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## Memory Set in Stone: Another Look at the Berezan Runic Inscription

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# Memory Set in Stone: Another Look at the Berezan Runic Inscription

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Scandinavian runic inscriptions constitute unique and reliable historical sources. Each Scandinavian runic stone tells a story. When someone encounters a runestone, they don't just observe it. The runic inscription on the stone makes them feel part of the life experience of the deceased. The Berezan Scandinavian runic stone from the Viking age is evidence of the Viking trade and a micro-narrative about the Viking age landscape. The text on the stone is understood as common topos for the development of cultural experience. It highlights the human lives, activities, and cultural environment that influenced the existence of the stone.

From the topography of the lands that the Scandinavians encountered during their trading expeditions, runic stones gradually filled the landscape with descriptions of human experience. Scandinavian runic inscriptions still visible today identify the location of past history in the given landscape and link the past and present with real evidence of Scandinavian activity. The definition of a runic stone can be formulated as a memorial object specially carved and erected at mnemonic multidimensional points. Runic inscriptions are placed on its surface, materializing communicative actions and consolidating mutual obligations of those who commissioned them.

The reference to the Berezan runic inscription highlights Viking activity of the past that has not yet been sufficiently interpreted. In this way, the inscription demonstrates the limits of modern attempts at establishing facts. At the same time, there are enough reasons to research the Berezan runestone along the Eastern way as this runestone appears to be the only one in the Eastern European landscape. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to review two groups of runic inscriptions: runic inscriptions referring to the Eastern way on Berezan Island, and runic inscriptions from Sweden and Danish landscapes that are discussed in terms such as *felagi* and *hvalf* present on the Berezan stone. Information about these rune inscriptions is evidence of cooperative relations in the communicative context of memorial stones. In this way, the inscription demonstrates the limits of our modern attempts at establishing the place of Berezan Island in Viking trade.

An increase of research interest in the study of the relationship between natural and social space through runic stones is evident from the latest developments

of Northern European scholars Judith Jesch<sup>1</sup> and Oscar Jacobsson.<sup>2</sup> In particular, connections between runic stones, roads, and reservoirs in the Northern European and Eastern European landscapes received modern scholarly emphasis in the work of Northern European researcher Gabriel Norburg.<sup>3</sup> The problem of the interpretation of the Swedish runic inscription from Berezan Island is found in the works of Fedor Braun and Ture Arne,<sup>4</sup> Omeljan Pritsak,<sup>5</sup> and Sven Birger Fredrik Jansson.<sup>6</sup> In recent years and at present an increasingly careful approach should be applied to runic stones as instruments of communication and carriers of historical memory.<sup>7</sup>

However, in the mentioned articles very little focus has been put on the spatial dimensions of this runestone. In order to fully understand it, it is necessary to seek a better understanding of the local landscape and to provide a context in which the runestone can be analyzed in terms of combining the knowledge of various related inscriptions from Swedish and Danish landscapes.

That is why the study of the rune inscription meaning as a mini-narrative about the Viking age serves as the key to understanding the Berezan stone and its communicative purpose. The text on the stone does not simply refer to the experience of special forms of human culture in the Viking age. This is an acknowledgment of the existence of life in a certain way, not in a certain place. The text on the stone signals movement from the contemplations of observers to participants of the trade expeditions. In this context, the stone turns into a biographical, translucent object. The runestone on the island of Berezan appears as a voice and place of memory.

The main task of the research is to study and interpret runic texts from the *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*<sup>8</sup> electronic database, as well as their logical categories that link their meaning to an understanding of the Berezan runestone. In general terms, the texts are analyzed concerning the Eastern way of the Viking age, and at the same time, for understanding the role of Berezan Island in trade communication. The research demands the following steps in studying the Berezan rune inscription:

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- 1 Jesch Judith, "Runic Inscriptions and the Vocabulary of Land, Lordship, and Social Power in the Late Viking Age," in *Settlement and lordship in Viking and early medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Bjørn Poulsen and Søren Michael Sindbæk (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), 31–44.
  - 2 Carl-Olof Siljedahl and Oscar Jacobsson, "People, Runestones and Landscape in Västergötland," *Lund Archaeological Review* 23 (2017): 135–49.
  - 3 Gabriel Norburg, "The Spatial Order of the Scanian Runestones. Analysing Runestones and Pathways through GIS," *Lund Archaeological Review* 20 (2014): 21–38.
  - 4 Fedor Braun and Ture Arne, "Den svenska runstenen från ön Berezan utanför Dneprmyningen," *Fornvännen årgång* 9 (1914): 44–48.
  - 5 Omeljan Pritsak, *The Origin of Rus'* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).
  - 6 Sven Birger Fredrik Jansson, *Runes in Sweden* (Stockholm: Gidlunds, 1997).
  - 7 Martin Hansson, "Life in Medieval Landscapes: People and Places in the Middle Ages," *European Journal of Archaeology* 17 (2014): 173–76.
  - 8 *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Uppsala universitet, accessed December 9, 2018, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?if=srdb&table=srdb>.

1. examining Berezan's rune text within different levels of contextuality;
2. determining a meaning for the text as a mini-narrative about the landscape of the Viking age;
3. establishing a group of signs as a text, identifying its basic components;
4. gaining a deeper understanding of the Berezan text and its historical runic commemorative tradition by combining knowledge from various connected inscriptions from Swedish and Danish landscapes.

In order to implement these steps, the content analysis method serves as the principal method of research. The research is carried out in two stages. The first stage involves the grouping of conceptual components into logical categories recorded in the runic inscriptions. The second stage involves examining the text on different contextual levels. The procedure of content analysis requires bringing the text of the runic inscriptions into an expedient set of certain semantic units, which are then subjected to an accounting and analysis. They are then grouped into logical categories that represent variables, fixed in graphical form.

Application of the content analysis method in the given study provides a deeper understanding of the text and its historical information about the Berezan runic inscription and the Viking trade.

During the Viking age Scandinavian merchants based on transit points of large rivers, the Volga and later the Dnipro, formed the Eurasian trade route through the Northern way. The shortest and the most efficient route to Byzantium passed through Kyivan Rus. It began in the Varangian Sea, passed through the Neva, Lake Ladoga, Volkhov, Lake Ilmen, the Lovat, and continued into the Dnipro and across the Black Sea to Constantinople. In the *Rus Primary Chronicle* it is described as the South to North route.<sup>9</sup> Western European chroniclers knew the trade route as well. The account of Adam of Bremen accounts for the last stage of "the way from the Varangians to the Greeks," when its most travelled segment was the route from Hamburg to Jumne (Vollin).<sup>10</sup> The development of "the way from the Varangians to the Greeks" was effected by the transformation of the trans-European system of military and trade communications, in which the Scandinavian entities played a major role. All three variants of the *Rus' Primary Chronicle*, the Laurentian, Hypatian, and Radziwill codices, contain the explanation that the Varangians controlled not only the northern variants of the ways from the Baltic to the Volga, *Austrvegr* (East way), but also the southern route across the Western Dvina to the headwaters of the Dnipro River, and across the Dnipro on "the way from the Varangians to the Greeks."<sup>11</sup>

9 *Povest vremennykh let [The Primary Chronicle]*, edited by Varvara Adrianova-Peretz and Dmitry Likhachev (St. Petersburg: Science, 1996), 13.

10 Adam of Bremen, *Deianiia arhiepiskopov gamburgskoi tserkvi. Nemetskie annaly i khroniki X–XI st. [Deeds of Bishops of the Hamburg Church. German Annals and Chronicles of the 10th–11th Centuries]* (Moscow: Russian Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Science, 2012), 391–93.

11 *Povest vremennykh let*, 13.

The network of Rus trading posts, inhabited essentially by people from the North, facilitated travel along the Eastern trade routes. The loose-knit character of the Northern martial organization would have enabled a high level of mobility even for the warriors, but it is not unlikely that their fluid organization allowed the warriors to take commissions for a limited period, acting as an armed guard for groups of merchants engaged in long-distance trade expeditions. Serving as an armed guard or convoy protecting trade in the Black Sea areas provided the opportunity to see action and gain both reputation and riches. The Viking and Rus cultures were based on trade and travel, which created an ideological structure that affected all people, merchants or not.<sup>12</sup> The role of the Birka in this trade route system was, apparently, significant, being associated with the birth of urban law and norms of medieval jurisdiction, later known as *Björköarett*. It was suggested that Birka united several centers bearing the same name — Birka to Melar, Birkö to Alands, Berkerøen — to the future of Bergen, Bjarkoy island in Northern Norway, Berezan in Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> The flexible character of the Northern organization of merchants enabled a high level of mobility for the merchants. In such a trading network of the Rus, finding new assignments along the way or on a return route would not have been a problem. To support this supposition, a runic inscription found in Ukraine should be mentioned. The inscription tells of Grane, who had the memorial made after Karl, his comrade in arms. This is the only runic stone in Eastern Europe, found on Berezan Island, an important stop on the trade route from Scandinavia to Constantinople.

The island is mentioned in *De administrando imperio* as the island of St. Aitherios, where the Rus usually rested on their way between Kyiv and Byzantium. Information about St. Aitherios Island is found in chapter 9 of the treatise “On the Governance of the Empire,” describing movement towards Rus on “the way from the Varangians to the Greeks.” Thus, from the text of Constantine Porphyrogenitus it can be seen that the Rus reequipped their *monoksily* for sea travel on St. Aitherios Island, and perhaps such a staging post on the island was not uncommon. Byzantine emperors were concerned about the presence of the Rus on the Lower Dnipro and near the island of St. Aitherios, as reflected in the agreement between Byzantium and Rus, signed by Prince Ihor in 944, which stipulated that the Rus did not have the right to winter at the mouth of the Dnipro on St. Aitherios Island. According to Gennadii Litavrin, that ban was caused by concerns from the Byzantines that Rus could compete with the inhabitants of Chersonesus as fishermen and procurers of salt on the territory of the Lower Dnipro.

In the second half of the 20th century archeologists found some archaeological complexes and casual finds from the 10th through 12th centuries on Berezan Island. Medieval layers from the 10th through 12th centuries were found and Katya Gorbunova has investigated a half dugout that is possibly also from the 10th through 12th centuries.

12 Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, “The Birka Warrior. The Material Culture of a Martial Society” (Ph. D. diss., Stockholm University, 2006), 80.

13 Gerasim Lebedev, *Epokha vikingov v Severnoi Evrope [The Viking Age in Northern Europe]* (Leningrad: University of Leningrad Publishing House, 1985), 61.

In the opinion of Katya Gorbunova, the archaeological data obtained in 1962–1972 indicate the temporary and periodically renewed nature of the settlement of Berezan Island in the 10th and 11th centuries.<sup>14</sup>

Most likely, the settlement on Berezan Island in the 10th through 12th centuries occupied a very small territory. The island was of too great strategic value to the Byzantine Empire to allow the Rus to inhabit it during winter, as it could lead to colonization of the area by the Rus. On the return trip, the island served as the last resting place before facing rapids, portages, and the backbreaking oar work of fighting the river's currents.<sup>15</sup>

Adelaide Svanidze assumes that the terms *birk*, *berek*, which form the basis of names of early trade, civil law, and a number of trans-shipment trade points from the East Baltic to the coast of the North Sea were contained in the names of trade places across the whole Baltic region, including Rus. In the Viking age in the Gulf of Finland there were several islands and places named Birkala, a place name similar to Berezan Island. These places were located on “the way from the Varangians to the Greeks.”<sup>16</sup> Perhaps local involvement and the importance of Berezan Island in trade contacts in the Viking Age were especially notable.<sup>17</sup>

Runestones memorialized merchants with enough information to reconstruct at least some of the routes they took. A stone was excavated in 1905 on Berezan Island at the mouth of the Dnipro on what used to be known as the Varangian Way “from the Varangians to the Greeks.”<sup>18</sup> The stone was found on the island, which is mentioned in *De administrando imperio* as the island of St. Aitherios, where the Rus usually rested on their way between Kyiv and Byzantium. It is evident that Grani had chosen a place where his monument could be read and understood. Excavations on Berezan Island revealed “a gable-stone of a coffin” with an inscription in Scandinavian runes: “Grani made this sarcophagus in memory of Karl, his partner.” The runestone was raised to memorialize a person—an echo for eternity.<sup>19</sup>

The word *half* is often interpreted as a burial mound or grave vault, but Elena Melnikova suggests that Grani had not only erected the stone with the runic inscription

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14 Katia Gorbunova, “O kharaktere srednevekovogo poseleniia na ostrove Berezan [The Character of a Medieval Settlement on the Island of Berezan],” *Problemy arkheologii* 2 (1978): 170–74.

15 Gary Dean Peterson, *Vikings and Goths: A History of Ancient and Medieval Sweden* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2016), 231.

16 Adelaide Svanidze, *Vikingi—liudi sagi: zhizn i navy* [*The Vikings—People of the Saga: Life and Customs*] (Moscow: New Literary Review, 2014), 178.

17 Ildar Garipzanov and Oleksii Tolochko, *Early Christianity on the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks* (Kyiv: Institute of Ukrainian History, 2011).

18 Braun and Arne, “Den svenska runstenen från ön Berezan j utanför Dneprmyningen,” 44–48.

19 *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*.

but had even made the mound, too.<sup>20</sup> This assumption is, however, not necessarily true, because the word *hvalf* could simply mean stone grave or, on occasion, runestone.

The study of the informative features of the Scandinavian runic inscriptions refers to the term *hvalf* (*hvalf*) as “graves” by depicting a collection of disparate data in a form convenient for perception. The material from *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* is grouped and presented in a more concise form: the output group of data is divided into groups, aggregated by a general index. Among the inscriptions *hvalf*, only six (G 7,<sup>21</sup> Vg 95 and Vg 146,<sup>22</sup> Ög 240,<sup>23</sup> U 170,<sup>24</sup> X UaFv1914<sup>25</sup>) feature the meaning of a runestone as a mound or grave. The grouped data is shown in Figure 1.1.

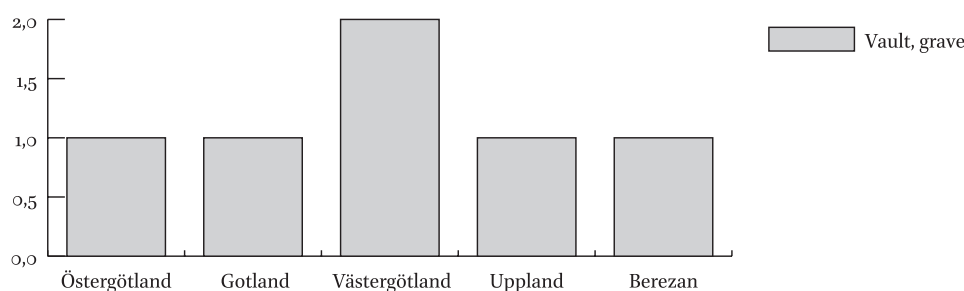


Figure 1.1

*The Distribution of Hvalf With the Meaning of “Vault, Grave” in Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of the 21st Century*

All six runic inscriptions (five from Sweden and one from Ukraine) are linked by an indication of raising the stones in memory of the people (sons, parents) traveling far from home. The inscription from Sweden (Vg 146) points to the erection of the *Bjärn* stone in memory of Margaret, his partner.<sup>26</sup> From this inscription we can assume that

20 Elena Melnikova, *Skandinavskie runicheskie nadpisi. Nove nakhodki i interpretatsii. Teksty, perevod, kommentarii* [The Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions. New Finds and Interpretations] (Moscow: Eastern literature, 2001), 201.

21 G 7, *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Uppsala universitet, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=18439&if=srdb&table=mss>.

22 Vg 146, *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Uppsala universitet, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=16677&if=srdb&table=mss>.

23 Ög 240, *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Uppsala universitet, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=15754&if=srdb&table=mss>.

24 U 170, *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Uppsala universitet, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=17001&if=srdb&table=mss>.

25 X UaFv, *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Uppsala universitet, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=21575&if=srdb&table=mss>.

26 Vg146, *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Uppsala universitet, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=16677&if=srdb&table=mss>.

the language is likely about a trading companion (*felah(a)*), just like the inscription from Berezan.

The shape of the Berezan runestone is very similar to the Gotlandic picture stones, which leads some historians to interpret the stone, and the people mentioned on it, as Gotlanders. However, their names are not “typical” Gotlandic names, which might indicate that they were from the Swedish mainland.

What makes the Berezan runestone more interesting is that Vikings trade campaigns from the Swedish lands (Västergötland, Gotland) to Byzantium proceeded along the Dnipro, which is pointed out in Eastern European toponymy and recorded in the runic inscription from Pilgårds (Gotland, G 280). The runestone refers to the southern trade route along the Dnipro river to Berezan Island.<sup>27</sup> The inscription commemorates a man who must have died south of *Ru[f]stæini* (Rofstein) while traveling through *Æifur* (Aifor). The latter indicates one of the Dnipro’s dangerous cataracts, whereas the former has been identified as a cliff located close to the cataract. The place names *Æifur* and *Ru[f]stæini* are of greatest interest on the inscription. The name *Æifur* occurs in a text drafted for Constantine VII around 950: “At the fourth great rapid, which in Rus is called *Aifor*; everyone brings their ships to land and those who are on it stand and watch after they disembark.”<sup>28</sup> The toponym *Ru[f]stæini* is not known from other sources, thus its interpretation is hypothetical. It is connected with the first thrust of the Neiasytetskyi rapid, which was called *Rvanyi kamin*. Thus the inscription was erected in honor of a Gotlandic merchant who died while sailing to Byzantium through one of the most dangerous parts of the Dnipro route.<sup>29</sup>

The inscription indicates the commercial interest of the Vikings in the Eastern route, therefore the inscription on the Berezan stone should be understood in connection with the function of the Dnipro trade way. Stefan Brink noted that the runestone from Berezan belongs to the type of burial monuments made of limestone or sandstone, which had strong connections to churches and were erected in many graveyards in Sweden. Because archaeological excavations on Berezan revealed the remains of a settlement and graves from the 10th to 12th centuries, it is possible to suggest the existence of a church and Scandinavian visitors there.<sup>30</sup> The translation of the Icelandic word *felag*, from the word *filaka*, on the Berezan runestone is connected with trade. Gun Westholm has interpreted the word’s meaning as “business partner.”<sup>31</sup>

In Figure 1.2 the term *felagi* is displayed in 10 indicators. The study shows that the term *felagi* occurs in conjunction with *drengr* in several inscriptions from Denmark

27 G 280, *Sammordisk runtextdatabas*, Uppsala universitet, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=18719&if=srdb&table=mss>.

28 Gyula Moravchik, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De Administrando Imperio* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1985), 58–59.

29 Sven Birger Fredrik Jansson, *Runes in Sweden* (Stockholm: Gidlund, 1987), 61.

30 Stefan Brink and Neil Price, *The Viking World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 520.

31 Westholm Gun, “Gotland och omvärlden,” in *Spillingsskatten: Gotland i vikingatidens världshandel*, ed. Pettersson Ann-Marie (Visby: Läns museet på Gotland, 2008), 126.



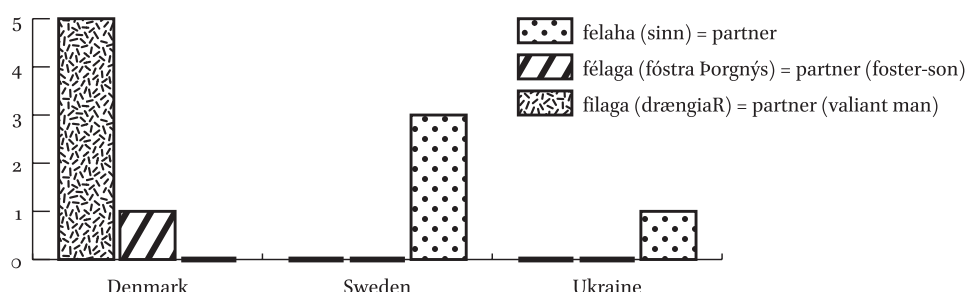


Figure 1.2

*The Distribution of the Term Felagi in Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of the 12th Century*

(filaga (drængiaR) = partner (valiant man): DR 68, DR 127, DR 262, DR 339)<sup>32</sup> and once with *fóstra Þorgnýs* (DR 125 félaga = partner (foster-son)).<sup>33</sup> Such a distribution of the term in Danish runic inscriptions highlights the nature of military campaigns, since the people mentioned in the inscriptions are mostly warriors. The term *felagi* never occurs with other words, except for valiant man, suggesting that this also implies a close relationship: it is, indeed, often translated as a fellow-in-arms. But in Swedish runic inscriptions, on the contrary, the term *felagi* has often been generalized to partners in trade, signifying “common property” (felaha = partner: Vg 122, Vg 182, U 391).<sup>34</sup> Thus, the term has been interpreted as both fellow-in-arms and fellow-in-trade, the exact meaning conditioned by the origin of the inscription from a particular land. It should be emphasized that the Karl and Grani, mentioned on the stone of Berezan Island can be identified as fellows-in-trade from Gotland, Upland, or Västergötland, as suggested by the use of the terms *hvalf* and *felagi*, found only in these regions.

The word *felagi* was borrowed into English where it became fellow. “Fellow” is someone who has provided money for a common enterprise, a business partner.<sup>35</sup> This sense is certainly recorded in runes. So, a rare piece of evidence from the end of the 10th to the beginning of the 11th centuries is a runic inscription carved onto a stone on Berezan Island, which testifies that a considerable part of the travelers on the Dnipro route came from the Swedish community.

Runestones are striking monuments in the landscape. Understanding the landscape and analyzing the potential connection of a runestone with other monuments within the same area are important in its general analysis. The meaning of landscape is connected to people, territorial factors, and the importance of social connotations through connections to a wider world.<sup>36</sup> In order to understand a monument it is necessary to analyze its geographical factors. Trade routes are commonly found near a

32 *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Uppsala universitet, accessed December 9, 2018, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?if=srdb&table=srdb>.

33 *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*.

34 *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*.

35 Raymond Ian Page, *Reading the Past Runes* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1987), 51.

36 Carl-Olof Siljedahl and Oscar Jacobsson, “People, Runestones and Landscape in Västergötland,” *Lund Archaeological Review* 23 (2017): 138.

runestone. Connections to runestones, in turn, entail a broad historical scope, in which the monuments are seen not only as products of their time, but also as testaments of the past.

The Berezan runestone held the general mnemonic function of maintaining social memory. The runestone was an individual expression in the sense that it reiterated the deeds of a deceased person. However, it should be emphasized that individual memories would not exist were it not for a social memory that provides the foundation and context for them. Social memory here refers to the selective preservation, construction, and obliteration of ideas about the way things were in the past in favor of interest in the present.<sup>37</sup> It is important that runestones were erected in past places of importance, such as along the Eastern way. Due to such usage, a runestone both reminds people of the past and, at the same time, brings something new to the equation. A runestone can be regarded as a memory object, i. e. a mnemonic citation. In this paper, I have shown that in order to understand how the Berezan runestone acted as a mnemonic agent it is useful to introduce the research of the category of *felagi*. It has been shown that the Berezan stone structured the landscape in a certain way and also regulated how traders encountered and experienced it. Not only places, but also evidence of fellows-in-trade were brought together in the landscape through runestones (not only the one on Berezan island, but also those in Gotland, Upland, and Västergötland) (Figure 1.3). This resulted in a common understanding of landscape where the runestone was erected as well as the life and death of the deceased, in other words, honoring their memory. Runestones were seamlessly interwoven in both individual and collective memory. The work of memory is a practical performativity based on experience, a profoundly material and strongly embodied process. Commemorative practices are performative and recurring in nature, which is why it is important to point out that it was not only the runestone raiser that traveled through the landscape.<sup>38</sup>

The Berezan runestone had an impact on people, in this case of the commonly traveled Eastern trade route. Such a practice-based approach serves to create a more dynamic perspective on the runestone as a monument and how it actually linked people together and is thereby connected to the Swedish trade community. A single runestone on Berezan Island may have affected and, in some instances, perhaps controlled movement in the Eastern landscape. The arrangement of stones with similar rune categories in certain patterns, which is evidence of the existence of trade partners (from Gotland, Upland, Västergötland), indicates that approaches to runestones were highly controlled and perhaps perceived as predestined. This process of receiving

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37 Ruth Van Dyke, "Imagined Pasts Imagined. Memory and Ideology in Archaeology," in *Ideologies in Archaeology*, ed. Reinhard Bernbeck and Randall McGuire (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), 234–39.

38 Ing-Marie Danielsson, "Back Walking Down Memory Lane: Rune-stones as Mnemonic Agents in the Landscapes of Late Viking-age Scandinavia," in *Early Medieval Stone Monuments: Materiality, Biography, Landscape*, ed. Howard Williams, Joanne Kirton and Meggen Gondek (UK: The Boydell Press, 2015), 79.



Figure 1.3

*Adaptation of the Runic Term Felagi in Connection with Viking Trade  
With the Territories of Northern and Eastern Europe*

information about successful trade campaigns through repetitive regularity contributed to the formation of a lasting memory.

Berezan Island played a major role in the Eastern way in the contexts of the Viking age and medieval communications, being a stage for trade-related activities as well as a transit zone for further travels. This is indicated by the only Scandinavian runic inscription in the East European landscape, the interpretation of which refers to commercial content terminology.

The runestone on Berezan Island was compared to other stones, and the inscriptions on those provided a better insight into trade relations processes on the Eastern way during the Viking Age. In the case of the runestone on Berezan Island, its comparison with other stones displaying the word *felagi* yields important results. The stones displaying this word with the meaning of “fellow-in-trade” are U 391, Vg 122, and Vg 182. Based on their text structure and typology, it can be assumed that all of these stones commemorate people from the Swedish community (Upland and Västergötland) who had taken part in trade campaigns.

The primary group of trade-related inscriptions on the Berezan runestone is limited, their small number indicates that the evidence remains selective. However, certain repetitive references highlight common motives for travel, such as trade. In view of this, Berezan Island acted as the gateway to communication with territories in the east and south, all the way down to Byzantium.

Moreover, the research demonstrates that the landscape is not only a neutral background but an integral part of the Berezan runestone. Through the connection of

the runestone with the geography and the area of Berezan Island, we can understand the meaning of its text as a mini-narrative about the Viking age landscape.

The current research shows how the Viking runic monumental tradition was important in identifying landmarks of past activity honoring the dead and combining past and present, thus playing a crucial role in defining historical memory. The Berezan runestone may essentially be considered as a fragment of memory about trade activity, as it serves to activate memories of distant places and the importance of the Eastern way.



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