



Affective Interventions and 'the Hegemonic Other' in Runestones from Västergötland and Södermanland, Sweden

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In the eleventh century AD, the Scandinavian countries were in the final stage of the process of conversion to Christianity. Local and regional processes of negotiations towards a Christian hegemony took various courses in different parts of Scandinavia. There are few substantial indications that social tensions resulted in violence. Rather, archaeological evidence indicates a gradual change. This paper highlights how these processes of negotiations were expressed by counter-hegemonic groups that took advantage of the affective affordances of runestones. By raising specific runestones, these non-Christian groups were part of an agonistic political process, as described by the political philosopher Chantal Mouffe.

Keywords: agonistics, Mouffe, affect, affective styles, affective communities, political negotiations, relational ontology

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Introduction

The Scandinavian Viking Age is usually counted from the last decades of the eighth century to the end of the eleventh century. This 300-year period, or 10–12 generations, was a dynamic time, characterized by significant changes. Society was in a process towards increasing hierarchy, as family and kin-based chiefdoms and petty kingdoms became the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden and the Icelandic free-state.

In tandem with the transformation towards the Scandinavian kingdoms, there was an ongoing process of transition from non-Christian or pagan beliefs to the Christian religion (see e.g. Birkeli 1973; Staecker 1999; Carver 2003; Janson ed. 2005; Brink 2008; Nilsson ed. 2010; Androschuk et al. eds 2016). The two worldviews differed sharply, in particular regarding rituals and cult performances (Gräslund 2001). Christian religious life was tied to a belief system with strict dogmas and a prescribed liturgy. Sacred space was restricted, like the church and the consecrated churchyard, and sometimes complemented by processional roads or specific holy features in the landscape. Liturgical practices were performed by exclusive specialists trained according to established rules and criteria. By contrast, the pre-Christian beliefs can be characterized as agency-operating agreements with practice-based manifestations and performative actions, primarily connected to local or regional customs, called *forn siðr* by later generations (Hultgård 2008; Raudvere 2008). These ‘ancient customs’ included broad aspects of daily life, such as ‘religion, faith, morality, custom, and tradition /... as well as/ traditional conceptions and ideas about the way things were to be done’ (Jennbert 2011:164). The archaeological evidence linked to pre-Christian contexts demonstrates that a number of ceremonial and ritual actions were integrated into various parts of social life. For example, ritual places were created, like specific areas of the farm (e.g. Steinsland 1994:79–80; Carlisle & Milek 2016; Storli 2016:234) and particular localities in the landscape (Andrén 2002; Sundqvist 2017) for the living and the dead. In this way, certain areas were connected to place-based ritual activities, and had strong ritual and mythical connotations. As this was integrated with different dimensions of life, it gave such ideas an open and flexible character (Näsström 2001; Andrén et al. eds 2006; Steinsland 2007). In turn, *forn siðr* also entailed the existence of a number and variety of agents at various levels of society, and with different sets of specialist knowledge. Through their knowledge of the appropriate ways to stage myths and rituals, including their geography, paraphernalia and intangible notions, these ritual actors possessed ritual capital which was connected to several social arenas. Most likely, the Christian customs challenged and confined their influential positions in various arenas of the *forn siðr*, or ancient customs.

This article discusses the transitions from one belief to another through a study of runestones in Västergötland and Södermanland. We start by giving an account of Mouffe's discussions of changes of power relations through negotiations, in effect as agonistic political processes, in which the power struggles are analysed through the recognition of a hegemony and a counter-hegemony, or relational other. The relational other, a group adhering to a non-Christian faith, is also discussed in terms of an emotional or affective community, having its own emotional or affective style (from Barbara Rosenwein 2006), which resulted in the designing and raising of specific runestones with particular affective affordances. We then highlight how these struggles were dependent on a situated, relational and sensing body, followed by case studies of particular runestones in Västergötland and Södermanland, after which conclusions are presented.

Agonistics – a model of analysis for political negotiations

There are many ways to approach analyses of changes in power relations. One entrance worth pursuing is to understand struggles for hegemonies in the way Mouffe has suggested. The struggles are between different beliefs, such as struggles between non-Christian and Christian beliefs, as discussed in this paper. In their studies of hegemonic political processes, Mouffe and her colleague Ernesto Laclau (1985) argue that the existence of an obvious social and political hegemony at the same time requires the existence of what they call its 'relational other'. The oppositions between the two can take the shape of antagonistic struggles against enemies but, as Mouffe (2016) develops in later works, such oppositions do not have to be articulated in an antagonistic way, but rather as an agonistic process. The term agonistics is connected to the Greek word *agon*, which can be translated as 'fight, battle', but importantly also as 'challenge'.¹ In an agonistic negotiation the hegemony's relational other will, according to Mouffe, counter the dominant hegemony by making the conflicts visible and confronting the oppositions. For this, the dissidents will need specific 'channels' (Mouffe 2016:135) for articulating their presence. Further, an agonistic public room is needed. Mouffe takes her examples from the art scene, where dissonances can be visualized in unexpected ways. Thus, an arena

1 In classical Greece the *agon* (ἀγών) (agones in plural) competitions were performed in sports as gymnastics and horse and wagon races and also in music, poetry and dance. These contests were predecessors to the Olympic games (Nordisk familjebok 1904: Agon: 353–354).

for visualizing and confronting conflicts will have to be at hand (Mouffe 2016:40). In such a process the affective dimension is extremely important, argues Mouffe (2016:22, 47, 83–84), stressing that this dimension is not always acknowledged. However, the significance of the affective component in discussions of power relations has also been emphasized by, for instance, Gilles Deleuze. Departing from Foucault, Deleuze (2006:60) argues that power has no actual form, but rather presents itself as an affect.

An example of how dissidents articulated their presence at art scenes in Sweden in the 1960s, and how affective affordances of different kinds were utilized in their art works, is found in figure 1. The oil painting ‘Landscape and church’ (*Sw. Landskap och kyrka*) by Dick Bengtsson (1936–1989) shows the kind of landscape that is usually of interest in cultural heritage discussions, and thus is considered important to preserve and cherish for future generations. We see a rural and pastoral landscape, where a road leads us to a church with a peaceful and fenced graveyard and standing stones to its left. As highlighted by Åsa Wall (2005), Bengtsson’s paintings are usually very provocative for those who consider the environments he brings out as their cultural heritage, or as something that is familiar to them. The well-known and familiar landscape becomes transformed through the addition of a swastika in the left-hand corner, and instead comes across as something troublesome, potentially nasty and hostile (Wall 2005:44). Curators, reflecting on his works, argue that Bengtsson reveals cracks within what has been described as the modernist project, and the disadvantages that follow from a society that is based on the rational and ideological (Castenfors & Widenheim n.d.).

While the example above is from our modern western society, Mouffe declares that her model of agonistic processes can be transformed and adapted to other types of cultures. In the same context, it is worth considering that Walter Ong (1990[1982]:57–59), in his characterization of orally-based societies, focuses on the importance of agonistic word duels and other polarizing manifestations. There is even an example from one of the Icelandic Sagas where two conceivable combatants, viewing a wall tapestry, perform a word duel based on the motifs in the tapestry (Hougen 1940:111; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:209–210). Within contexts of combat, verbal and intellectual, knowledge or belief is mediated, contested and at times transformed to the extent that the main purpose of the duels can be to engage in interpersonal relationships, which may be of friendly or antagonistic character (Camille 1993:53).

In the following, we adapt and use Mouffe’s model of understanding struggles for hegemonies in an analysis of runestones from Viking-Age Scandinavia. Before discussing specific runestones from Västergötland and Södermanland, a few general remarks are presented on the raising of rune-



Figure 1. 'Landscape with church' (*Sw. Landskap med kyrka*) by Dick Bengtsson, 1969. Oil on canvas. Measures 73.5x91cm. Source: Göteborgs konstmuseum, ©Dick Bengtsson/Bildupphovsrätt 2021.

stones in the landscape. In order to ascertain whether it can be suggested that runestones were raised in what would be the Viking-Age equivalent of an agonistic public room, the question of the original placement of runestones in the landscape needs to be addressed.

Runestones were originally raised in connection with features in the landscape where people commonly travelled, paid visits and/or seemingly had to slow down or rest. In the cases where the original places of runestones are known, they are found to be raised in connection with, in order of frequency, burials, creeks, roads, bridges and borders (Back Danielsson 2015:69 with references). These features in the landscape could often overlap, for instance roads or routes were commonly associated with cemeteries (Engesveen 2005), or a river and a road were close to a burial ground, and so forth (Klos 2009:114, 117). The carved surface of runestones, when placed by both cemeteries and roads, would have faced the travel routes (Ekholm 1950:138–139), so that it might be directed towards the living that moved in the landscape. Burial grounds were thus passed, most likely on a regular basis, but they were also locations that people visited, even at times when no funeral or burial was taking place. There are several indicators, within

Late Iron Age Scandinavian contexts, including the Viking Age, suggesting that the person who was buried was considered a form of living entity, an ancestor, who, as a dweller in the burial mound, had agency and communicative skills that enabled various exchanges and reciprocal engagements (Back Danielsson 2007:250, 2015:69–70).

It is also very common for runestones to have had other stones in their proximity, in fact, the category ‘other stones’ is the second most common landscape feature near runestones (Klos 2009:114, 117). Occasionally, these could have been arranged in such a way that they more or less directed and guided how your body was to approach the runestone(s), or in Mouffe’s terms, how to arrive at the arena or art scene (see examples in Back Danielsson 2015, 2016). Such arrangements would also entail a control of how and when the runestones’ different affectual components came into being and were experienced, which underlines the importance of the affective dimension in the processes of negotiations.

Before delving deeper into these intra-constitutive engagements and enmeshments through runestone examples from Viking-Age Västergötland and Södermanland, it is necessary to provide a brief sketch of affect, agency and bodies, and their roles in agonistic political processes.

Affect, agency and bodies

The study of affect within archaeology has generally been restricted to senses or emotions (e.g. Harris & Sørensen 2010; Brady & Bradley 2016), and how these are connected to, for instance, memory work (e.g. Hamilakis 2013). Affect has also been a topic of interest in discussions of encounters with archaeological art (Back Danielsson 2012; Jones & Cochrane 2018). We argue that affect is the result of a co-involvement between the runestone and viewer. In this respect, meeting a runestone standing in the landscape can be described as an immanent communicative event, which both encompasses and realises affects (Back Danielsson & Jones 2020:10). Following Seigworth & Gregg (2010:1), affects thus arise in the midst of inbetween-ness, in the capacities to act and be acted upon, and affect is in this view a force that passes between and adheres to bodies. Affect can also invite and stimulate playfulness (Hustak & Meyers 2012:77–78; cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1988:12). As a consequence, agonistic political processes, identified by Mouffe as involving affect, may not only be the product of polarizing manifestations driven by struggles for power, but may also be propelled by affect itself.

Affect requires sensing and responding bodies. The human body, with all its corporal sensibilities, can be understood as a node through which

various material phenomena and affective possibilities are processed, and vice versa; a social and cultural awareness of certain material expressions enables a society to use material culture's affective qualities. As Hamilakis (2013:125) writes: 'It is through affectivity that sensorial flows and interactions animate the flesh of the world'. The connections between sense and affect are intricate, however, and the distinctions are not always sharp. When it comes to emotion, it can be understood as a manifestation of a feeling, in fact, as an interpretation of affect. Research into emotions, or interpretations of affect, forms a large field crossing into several academic disciplines, not least history. William Reddy (2001) and Barbara Rosenwein (2002, 2006) are two scholars working in this field, both of whom regard emotions as historical phenomena that can be linked to historical situations, social groups and power relations. Here we find Rosenwein particularly useful. In her studies of Medieval European societies, she identified group-specific expressions of feelings and emotions. To categorize specific identity groups, she introduced the concept *emotional communities* for groups that share specific values and norms regarding emotional understanding. The particular expressions, or articulations, she identifies as *emotional styles*. Her research demonstrates that individuals and groups can simultaneously belong to several emotional communities, based, for example, on intersecting categories like age or gender. In the context of runestones, we propose that the concepts of *affective communities* and *affective styles* might be more useful so that bodies, materiality and materiality's affective affordance might be at the centre of attention.

In recent archaeological discussions it is no longer controversial to acknowledge the fundamental and complex position of material phenomena in the inter- and intra-relational processes of social dynamics and various ways to understand this (e.g. Fahlander 2014). As material realities are connected to practice (Barad 2008), practice can also be materially defined (Alaimo & Hekman 2008; Arwill-Nordbladh 2013). Furthermore, as specific practices are situated in time and place, actions are by nature embodied in its corporal dimensions (Alaimo & Hekman 2008:7–8). Through various performative practices individuals and groups negotiate around society's norms and structuring principles. The various agents in such processes of negotiations are connected to different, specific positions of identity, for example regarding rank, age, kin, gender and religious beliefs. All of these positions could relate to the subject's different positions in the respective order of power. The specific individual subject could thus include a number of positions which could relate to various, intersecting, orders of power (Young 1997; Lykke 2010). This contributes to a complex and dynamic social structure.

Many components within these practice-based negotiations, like meetings, feasts or, as in this case, the raising of a runestone, were also expressed in a material way, which now constitutes archaeological evidence. These physical phenomena offered a number of culturally formed properties, which taken together endowed the material phenomena an *agency* (Gosden 2005; Back Danielsson 2015). Due to materiality's wide range of meanings and polysemous quality, different sides of physical characteristics and cultural articulations will be more or less 'activated' and meaningful, depending on the specific questions and contexts. In this way, the material world in a broad sense is indispensable in the actions and courses of events which took place in the lived life. As Marie Louise Stig Sørensen (2009) shows, Viking-Age material culture took an active and demanding place in actions and counteractions, something that runic inscriptions also convey (see for example Jesch 1998).

Relational corporeality and affectivity

Over time, human societies have paid attention to bodily differences in a number of ways. The organization and interpretation of specific characteristics according to presence and absence can divide up bodies in binary categories, which in our society is more or less a norm. However, there are other ways to look at bodily similarities and differences, where the situated corporal subject is at the centre. This makes the comparisons and characterizations more open and flexible, relating to specific questions. With such a relational ontology (Watts 2013; Fahlander 2014; Normark 2014; Fredengren 2014, 2015) specific relational traits are singled out. One such trait is size. In line with a traditional, binary, perspective, an item could be categorized as big or small. Size can also be expressed more precisely by connecting it to a defined unit in a measure system. But, size can also be contemplated in a relational way. In this case, the basis is a specific point of reference to which one would have to relate. Regarding size, such a point of reference could be the human body, which could be understood as a phenomenological node. Objects, animals and natural features would be seen as bigger or smaller than the human body. For instance, a miniature may attract a viewer, and a drawn-in and enmeshed spectator may oscillate between taking the place of the miniature and occupying their own scale (Bailey 2005:42). However, it must be pointed out that scale need not always be measured against the human body. Alberti (2013), employing the perspectivism of Viveiros de Castro (e.g. 1998, 2012), argues that miniature clay pots of La Candelaria, from first-millennium-AD Argentina, do not have size as a measure of scale, but rather that intensity of decoration

offers a measure of scale, and continuous variations may occur. In her studies of miniature gold foil figures of Late Iron Age Scandinavia, Back Danielsson (2012, 2013) has stressed that the very concept of miniature is delimiting as it reinforces representationalism, and denies the figures the possibility of being objects in their own right. Scale must thus be seen as something that cannot be taken for granted, but rather as something that has the potential of generating affect and relationships of varying intensities. Where runestones are concerned, though, we contend that they, and their at times monumental features, reinforce the impressions of form, material and visibility. They will inevitably claim presence and attention in the landscape. Often, the exaggerated scale demonstrates power, dominance and authority, and sometimes even threat (Renfrew 2007:122). As Susan Stewart (1993:36) states, the enlarged monument is generally connected to the landscape with its seeming stability and geographical continuity. If humans wish to interact, it is usually the big monument that demands a visit. Sometimes the natural place itself integrates as a necessary part of the monument, adding physical features that capture and control the view of the visitor. At times, these monuments and the surrounding landscape would be parts in a unity. Such places can constitute a background to collective memories and narratives, like origin myths or stories of dramatic events in the past (Chapman 1997; Arwill-Nordbladh 2008; Lund & Arwill-Nordbladh 2016).

In view of the above, we turn to a discussion of runestones from a few locations in Västergötland and Södermanland, from the eleventh century. They demonstrate, in different ways, how Mouffe's agonistic political processes came to be expressed in Viking-Age Scandinavia, and how a variety of affective affordances were employed in this process.

Runestones in Västergötland and Södermanland

The majority of Västergötland's runic inscriptions are dated to the Viking Age and primarily to its second half. On many stones, a cross is engraved, which situates the runestones in a Christian cultural context. The runestone milieu belonged to a higher social stratum. It is also generally held that the leading magnate families were consolidating and affiliating with various lines and branches of certain families and kin groups, which were stepping forward in the process towards the establishment of the Swedish kingdom. In the following century, the written documents prove a power struggle for the royal crown between a few magnate families, of which some show a network of land properties and kin affiliates in Västergötland (Lindqvist & Sjöberg 2013). However, it must be pointed out that the way towards the

kingdom was not direct. Regarding the Mälars Valley, including Södermanland, Uppland and Västmanland, where the majority of Swedish runestones occur, a differentiation appears among the group of high-ranking people as a whole (Zachrisson 1998). One of the ways to secure one's social position, both towards other magnates and farmers, and towards the king, was to raise a runestone. Thomas Lindkvist (1997), when discussing the Sigurd's carving in Södermanland (Sö 101), concludes that the dissonance between its Christian text and the images of an ancient narrative might express tensions between the emerging local Christian kingdom and local magnate circles. Most likely, Lindkvist's view is valid not only for Södermanland in the eleventh century, but also for other Scandinavian areas, including contemporary Västergötland. It must also be noted that even if it seems clear that there was a strong connection between the formation of the Swedish kingdom and the transition to new beliefs, it has been debated whether the early driving forces originated from the highest strata, as for example Brink (2008) states, or if it was a bottom-up process (Theliander 2005). It is likely that both the time frame and the social direction of the process were open to local variation and negotiation. Most likely, the change from old customs to the Christian custom was an intricate and complex process, and the archaeological evidence indicates that the path was not straight. Nevertheless, an example is seen in the investigations at Varnhem in central Västergötland, which demonstrate, on a local scale, that the Christian beliefs and an increasing social hierarchy were co-connected to establishing an aspiring ideological and political hegemony (Axelsson & Vretemark 2013; cf. Nykvist Thorsson 2021).

Västergötland

At *Källby ås*, on the moraine-covered agrarian plain not far from the mountain of *Kinneulle* and the lake *Vänern*, Sweden's largest lake, stand two extraordinarily large runestones. One of them, Vg 55, measures 4.5m, and is the tallest of Västergötland's approximately 200 runestones. Its inscription tells us that Ulf and Ragnar raised the stone to commemorate their father Fare, a Christian man, having good faith in God (figure 2; Jansson 1963:117–118; Jungner & Svärdström eds 1970:68, 75–82). This double Christian affirmation is emphasized with a large engraved cross. Close to Vg 55, however, most likely not in its original place, stands Vg 56. The text says that Styrlak (or Styrlaug) raised the stone after Kår his (or her, as Styrlaug is a woman's name) father (figure 3; Jungner & Svärdström 1970: 68, 75–82). Most of the stone's surface is covered by a large figure: a man's body with the head of an animal. The human-animal hybrid is depicted in



Figure 2. Runestone VG 55 reads: Ulf and Ragnar, they raised this stone in memory of Fare, their father ... Christian man. He had faith in God [UlfR ok þæXiR Ragnarr ræistu stæin þannsi æftiR Fara, faður sinn ... [k]ristinn mann, saR hafði goða tro til Guðs]. Sources: Samnordisk runtextdatabas. Photograph: Bengt A. Lundberg, RAÄ, CC BY 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=59787145>.

profile, vigorously walking, dressed in trousers and with an object around the waist which has been interpreted as a belt. It might also be understood as a big ring. With his hand, the giant man grasps a snake's head, as if there has been a fight. The figure's animal-like head, with flapping ears, is possibly a mask. The character has been interpreted as Thor with his strength belt, but he may just as well represent a creature embodying such extra-human power which the symbiosis of man and animal could generate. The gigantic human-animal figure is unique but connects to a long tradition of man and animal hybridity. This hybridity tradition is particularly notable in Iron-Age iconography, like in the ornamental style of bronze and silver brooches (Hedeager 2011). Human-animal fusion also appears in personal name-giving practices, like Björn and Bera, meaning male and female bear, and Ulf, meaning wolf, and names with two components, like Thorbjörn and Ulfhild (Jennbert 2011:184–188; Coleman 2014). Other examples of man-animal metamorphoses include the idea of Bäsärk (Berserk), a warrior possessed by a raging animal's spirit, or Fylgia, a human's follower as an alter ego in the shape of an animal. Kristina Jennbert (2011:139) labels this symbiosis a 'Midgard mentality'. This underlines that the image on Vg 56 refers to non-Christian ideas. These concepts from times past differed markedly from the majority of the contemporary eleventh-century *Västgöta* runestones, such as Vg 55. Many stones of the time explicitly proclaim trust and faith in God and Christ through texts or cross images, and the eleventh-century runestones are generally believed to be raised in a Christian context (e.g. Gräslund & Lager 2008).

The runestone Vg 56 was moved to *Källby ås* in the seventeenth century, since it was believed, wrongly, that *Källby ås* was its original place. However, when removed from its seventeenth-century function as a bridge over a stream in close-by Skälvum to the *Källby* ridge, it was eventually discovered that the runestone did not fit or match the runestone piece that remained on the ground of the ridge. It was decided that the mighty and heavy runestone, Vg 56, would be left standing on the ridge nonetheless (Jungner & Svärdström 1970:75; RAÄ 2020). Regardless of the fact that Vg 55 and Vg 56 were not in absolute proximity of one another at their time of erection, they were still present within the same local community, not far from one another. Skälvum is only 6km from *Källby ås*. In this local context, Vg 55 and 56 give an indication of disunity or dissonance in Viking Age society. Being contemporary, their outspoken perspectives on Christian and pagan belief respectively, express a complexity and state of tension regarding these different ways of understanding the world (cf. Jungner & Svärdström 1970:82).

How, then, could the two runestones, now standing close to one another at *Källby ås*, take part in a local ideology-based politics of negotia-



Figure 3. Runestone Vg 56 reads: Styrlak/Styrlaug (?) raised this stone after Kâr his (or her, as Styrlaug is a woman's name) father [*Styr[l]akr/Styr[l]augr satti stæin þannsi æftir kaur, faður sinn*]. Sources: Samnordisk runtextdatabas. Photograph: Bengt A. Lundberg, RAÄ, CC BY 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=59780104>.

tion? Assuming that Vg 56, the stone with the giant man-animal hybrid is non-Christian, the stone shows a forceful creature, possibly fighting with a snake, referring to ancient concepts. It could be Thor, it could be some mythical figure, it could be a berserker, or it might refer to narratives, unknown to us. Whatever the image may refer to, with the gigantic stone and the huge man-animal figure, Styrlak/Styrlaug made an impressive statement for the traditional custom, when s/he wanted to commemorate Kår, the father. This resulted in a powerful, maybe frightening intervention regarding status, faith and place.

Ulf and Ragnar, who raised the extraordinarily high stone in memory of their father, Fare, made a statement regarding their status, faith and place, which was just as mighty. As they, like most other stone-raisers in the province, celebrated their Christian belief, Ulf and Ragnar belonged to the dominant faith. However, most of the runestones are not as conspicuous as Vg 55. Perhaps the impressive size and the cross were directed to Styrlak/Styrlaug's circles, but it is also possible that the eye-catching stone was turned towards the aspiring kingdom – this happened sometime when King Olof Eriksson Skötkonung (Olaf the Treasurer) temporarily resided in Västergötland. Olof was allegedly baptized in Husaby, only 6km away (Lindqvist & Sjöberg 2013).

However, the Christian expressions were not completely dominating on the runestones of the time. Not far from Källby, at Lärkegapet, Grästorp, stands runestone Vg 113 (figure 4). Two upright bands with runes are placed along both edges of the high, slim stone. The text is of the conventional type, saying that 'Dag raised the stone after Björn, his relative (*frände*), a very good theng'. The meaning of theng is not quite clear, even if the most widely accepted view is that it refers to a military position, perhaps connected to the Danish political sphere (Christoffersen 1982). Another interpretation is that it might be a more general designation for an independent farmer (Snædal 1999). We may conclude that Björn's position as theng must have been well regarded. There are about 20 theng-stones in Västergötland (Jungner & Svärdström 1970), thus a connection to this fairly large group also gave the protagonist a safe social identity. However, a most unusual attribute of Vg 113 is the image placed at the top of the stone, namely a Thor's hammer. The hammer's shaft is formed by the space between the two parallel text bands. We can see that Dag follows the contemporary custom regarding the text. But, through the image, Dag makes a clear non-Christian statement.

Yet another stone, Vg150 in Veland, Väne Åsaka, can be seen as an agonistic articulation against the Christian hegemony. The text says: 'Tyrvi raised this stone after Ogmund, her husband, a very good theng. May Thor consecrate [*Thor vige*]' ([our translation] Svärdström 1958:279–280). The



Figure 4. Runestone Vg 113 reads: Dag raised this stone after Björn, (his) relative (*frände* in Swedish), a very good thing [*Dag ræistu stn þannsi æftir Biorn frænda harða goðan theng*]. Sources: Samnordisk runtextdatabas. Photograph: Bengt A. Lundberg, RAÄ, CC BY 2.5.

runic ribbon is surmounted by a head of a bird of prey (see figure in Jansson 1963:150). Like Björn, Ogmund was also a theng. Here we can see how his widow, living in this exceedingly Christian milieu, was able to manifest a statement against the normative custom, claiming the old traditional habit by invoking Thor (Jansson 1963:120). Within this community, Tyrvi could allow herself to independently mark her (and probably her husband's) perspective regarding the ancient custom. The head of the bird of prey probably added to the stone's affective affordance, as such birds had deeply-rooted connotations with ancient myths. With this challenging formula, Tyrvi took the side of the old traditions. Actually, even her name, which means the god *Tyr's vi*, or sacred place, alludes to *forn siðr*. Maybe she belonged to those who would lose the agential capital of the traditional ritual tasks if they connected to the Christian faith. As the wife of a theng, she could quite possibly have been a '*husfreyja*', responsible for the farm's ritual and ceremonial events.

Vg150 is often compared with the Glavendrup stone in Denmark (Dk nr Fyn 26), which is approximately 100 years older. It was raised by Rangnvi for her husband Alle and by Alle's sons for their father. Alle is called *gode* for the Sölvs, leader of the hird and an honourable theng and *drott*. As Alle, Björn and Ogmund shared the position of being a theng, they, figuratively speaking, were brothers-in-arms. As strange as it may seem, the Glavendrup stone also includes the formula about Thor: 'May Thor consecrate these runes'. The inscription ends with a threat against anyone who would harm the monument.

It is worth noting that both Tyrvi and Rangnvi had the power to raise commemorative monuments for their husbands. Moreover, the invocation to Thor shows that they shared beliefs regarding the mythical world view, which they may have applied in similar ways. As Tyrvi probably was three to four generations younger than Rangnvi, Tyrvi and those of her circle, maybe as female cult practitioners like *gydjas* or *husfreyjas*, would have served as memory keepers by using their agential capital in ritual performances (van Houts 1999, 2001). With the advent of Christianity, the importance of this centuries-old knowledge must have eroded, making Tyrvi and her counterparts the hegemony's relational other.

We will now turn our attention to two runestones in Södermanland which were brought about through other affectual affordances, and which describe other ways of negotiating in agonistic political processes.

Södermanland

There are almost 400 runestones in Södermanland, which is many fewer than the neighbouring county Uppland, where more than 1300 are known.

For the most part, the Uppland runestones were raised during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries (Zachrisson 1998:130), that is during the so-called second wave of raising runestones, when professional rock carvers entered the scene. Of the runestones in Södermanland, around 41 per cent are equipped with a (Christian) cross, and around 12 per cent include a prayer in their inscription (Wilson 1994:39–40). However, it is not only crosses and prayers that are considered to be expressions of a Christian faith, but if phenomena such as names, concepts and other specific expressions are included (William 1996; Gräslund 2001), the vast majority of runestones in Södermanland can be considered Christian monuments. A few are nonetheless considered to be pagan, and two of these runestones are presented below. Both have what has been interpreted as a Thor's hammer carved on them. In this context, it is relevant to point out that many a burial in the Mälars Valley from the Late Iron Age, in particular from the Viking Age, have had so-called Thor's hammer pendants threaded on iron rings or iron necklaces, deposited on top of a centrally placed ceramic urn. Deposited in the ceramic urn were usually specially chosen burnt and/or unburnt bones, and the Thor's hammer ring adorned the neck of the urn, perhaps a creation or materialization of a new ancestral being or family member (Back Danielsson ms). This pagan burial custom occurs most frequently in the counties where the greatest number of runestones are or were raised. The reasons for the inclusion of possible Thor paraphernalia in pagan burials may be due to the fact that this Aesir god was perceived as having vital virtues connected to regeneration and fertility, and most importantly, Thor worked as a protector of the dead. Thor is considered to be the strongest of Aesir gods and is also the protector of Asgård, the home of gods, and of Midgård, the home of human beings (e.g. Ljungberg 1947). The idea of regeneration and rebirth after death can also be linked to Christ, and Christian ideals. The body of Jesus Christ was nailed to a cross, and the cross is connected to ideas of sacrifice, death, salvation, resurrection and eternal life.

Two runic inscriptions in Södermanland (Sö 86 and Sö 111) have what has been interpreted as Thor's hammers carved onto them (figures 5 and 6). Further, the lack of, for instance, a Christian prayer has strengthened the interpretation of these stones as expressions of pagan beliefs. Both runestones belong to Gräslund's (2001) type B-e-v (Birds-eye-view, or *Fp* in Swedish), which means that they are from the time period c. 1010–1050 AD. It must be pointed out that Christian crosses and Christian prayers are more explicit on early runestones (Wilson 1994:39). Regarding runestones from Uppland, Gräslund (2001:42) observes, that the Christian cross is more prominent on runestones from the first half of the eleventh century. Seemingly, the struggles between beliefs required the Christian commu-

nity in the eleventh century to be more explicitly Christian by making the cross more affective in appearance. What affective affordances might then a possible counter hegemony in another region have utilized, specifically in two areas of Södermanland?

Sö 86, Södra Åby, Västermo parish, consists of runic letters and image components carved onto a boulder. Needless to say, this means that Sö 86 is in its original place. The carving of the boulder measures c. 1.77 x 1.56m. Sö 86 appears to display a human-like figure: it has a face, a torso in the shape of Thor's hammer and two snakes depicted as somewhat tiny, bent legs (figure 5). The runestone Sö 111, on the other hand, does not have a human figure, but there is an alleged hammer of Thor hanging from the top of the runic ribbon, securely tied by the so-called Irish linkage (figure 6). As previously remarked, they have been interpreted as expressions of a pagan faith (e.g. Hultgård 1992). However, we think it is worth considering that at least one of these stones could be connected to both pagan and Christian beliefs, and that they may be discussed in terms of agonistic political processes, negotiating, amongst other things, memories in and of death. That is, competing expressions or polarizing stances are ambiguously placed and/or expressed in one and the same carving. In fact, we argue that it is possible that the deceased and the runestone erectors, belonging to different generations, might have been part of different affective communities.

The runic ribbon of Sö 86 is almost circular, and the two tiny snakes touch, nibble at, hold up, or constitute legs of a possible torso which is in the shape of the letter 'T', with a broader base at the bottom. Two sons, Ásmundr and Freybjörn, had the monument made in memory of their father Hærbiörn. It has been suggested that the face above the 'T' or torso is also a mask (see discussions and accounts of masks in Back Danielsson 2007). The sensibility of hearing might possibly be emphasized since the runic ribbon goes through the figure's head, as if the figure were listening to the words carved into it. Runestone Sö 175, Aspö, could be mentioned in this context, too, as it also shows a figure with a moustache, and the loops of the snake are held by the figure and are turned towards the figure's ears.

When encountering Sö 86, you would meet, and perhaps greet, a figure, possibly Thor himself. Considering the height of the carving, or of the figure, if you were an adult, you would be approximately as tall as the figure, and would not, in terms of height, feel either inferior or superior. Hence, affect is not produced through size, but in other ways. If you stood in front of the figure, and were of similar height, you might have the sensation of being drawn or pulled into the imagery, in fact you may become temporarily enfolded within the imagery and text to the extent that you are in the same position as Thor or the figure, and may read and listen to what unfolds within. Perhaps the viewer and the possible Thor character were



Figure 5. Sö 86, carved on a boulder, reads 'Ásmundr and Freybjörn had the rune-decorated landmark made in memory of Herbjörn, their father' [*Ásmundr ok Frøybiörn letu gæra mærki sirun/sirynd at Hærbiörn, faður sinn*]. Sources: Samnordisk runtextdatabas and SLM Mo25824 – Sörmland Museum.

mimetically responsive to each other, in the act of engagement? Such a reasoning would also stress the work of Sö 86 as a process of ongoing becoming. Do the two snakes, touching the torso, refer to *wyrmas* (meaning eating creatures such as dragons, worms, snakes, maggots, and so forth)? A body, living or dead, is constantly threatened by *wyrmas* and they signal that the body is under siege, a recurrent theme within Christianity (Thompson 2004:134). The intensities that would pass between viewer and image would in this case then be most affective, and the affect would also lie in the carving to be in life-size, that is, in the viewer's own size. Hence, people might have been given the opportunity to bodily approach the Christian life after death, till the Last Judgment, remembering that images are actively constitutive of social reality (Mitchell 1996). However, there are other components of the imagery that relate to pagan burial practices that would have been very familiar to the people who engaged with the carving. The carving can, in effect, be described as a ring with a Thor's hammer, which at the same time is an encircled entity or body. In other words, it cites pagan burial practices, where a Thor's hammer hanging from an iron ring was deposited on top of a ceramic urn.

Turning to runestone Sö III, Stenkvista parish, it must be noted that it is similar in its verbal construction to Sö 86, apart from both stones having a possible Thor's hammer carved into them. Here, three sons raised a landmark in memory of their father. It says: 'Helgi and Freygeirr and Thor-gautr raised the rune-decorated landmark in memory of Thjóðmundr, their father'. [Hælgj ok FrøygæiR ok Þorgautr ræistu mærki sirun/siryn at Þi-uðmund, faður sinn.]

The runestone Sö III was found as a constructional element of the floor of old Stenkvista church, and when this church was deconstructed and taken down in 1794, the runestone came to lie in the soil with its imagery and inscription turned upwards for some 30 years (Brate & Wessén 1936:83). It is now raised to a standing position outside the new church of Stenkyrka's eastern wall. On Sö III, the 'Thor's hammer' hangs the way a pendant would hang from a ring or a necklace. The Irish linkage holds Thor's hammer in place. This runestone has also been interpreted as pagan, as stated above. However, employing a more visual understanding of the monument, and how text and image work together, we suggest that this monument negotiates between divergent ideas about life and death. The inscription says that three sons raised the landmark in memory of their father. The last part of the text is 'Thjóðmundr, their father'. Thjóðmundr is written horizontally above, but outside, the runic ribbon at the bottom of the stone. 'Their father', on the other hand, is written vertically from the letters 'Thjóðmundr' up to the hammer's base, also without being inside a runic ribbon. In this way, the vertical carving 'their father' is added to the hammer of Thor, and can together be interpreted as a Christian cross. However, the very same feature can also be interpreted in another way. The carved runic letters outside the ribbon (horizontal plus vertical), together constitute another Thor's hammer. Although, of course, runestones as images are far different from modern imagery, we are in this respect reminded of figure 1, in which a work of art in itself expresses values or ideas that may seem, or are, contradictory.

Sö 86 and Sö III are unique in that they both have the expression 'sirun/siryn', which is interpreted as 'decorated with runes' (e.g. Hultgård 1992:90). Anders Hultgård suggests that the hammer and runic inscriptions together are ways to make sure that the monument, and those mentioned, are protected and made permanent by Thor. As with the names of those mentioned in the runic inscriptions of Västergötland, discussed above, the sons' names here allude to ancient Scandinavian gods. Thjóðmundr means protector of people (Eldblad 2002; Peterson 2007).

Since it is only the expression 'Thjóðmundr, their father' that is not included or put in a runic ribbon, it is possible that the father adhered to the non-Christian faith, but the sons did not. If this is the case, age differences,



Figure 6. Runestone Sö 111 reads 'Helgi and Freygeirr and Thorgautr raised the rune-decorated landmark in memory of Thjóðmundr, their father'. [*Hælgj ok FrøygæiR ok Þorgautr ræistu mæрки sirun/siryn at Þjóðmund, faður sinn*]. Sources: Samnordisk runtextdatabas. Photograph: Bengt Lundberg, RAÄ, CC BY 2.5.

or belonging to another, younger generation, could mean that one was part of a different affective community. It could also be a way to separate the living from the dead. The sons are linked together within the runic ribbon, and perhaps within a Christian context. They show respect towards their father by having a pagan hammer carved onto a stone, whose associations were typically Christian. By letting the phrase ‘Thjóðmundr their father’ be free-standing, while at the same time connecting both to the hammer and the Christian cross, the sons offered their father a safe transformation and passage to other realms, while at the same time adhering to the values of their affective community. The ambiguity argued for here, a way of visualizing an ongoing agonistic political process, could have been of central importance for the runestone erectors as well as for society in general.

Conclusions

In this paper it is contended that a number of runestones from the counties of Västergötland and Södermanland played an active part in agonistic political processes which revolved around different, or changing, beliefs. They are from the eleventh century and have been interpreted as non-Christian. The people who erected the stones, and those who saw them, understood their meaning as place markers and carriers of messages. Part of the message was conveyed explicitly in words and text, and part of the meaning was conveyed in an affective way by the impression made by the mere existence and imagery of the stones. By being part of the same affective community and being able to interpret the affective style of the monuments – material items that are exaggerated in relation to the human body, like unusually large stones, oversized images of a cross, a gigantic hybrid of man and animal, a hammer as a symbol of the God of thunder, a bird of prey which crowns an inscription where Thor is evoked, or allowing polarizing stances in one and the same runestone – the material culture with a broad palette afforded channels for the relational other to articulate its difference. Through particular material phenomena, Viking-Age people could participate in negotiations to position themselves in an ongoing process towards changing orders of power. Regarding belief, it concerned *forn siðr* or Christian faith, where changes in beliefs led to significant consequences for practices and relations. Regarding hierarchy, it dealt with family- and kin-based local and regional power groups versus royal power. The places in the landscape and the material character of the runestones could then function as affective channels in the public arena. By using the runestones’ affective affordance, the hegemony’s ‘relational other’ could express its distinctive character in an agonistic political process.

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