studies of these monuments. Religious and linguistic aspects have dominated runestone research in the province, while few exclusively archaeological and landscape-related studies have been conducted.*

*This article focuses on a landscape analysis of two runestones in Västergötland: Vg 127 in Larv and Vg 174 in Nöre. The results show that there are clear connections between these two runestones, with both standing in connection to well-established roads and border areas between settlement units and land use types. A closer inspection reveals that the stones differ in purpose and although broadly located in similar settings there are clear differences in their local landscape. The runestone in Larv is a manifestation of power while the monument in Nöre instead commemorates a tragic incident. These results illuminate the importance of studying runestones individually and not just as parts of a general cultural phenomenon.*

## Introduction

The subject of Scandinavian runestones is vast, with research having focused on a great variety of questions. In recent years the introduction of more advanced digital tools in archaeology has made it possible to pursue a broad and quantitative analysis of runestones in a wider setting (e.g. Kitzler Åhlfedt 2012; Norburg 2015). However, there is a lack of in-depth contextual individual studies of these monuments. In order to fully understand

their social purpose in a wider setting it is necessary to seek a better understanding of the local landscape, providing a context in which runestones can be analysed in relation to other features of society.

This article focuses on a close analysis of two runestones in Västergötland and the contexts in which they are located. The stones in question are Vg 127 situated in Larv, and Vg 174 in Nöre (see Fig. 1). Both

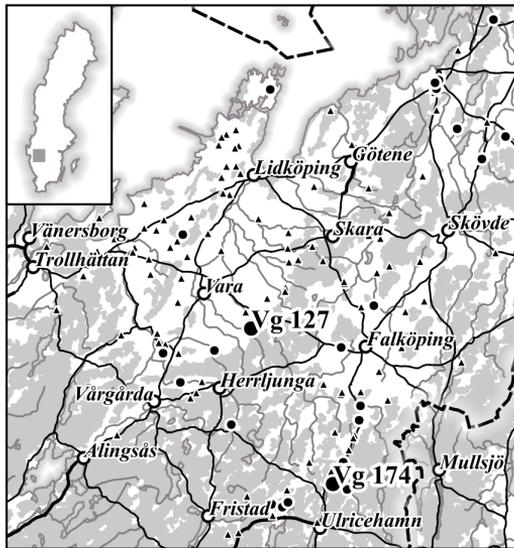


Fig. 1. Map showing the location of the studied runestones in Västergötland, as well as the other runestones which remain in situ (based on *Västergötlands Runinskrifter 1940–1970* and *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*) in combination with modern main roads and towns. The background map is produced using the GSD Map of Sweden 1:1,000,000. © Lantmäteriet.

are considered to be situated in situ, meaning that their location has not been altered since the stones were erected. A majority of the runestones in Västergötland have had their location changed or in some way altered, and only around 25–30 of the runestones in the province stand where they were first erected. In order to perform a valid analysis of the runestones and their surrounding landscape, the original position of these monuments should be considered a vital part of the analysis.

The results presented in this article are based on an analysis of data produced through a research project conducted during the winter of 2016/17. The project used field surveys, GIS-based digital analyses of the

sites, literature studies as well as historical and archaeological material from the area in order to more fully understand the local landscape surrounding the two runestones. The aim of this article is to conduct a deeper analysis of the runestones, observing similarities and differences in order to emphasize the individuality of the monuments which otherwise might be overshadowed in larger and more general studies.

## Previous research

The quintessential work regarding runestones in Västergötland is *Västergötlands Runinskrifter 1940–1970* (the fifth volume in the collection of *Sveriges Runinskrifter*, or *SRI*) by Elisabeth Svärdström and Hugo Jungner (Svärdström & Jungner 1970; Gräslund 2015, 39). Another book which although focusing on the Viking Age (and the early medieval period) in Västergötland in general, also gives some attention to runestones is Harald Wideen's *Västsvenska vikingatidsstudier: Arkeologiska källor till Vänerområdets kulturhistoria under yngre järnålder och äldsta medeltid* from 1955. Birgit Sawyer's *The Viking-age rune-stones: Custom and commemoration in early medieval Scandinavia* is also important for the analysis and interpretation of Scandinavian runestones (Sawyer 2000), but only touches very briefly upon the subject of spatiality in Västergötland (Sawyer 2000, 103 ff.). However, she points out many of the important topics concerning studies and interpretations of Viking Age runestones. Sawyer emphasizes, for example, the importance of in-depth individual studies of runestones in order to highlight the individual traits of specific stones, although her focus is on the inscriptions rather than their individual locations (Sawyer 2000, 51 ff.). She has also considered runestones in relation to inheritance (see Sawyer 2000).

More recently there has actually been an

increase in archaeological studies of runestones in Västergötland (as well as other regions) which steps away from the more traditional linguistic aspects of these monuments. Some of these studies also illuminate the relations between runestones and the surrounding landscape to some degree. For example, Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt's study compares the cut marks of runestones with Eskilstuna coffins in Västergötland and examines the subject from a more spatial point of view in order to analyse similarities and variations. Although her study differs from the theme of this article it highlights runestones as a vital source and link between late Viking Age and early medieval Scandinavia with all the social changes that occurred during this period (Kitzler Åhfeldt 2012). Studies by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen (2015) and Anne-Sofie Gräslund (2015) also focus on runestones in the region but Bertelsen looks at the religious aspects while Gräslund applies her typological analysis to runestones. The articles by Kitzler Åhfeldt (2012), Bertelsen (2015) and Gräslund (2015) clearly show that individual studies illuminate the potential and diversity of runestones.

Perhaps the most relevant example of an in-depth analysis of a runestone and its location is Martin Hansson's and Per Stille's study of Sm 42 in Småland, Sweden. The analysis of SM 42 is a very rare one since it is one of very few runestone studies combined with an archaeological excavation. Hansson's and Stille's research clearly shows the complexity of analysing runestones and their location, as well as the necessity to use interdisciplinary and various types of information to generate an overview of the historical context (Hansson 2014). A study performed by Gabriel B. N. Norburg also shares similarities with this project. Norburg has studied runestones in relation to other features in the landscape by using digital methods in order to understand the context of runestones (Norburg 2013;

2015). Another more recent article that brings up the relation between runestones and other structures in the landscape, by Ing-Marie Back Danielsson, is also related to this study. Although her study concerns the eastern parts of the Mälars Valley, her work also emphasizes the importance of analysing the social context of runestones. Back Danielsson, among other things, points out the social memory attached to raised stones such as runestones, and the individual aspect of each stone, reflecting the persons involved in its creation (Back Danielsson 2015).

In general, however, there has been a lack of close individual analysis of runestones in Västergötland. Apart from the some of the previously mentioned articles very little focus has been put on the spatial dimensions of runestones. To find this type of research it is necessary to look at other regions. By combining various elements from archaeology, historical geography and literary sources it is possible to conduct an analysis that is less unilateral and opens up for more extended discussions than more traditional inquiries.

## Landscape and runestones

Runestones are striking monuments in the landscape, and as such immediately invite a researcher to perceptual analysis. A phenomenological approach where the runestones are observed through human senses in a wider setting leads to questions regarding the impression of the monument through an imagined observer (e.g. Tilley 2008, 273 f.). It is thus important to remember that studying a monument from a phenomenological perspective is a very individual way of analysing the world (Tilley 1994, 11; 2010, 25 ff.). A main question of this article in relation to phenomenological analysis is: how would the studied monument have been perceived during its active period? This question may be

investigated on a number of scales, but vital to any such analysis is the reconstruction of the contemporary landscape and an analysis of the potential connection to other settlements or monuments within the same sphere (Tilley 1994, 71; 2008, 273 f.). Christopher Tilley states that phenomenological surveys are often best used in a limited area, since the approach has its limitations and is difficult to apply to a larger mass of land, for example a nation (see Tilley 2010, 25 ff.).

As described above, however, a landscape is a complex entity, which means that it is not enough to merely reconstruct its perceptual appearance. The meaning of landscape is not tied to the senses alone, but also to territorial and physical factors (e.g. Forman & Godron 1981; Olwig 1996). While vegetation, topography and land use of course affect the ways in which a monument can be perceived (e.g. Llobera 2007), of even more importance are the socio-natural connotations ascribed to it through its connections to a wider world. In order to understand a monument, it is thus necessary to analyse the social and economic structures of the surrounding area as well as physical geographical factors. More or less all runestones in Västergötland can be connected to other types of monuments, man-made structures or communication routes. Roads, rivers, bridges, churches and graves/grave fields/burial mounds are some of the features commonly found within close proximity to a runestone. Settlements are of course also connected to runestones, although the number of excavated reliable settlements in Västergötland is rather small (see Siljedahl 2015). The wide connections of runestones in turn entail a broad historical scope, where the monuments are seen not only as products of their contemporary time, but also as results of the past and giving effects into the future (e.g. Hägerstrand 2009, 130 ff.).

This article has applied the above outlined approach through a comparative analysis of

two runestones in Västergötland, Sweden. Each runestone has been analysed using a combination of historical geographical and phenomenological approaches. A GIS analysis of historical maps of villages connected to the monuments enabled a discussion concerning the communication pattern, settlement system and land use of the studied period which also could be related to the physical geographical setting. Phenomenological methods included field surveys at both locations, photography and analysing relevant paths of movement in the historic landscape.

## Larv

The municipality of Larv is situated close to the southern border of the contemporary rich agricultural plains of Västergötland, and constituted the parish village of Larv parish in historical times. Contemporary land use patterns of the area to a large degree correlate with variations in soil geology, where the agriculturally dominated plains consist mostly of glacial clay and postglacial sand. To the east and south of Larv extends an area dominated by uplands covered in glacial till and more low-lying valleys of glaciofluvial deposits (SGU). In historical times the area displayed a mixture of two-field and one field systems, where variations can be observed between the villages (Jansson 1998, 121 f.). This variation further emphasizes the mixed character of the landscape (Fig. 2).

The area surrounding Larv is rich in archaeological and historical sites (see Hjohlman 1978 for an overview). Several grave fields and single graves surround the western part of the area called Larvs Hed (Larv Heath) – where the runestone stands today – as well as the hill where the church of Larv is situated. These grave fields along with the large burial mounds of the area indicate that Larv was a place of importance during the

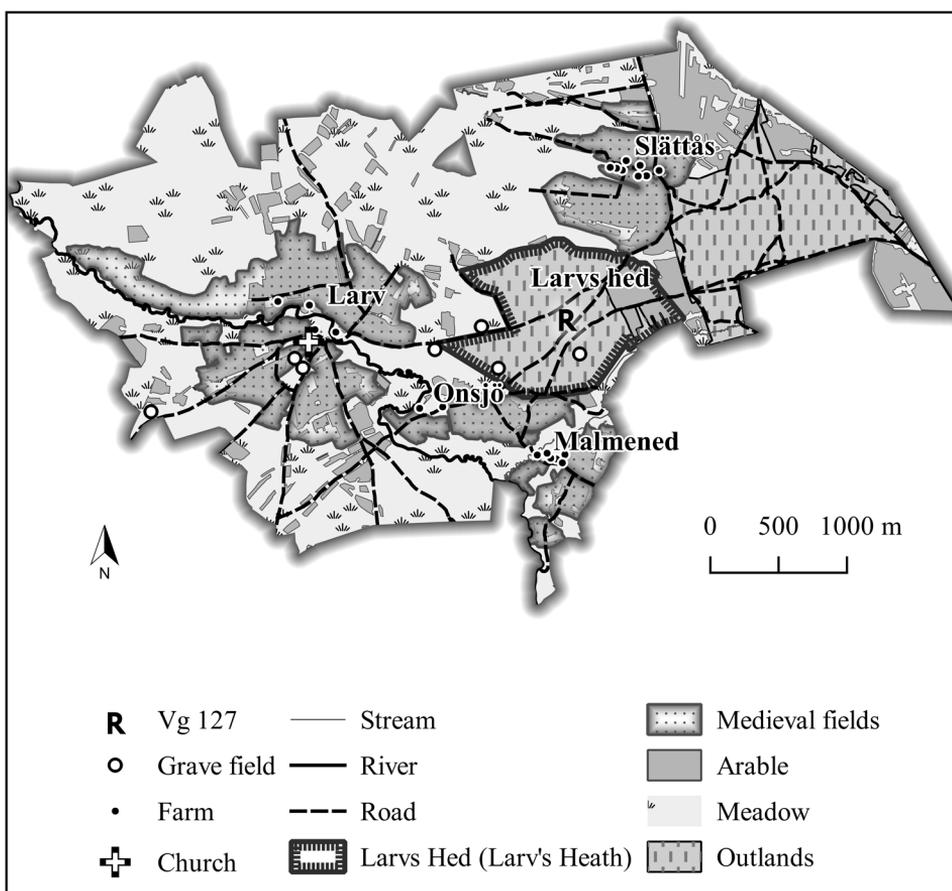


Fig. 2. Redrawn and combined version of historical maps from the period 1795–1851 of the villages surrounding Vg 127 on Larvs Hed. Medieval fields are indicated on these maps through narrow parcels of arable and meadow most likely related to ridge-and-furrow field systems. The runestone and surrounding grave fields are also marked.

Iron Age. The pattern of graves in the vicinity seems to indicate that most grave fields appear in a context with an underlying geology of glacial alluvium, while the clay and sand plains in comparison do not exhibit the same concentration of burials. While this might indicate that the clay plains were only sparsely populated during the prehistoric period, the loss of remains due to the intensive nature of modernized farming in these areas seems a more likely explanation.

There is a diversity of grave types and monuments in the area. The amount of graves should be seen as a strong indication

of several Iron Age settlements in the area. Few archaeological excavations have however been undertaken concerning Iron Age material. Unfortunately only one local artefact can be tied to the Viking Age, an axe head found in Långjum, although the origin of its discovery remains unknown (Hjohlman 1978, 67 f.). There are also traces of a long Christian continuity in the area. In the 1860s the old church was torn down in favour of a new structure. However parts of the still used baptismal fount indicate that it originates from the 13th century, which is also supported by the Romanesque church

depicted in a conceptual map from 1796 (LMA 16-lar-28b). This together with the Christian imagery found on the runestone could indicate some religious continuity from at least the early/mid 11th century onwards (Johansson 1978, 78 ff.; *Bebyggelseregistret*; Siljedahl 2015, 32 f.).

By looking at historical maps and archaeological monuments it is possible to make some assumptions concerning the age of various transportation routes (Fig. 2). Historical maps of the area show that the historical network of roads surrounding Larv and the area of Larvs Hed more or less still remains to this day. This may indicate that the roads might be even older (Siljedahl 2015, 40f.), remaining fixed in areas where the underlying geology presented good foundations for travel. At least the southern one of the two paths which passed the runestone in historical times is clearly tied to permeable soils, as opposed to the clay-dominated plains (Fig. 2). It has been suggested that the road through Larv was part of the larger medieval transportation network through Västergötland from Gamla Lödöse to Skara. This road is probably one of the older ones found in the region, which is supported by the large number of mounds and other archaeological monuments surrounding the road through Västergötland (Sawyer 1986, 345 f.). Communication routes may sometimes aid in the dating of a monument, but this relationship works vice versa as well. Runestones have been analysed in relation to travelled paths (Wideen 1955; Sawyer 2000; Brink 2002; Norburg 2015) which in turn may provide evidence of the possible age of older infrastructure.

Other types of remains that might be difficult to analyse are agricultural remains, although these are useful in order to gain insight into the socio-economic factors of a prehistoric location. The area surrounding Larv is characterized by a large number of

archaeological sites related to abandoned fields. A majority of these have been defined as ridge-and-furrow field systems, but due to their characteristics they are most likely connected to oat cultivation in the 19th century (Mascher 2002, 41).

The location of the runestone is in itself an interesting place. As can be seen in historical maps of the village of Larv and its surrounding localities, the area called Larvs Hed was probably not used for agricultural purposes until fairly recently. Many of the medieval fields were located in a more centralized manner, with areas such as Larvs Hed being used for other purposes – for example as pasture. The comparatively young present agricultural activity on the heath thus supports the idea that the runestone in Larv stands in situ, as there has been no reason to move the stone in the periods preceding the historical documentation of its location (see below). Another thing that becomes clear is the relationship between Larv and other surrounding settlement units (see Fig. 2). Larvs Hed seems to have been a form of common outland pasture which was first divided by the surrounding villages in connection with the agricultural reforms of the 18th and 19th centuries. Larv together with the adjacent villages of Onsjö and Malmene in some ways constituted a single village community, where Larv held religious centres (church and rectory) and Onsjö constituted a place of more secular importance (Claeson 1978, 248 f.). The ownership patterns further illuminate this complexity, with all villages holding plots of land inside the boundaries of the others. While this might be the result of a late medieval development (e.g. Karsvall 2016), it further emphasizes the close connections between these settlement units with the common pasture forming a central area. *Larvs Hed* or *Larva Hed* has also been mentioned as the location for one of the rallies/meetings held during the Västergötland rebellion in 1529. It

is not mentioned where on the heath the rally occurred (Kjöllerström 1963), although with the runestone as the most prominent feature it is not impossible to speculate that it served as some sort of marker to meet by. This gives a sort of secondary life/purpose for the stone, with some elements of its possible original function still useful (visibility) but the main message (the text and imagery) becoming less important.

The runestone Vg 127 is historically well documented, both in written sources (from 1672 onwards) and in drawings (from 1687 onwards). It is situated in the area of Larvs Hed, in the middle of a modern field – a very visible location from the adjacent roads – and its sheer size also adds to its visibility (2.67 m high and 1.83 m wide). There are no indications that the stone has been moved or altered in any way (Svärdström & Jungner 1970, 243 ff.). Since Larvs Hed with high probability was not used for agricultural purposes until fairly recently, and the historical sources point out its current position, it is possible to say that the stone stands *in situ*.

The inscription can be translated as: “Ôlvir(?) and Áskatla raised the stone in memory of Gunnarr, Sigtryggr’s son, a good and valiant man. May the Lord God save his spirit” (Bertelsen 2015, 69). This is a very common structure for texts on runestones. Stylistically it is made in what is known as a “birds-eye-view” (or b-e-v) with some elements of Ringerike style. Based on Gräslund’s typology the stone can thus be roughly dated to 1010–1050 AD (Bertelsen 2015, 69; Gräslund 2015, 43 f.). The imagery of the stone is heavily influenced by Christian attributes. In the centre there is a large but simple cross with double circles in the middle. Surrounding the cross are four leaves, believed to represent the biblical tree of life (Bertelsen 2015, 69 f.). Both the stylistic features and some of the linguistic features share similarities with runestones found in Södermanland and

Uppland as well as a few Danish runestones (Bertelsen 2015, 69; Svärdström & Jungner 1970, 244 f.). For a detailed analysis of the linguistics concerning Vg 127 see Svärdström & Jungner (1970, 243 ff.).

In some ways Vg 127 is very general, two persons commemorate someone who died, with an end part which in this case says “May the Lord God save his spirit”. We can assume that people in the region knew who at least Gunnarr or Sigtryggr were, and perhaps Ôlvir(?) and Áskatla also were well known there. The stone could reflect the participants’ religious beliefs, or the religious attributes could be something that would have been seen as favourable in the public eye of the local inhabitants. In any case it is possible to say that the location was strategically chosen, people would react to it/interact with it. It was meant to be seen by others, local inhabitants and passers by alike.

Vg 127 in Larv is located in what we can call the “public space” of Larvs Hed, its location chosen in order for others to see the monument. With clear visibility from the surrounding roads in combination with its size it was most likely meant to be seen. As a manifestation of some sort, this indicates that the persons who had it made either had or strove for power in the region. With no indication of kinship between the persons erecting the stone and the one commemorated on it, it is difficult to say what their relationships were. It is nonetheless arguably a very bold statement to erect such a monument on a public site connected to so many places. A great amount of resources would have been needed to create this monument, supported not least by the large and “advanced” carving. Several persons would – based on its size – also have been necessary in order to move and erect the stone itself. In summary, the monument was not erected by a person of lower standing (Fig. 3).

As previously mentioned, Larvs Hed was obviously a significant location, and by



Fig. 3. Close-up picture of Vg 127 situated on Larvs Hed. Photo by Carl-Olof Siljedahl.

looking at historical maps it is possible to suggest that it was not used for tillage until the late 19th century. With Larv being the administrative and religious centre in early historic times it is possible to discuss whether this area was used for local meetings, perhaps resulting from purely natural or geographical factors. This would however require further research.

## Nöre

The village of Nöre is located in the upper Ätran valley, in the northern parts of a region historically known as Sjuhäradsbygden. Nöre is located to the south of the parish village of Dalum, with a Romanesque medieval church. Almost the entire valley floor in the area consists of glaciofluvial deposits and glacial silt/sand, apart from the floodplain which

naturally consist of flood-plain deposits. Lime from the lime-rich soils of Falbygden to the north has enriched the fertility of soils in the river valley, perhaps contributing to the long history of human settlement in the area. This is marked not least by a rich variety of grave fields following the course of the river valley. Some of the graves show signs of overlapping burials, suggesting a long continuity of certain burial locations (Artelius 1993, 10 ff.). The uplands surrounding the river valley are almost entirely dominated by glacial till and at least the area to the east of Nöre seems to have been more sparsely populated at least during the Late Iron Age.

During historical times, the Ätran valley served an important communication role, connecting the inlands of Västergötland with the coast of Halland and the Danish kingdom. A road called “Redvägen” or “Ätrastigen” followed the course of the river and was used several times by campaigning troops (Andersson 1992). The graves of the region indicate that the river valley served a similar function during prehistory (Jacobsson 2014, 80). This is further supported by the runestones of the upper Ätran valley, where mentions of travels to the west are much more common than eastward travels (Svärdström & Jungner 1970, 308 ff.).

Historical agriculture in the area surrounding Nöre was based on a one-field system, with annual cropping of relatively stable arable fields. The one-field system and its inherent land use was primarily a result of a development starting during the 14th century, where the rural system of the area was adapted to the shifts of economic markets and new consumption patterns in north-western Europe (Andersson Palm 1997). The agricultural system that preceded this shift is still rather uncharted territory, but is reflected partly in the many strip fields observed in historical maps of the region. Strip fields from neighbouring areas have been excavated and

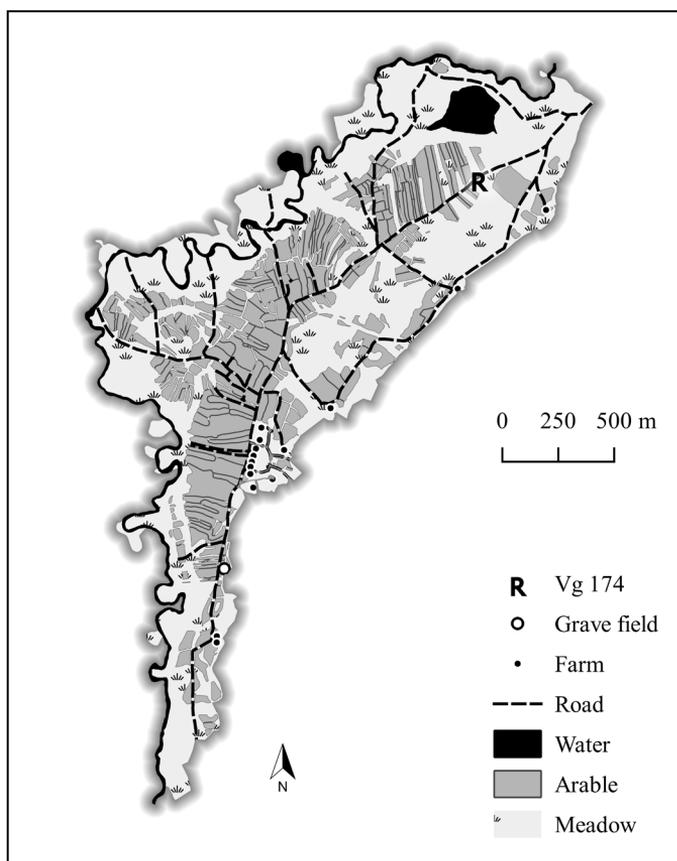


Fig. 4. Redrawn version of the map of Nöre from 1783 (LSA O3–10:1) with the runestone and a neighbouring grave field marked.

roughly dated to 500 AD (Mascher 1993), while dates from Halland and other regions instead point towards a period between the Late Iron Age and the Early Middle Ages (e.g. Connelid 2004; Mascher 2005; Widgren 2014).

The village of Nöre consisted of 14 farms during the 17th century (LSA O3 96–97) and was divided between the parishes of Dalum and Timmele. Land use was organized according to the one-field system described above, and it is clear that a majority of the arable during this period was divided into strip fields. This early map can be effectively compared to a map from 1783 (LSA O3–10:1) which more accurately shows the older

elements of the landscape. The arable fields have been extended since the 17th century and a new north-western area of arable has appeared which was clearly divided into strip fields. In the 17th century this area was simply characterized by dry heathland (LSA O3 96–97). This indicates that the farmers started to recultivate plots of land whose field boundaries still remained intact from an earlier period. Based on the results from Halland and southern Västergötland (see above), it is relatively safe to assume that the layout of arable fields seen in the map from 1783 reflects the extent of arable during the Viking Age or the Early Middle Ages (Fig. 4).

The runestone in Nöre, Vg 174, stands

on the borders of this newly re-cultivated area on the late 18th century map, but is also depicted in the same location on the border between heathland and meadow in the earlier 17th-century map (LSA O3 96–97) – which seems to be the oldest surviving image of the monument. In this map, the text is clearly directed away from the road. The 17th-century map also shows that the monument is located on the border of another settlement unit called “Ambjörnarp” and may thus have served as a border mark (e.g. Tollin 2010, 44 f.). This border function should not be overemphasized as the border just as well may have been adapted to already existing landmarks. The monument, however, also seems to have been placed on the border between different land use types (see Fig. 4) where at least the arable fields most likely predate the runestone.

In the present landscape the runestone stands on the border of a rather sharp glaciofluvial terrace currently as well as historically used as arable. A small tractor road passes a few metres north of the runestone in a north-east to south-west direction, a road which during historical times constituted the main road between the village and the parish church of Dalum – but also connecting to the wider road network of Redvägen (described above). This road leads down from the terrace into a small depression to the north-east where a small stream passes between pastures down to the lake of “Flatasjön” (historically known as “Nöre sjö”) further to the north.

The monument is somewhat smaller than Vg 127 with a height of 2.3 metres and a width of 1 metre. In order to read the inscription it is necessary to walk away from the road and stand on the opposite side of the stone, something which as described above, together with other evidence also supports the idea that the stone has not been moved from its original position (Svärdström & Jungner 1970, 317). According to Svärdström and

Jungner (1970) Vg 174 can first be found in written sources from 1667 and 1684 and in pictorial depictions from 1687. As previously mentioned, however, the monument is also roughly depicted on the geometrical map from 1642 (LSA O3:96–97). The inscription reads in translation: “Gamle(?) raised this stone after Helge, his son, who drowned” (ibid.). Vg 174 differs in style from Vg 127. It is a non-zoomorphic/ornamented carving that dates to roughly 970(?)–1020 according to Gräslund’s typology (Gräslund 2015, 43 f.) with an arch/portal-shaped inscription that might have some religious meaning behind it (see Bertelsen 2015, 61 f.). It is thus possible that the runestone in Nöre is slightly older than the one in Larv, although its simplicity may be tied to other factors such as personal economy or taste. For more details concerning the linguistic interpretation of Vg 174 see Svärdström & Jungner (1970, 317 f.).

One of the interesting aspects of the Nöre stone is the text, since it can be considered a very personal message of a father commemorating his son who drowned. There are only seven stones in Sweden that display some variant of the verb drown (*drunkna*), which makes these stones quite unique (see Wulf 1997 for further discussion concerning runestones bearing this word).

The topographical position and direction of the monument and its text is interesting in this regard. In a certain sense, the monument constitutes a rather private message displayed in a public area, meant to have a public effect. Travellers on the road passing by the runestone would have to take some time away from travelling to read the text itself, which was not possible “on the move”. This meant that the only persons who actually read this text were people genuinely interested in its message. A majority of runestones were most likely erected in relation to power manifestations and heritage rights (Sawyer 2000) and the message – as in the case of Vg



Fig. 5. Close-up picture of Vg 174 in Nöre. Photo by Carl-Olof Siljedahl.

127 described above – would thus have been displayed publicly and to as many people as possible. In the case of Vg 174, the message is clearly unrelated to power structures but the monument used a common contemporary discourse to spark the interest of the traveller, while the text itself may be a warning or a simple memory of a sad accident.

The monument is clearly connected to water, not only through the text but also through its location close to the lake of Flatasjön and the river of Ätran. It is only possible to speculate on the drowning location of Gamle's son, but a plausible explanation might be that he drowned in the river while mowing hay on a particularly troublesome day. The slope is also quite steep by the lake and the incident might have been the result of a fall. Regardless of the exact drowning location, the son's death seems to have been a tragic accident rather than a more honourable

death "in Viking" (which occurs quite regularly on other stones in the region). There was no deed or power to commemorate, only a sad event in the life of a family. This in turn may explain the location of the monument as well as the direction of the text (Fig. 5).

## Comparisons

By comparing the locations of Vg 127 and Vg 174 some similarities emerge. Both are located by roads that were most likely frequently used for long-distance travel. They are located close to watercourses. A large river such as the Ätran would have affected everyday life in the region, and the local inhabitants would have interacted with it on a frequent basis for various reasons. This of course makes the mention of drowning on Vg 174 interesting. Vg 127, however, is more difficult to directly put in

relation to the Larvaån, but from a spatial point of view it is within close proximity of the stone, and there could be some form of relation between the two. At both locations there are signs of prehistoric activity – not least marked by the grave fields of Larv and the combination of graves and strip fields in Nöre – indicating a well-developed landscape during the active period of the monuments in question. In combination with the presence of early medieval churches, this could indicate a long-term economic and demographic stability in these areas.

When it comes to the texts and inscriptions there are clear differences. Vg 127 is probably a little younger, and clearly more “extravagant” than Vg 174. This can be attributed to typological, economic or other factors. Vg 174 however displays a more personal message in contrast to Vg 127 where there are no signs of any direct family relation between the individuals concerned, although there might be some “political” affiliation involved. Another factor that differs is of course the size of these stones, with the one in Larv being larger. This indicates that Vg 127 probably needed to involve more people in order to move and raise the stone.

The typology of runestones overlaps in dating from one style to another. Variations in style might be due to stylistic currents or regional differences. Since there is such a large overlap between the style of these runes, however, it is possible that they were made within the same lifetime but, as previously mentioned, Vg 127 could be somewhat younger. The phenomenon of runestones occurred during a rather short period of time compared to other types of monuments. Both regional and economic factors could thus lead to similarities as well as quick changes in popular styles.

The runestone in Nöre stands on a historical border between land use types (arable and meadow/pasture) as well as a

topographical border between a terrace and a depression. This border character most likely made it suitable to serve as a boundary marker between settlement units sometime during the Middle Ages and onwards. The monument in Larv in a certain sense stands on the border between underlying geologies and landscape characters, but the heath itself was a much more uniform area which was shared by the surrounding settlements. Erecting a monument referring to individuals on a common pasture is a clear display of power over the other settlement units. Whereas the stone in Nöre may have solidified existing landscape relations, the stone in Larv could be seen as an intrusion on common agreements in the area or as an attempt to secure power developed over time through rights of kinship.

This interpretation is further supported by the direction of the texts in relation to potential paths of movement during the Viking Age. The runestone in Larv displays the text and the clearly Christian symbolism in the direction of travellers on the road to the important church in Skara – where a diocese was established during the 11th century (Theliander 2004, 106 ff.) – which indicates that the persons in the text meant for their names to be spread far and wide. In Nöre, the text displayed on the runestone is instead directed away from the road, supporting the idea that it was not meant as a display of power. This runestone was rather intended only for a selected few who were not in a hurry and with a clear interest in actually reading the text. Perhaps this monument was also intended to attract the prayers of the readers, but these were most likely meant for the souls of the individuals involved rather than the worldly power of still living people.

The two runestones thus share some similarities in overall setting, but a detailed examination reveals the individual factors of their purposes and the locations in which they were erected.

## Conclusion

Runestones can in some ways be seen as parts of a homogeneous phenomenon, but as shown in this and other studies (e.g. Hansson 2014) it is also important to analyse them as individual objects. By analysing runestones as parts of a larger landscape – with both man-made and natural aspects – it is possible to place them in a larger context. This of course works vice versa – the texts and art can be connected to the landscape – something which becomes clear with Vg 174 in Nöre mentioning someone drowning so close to the Ätran and the nearby lake. This means that it is possible to physically connect the text on the stone with the area it is located in. Vg 127 in Larv seems to be a manifestation of power placed in a very central location. This runestone has clear attributes associated with Christianity, with some features somewhat esoteric for modern eyes. This monument can thus be connected to the wider Christianization of the area, or to other structures of power in connection with the establishment of a more organized Christian society in Västergötland.

There is indeed some potential in developing an overview of different runestones based on their individual characteristics. In the case of the runestone in Nöre, a comparison with the seven other stones displaying the word “drown” could provide fruitful results. The other stones displaying this word are U 214, U 455, SÖ 39, SÖ 83, SÖ 318 and GS 7. Based on text structure and typology it can be assumed that all of these stones were erected between the 11th century and the early 12th century. All stones – except SÖ 83 of which only handwritten fragments of text remain – commemorate close family members who died by drowning, with some even mentioning locations or places. Apart from Vg 174, only U 455 can be considered to be located in its original position and would thus provide a good starting point for a

comparative landscape analysis. The runestone in Larv would be effectively comparable to other stones erected in similarly “public spaces”, which could provide a better insight into processes of power during the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages.

In this article we have shown the necessity of combining runestones, the text and art upon them as well as their landscape context in order to broaden the perspectives used in their interpretation. Even though there are many similarities among runestones, each of them has an individual meaning that reflects the persons involved in their creation, even if the texts might be generic or short. There is solid potential in the runestone material found in Västergötland, and by conducting similar investigations at other locations in the region a more profound knowledge of the region’s Viking and early medieval history could be produced.

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#### *Abbreviations*

- GS = Jansson, S. B. F. (ed.). 1981. *Sveriges runinskrifter. SRI 15. D. 1, Gästriklands runinskrifter*. Stockholm
- Sm = Kinander, R. (ed.). 1935–1961. *Sveriges runinskrifter. Bd 4, Smålands runinskrifter*. Stockholm.
- Sö = Wessén, E. & Brate, E. (eds.). 1924–1936. *Sveriges runinskrifter. SRI 3, Södermanlands runinskrifter*. Stockholm
- SRI = *Sveriges runinskrifter*. Utg. av Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien. 1–1900 ff. Stockholm
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