

# THE SOCIAL QUALIA OF *KUML*

## An Exploration of the Iconicity of Rune-Stones with *Kuml* Inscriptions from the Scandinavian Late Viking Age

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This article discusses qualitative experiences (qualia) of Scandinavian Late Viking Age rune-stones from a semiotically theorized perspective. Rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions receive particular attention. Despite the fact that *kuml* referred to different material entities, such as rune-stone, other standing stones, and/or grave, it is suggested that they resembled one another on iconic grounds. The quality associated with the multiple qualia was a sensation of safety that resulted in shared experiences that had positive social values. The article demonstrates that the semiotics of Peirce can be of great value to archaeologists who want to delve deeper into the social analysis of things.

*Keywords: rune-stones, kuml, qualitative experiences, qualia, Peirce, semiotics, Munn, body*

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## INTRODUCTION

Standing stones from prehistoric contexts have been investigated recently within archaeology (e.g. Weismantel 2012; Crossland 2014; Källén 2015). It has been emphasized that in order to reach deeper understandings of standing stones the materiality of both the stones and the landscape needs to be acknowledged, where the importance of including sensuous embodied engagements with them is stressed as well (e.g. Jones 2007; Tilley 2008; Williams *et al.* 2015). It must be mentioned that criticism has been put forward against such phenomenological approaches, for instance that they are ethnocentric and make ahistorical assumptions (e.g. Hall 2000; Smith 2003). However, I am in agreement with Mary Weismantel (2011, 2012:114), who has researched monumental stones in Formative South America, that a careful analysis of the body-artefact interface can produce the opposite. Such analysis may allow the accession of data from prehistory that otherwise would be ignored. The new information may be used to come close to the lived experience of prehistoric people. The information may include recognitions of sensations of, for instance, increased or decreased visibility, or movement on a site being directed or broken up in certain ways (Weismantel 2012:113, 131). An investigation of possible qualitative experiences also entails discussions of how sensations become sensations of certain qualities, and under what conditions they become endowed with specific cultural value, which may be positive or negative (Munn 1986). More importantly, qualitative experiences need not be just mental experiences that are subjective, but can also be regarded as sociocultural events that are affected by, for instance, political, historical and discursive conditions (Chumley & Harkness 2013:3). Such an understanding of qualitative experiences can be described as semiotically theorized, with a particular interest in how social practice is framed culturally (*ibid.*:4).

In this article I will investigate what such theoretical insights may mean for the study of Scandinavian Late Viking Age rune-stones (tenth to twelfth centuries). Specifically, I will investigate the body-artefact interface by discussing rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions on them. These stones are of special interest, not least from a semiotically theorized perspective, since the same word, *kuml*, the sign, could refer to different material phenomena. *Kuml* could refer to, or stand for, the rune-stone that carried the *kuml* inscription, and *kuml* could also refer to other uninscribed stones standing in the vicinity of the rune-stone, but also to a mound, or grave, as in the abode of the dead. When different material phenomena share the same name, it is implied that they were perceived as instances of the same quality. The question is then,

how could different qualitative experiences, the result of encountering and engaging with the different material phenomena, be perceived as instances of the same quality? And further, what social values, positive or negative, may have been created through this quality?

In order to discuss possible answers to these questions, I turn to Peircean semiotics, which offers means to shed light on the kind of relations that hold a sign relation together, and importantly considers the sign as dependent on a triadic relation (sign, object, and interpretant). The article therefore starts with a brief presentation of how qualitative experiences have been explored within such semiotics. I then consider characteristics of rune-stones in general, first with focus on rune-stones and landscape, and then on rune-stones per se. This section is followed by a further discussion of *kuml* inscriptions. Throughout the article I maintain that rune-stones were not only memorial stones to deceased people (see also Williams 2013 on their social dimensions and Stille 2014 on the multifunctionality of rune-stones), but also a type of artefact that encouraged, renegotiated and/or reinforced different embodied, and therefore, mnemonic practices among the living. I stress that encountering rune-stones is practical, performative, experiential, profoundly material, and very much an embodied process. Therefore, focusing on the qualitative experiences of engaging with rune-stones can be described as an appropriate analytical tool since it highlights the changes and variations human bodies may have experienced when rune-stones were created and/or encountered. Finally, this article is also about testing the chosen semiotically influenced method on the chosen material, in order to stimulate further theoretical discussions of how rune-stones, and specifically those with *kuml* inscriptions, in their capacity as standing stones may have worked on both an individual and a social level in the Scandinavian Late Viking Age societies.

## SOCIAL QUALIA

Qualitative experiences are known in semiotics as qualia. Qualia, quale in the singular, refers to the properties of experience, or phenomenal properties. Qualia can also be explained as experiences of sensuous qualities and feelings. They include, for instance, experiences of sounds, smells, and colours. Examples of experiences of feelings include anxiety, satiety, and otherness, to mention but a few. Perhaps needless to say, qualia have been discussed at great length and for a long time in philosophy, and also in other academic disciplines. Here I am chiefly interested in how qualia have been understood by the American philo-

sopher Charles Sander Peirce (1839–1914) and how his elaborations have contributed to semiotics, or the theory of sign relations, which may be of particular interest when discussing rune-stones. This is the case since they can be described, for instance, as inscribed signs in the landscape (cf. Crossland 2014), or as Stefan Brink has put it, rune-stones are veritable signboards (2002:108). Equally appropriate, the word *kuml* in itself has as its alleged general meaning sign or mark (Jacobsen & Moltke 1942:677).

C. S. Peirce (1931) expanded the notion of the sign from Ferdinand Saussure (1857–1913), to include all kinds of coded behaviour, thus not at all restricting its usage to language. Importantly, he also let the notion of the sign comprise a triad of terms, or three basic semiotic elements; the sign, its object, and an interpretant. Each of these three terms has been further developed by Peirce into different types and typologies, especially the sign and the interpretant. One of them concerns the grounds through which signs may stand for objects, namely on iconic, indexical, or symbolic grounds. This division is dependent on the type of relation that holds the sign relation together. In short, an icon has a sign relation that is characterized by similarity, an index by causality or contiguity, and a symbol by social convention or habit for its interpretant (e.g. Keane 2003:413f).

The anthropologist Nancy Munn (1986) has combined Peirce's division of signs with his provision of a key to the structure of experience, or the phaneron, which he named Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness (Houser 2010:98). Firstness pertains to quality, which may be described as abstract properties, Secondness to qualia, which may be described as qualities embodied in either events or entities, and Thirdness to qualisign, which may be described as a linkage between an object with an interpretant in a sign (Chumley & Harkness 2013:5). Qualisigns involve an identification of qualities that can be found in different entities that through an iconic identification resemble one another. Munn (1986) has provided one example of this. She focused on value transformation on a small island off Papua New Guinea called Gawa. She was able to demonstrate that within Gawan societies iconicity was central for analysing and interpreting qualitative experiences. For instance, a quality of lightness in such different entities as canoes, bodies and garden plots worked as a qualisign of value. That is, the identification of lightness in canoes, bodies and plots meant that they were perceived as resembling one another in terms of their lightness, which thus served as an iconic identification (Munn 1986:126). Lightness had positive cultural value, and lightness could be experienced through sensory experiences. However, lightness was an abstract potentiality (Peirce 1997 [1896]:1.422), so

the sensory experiences of the different entities need not have been the same. This means that the (abstract) quality, lightness, did not depend solely on the senses, or the different qualitative experiences. Peirce calls it hypostatic abstraction (Parmentier 1994:28 with references). In the qualisign the abstracted property itself (lightness) signifies not only the thing or object (Chumley & Harkness 2013:6). Thus, the qualitative experiences may be different, but were culturally interpreted as instances of the same quality (lightness). In order for this to work, the interpretant is needed to create the ground, or relation, between representamen and object; the interpretant has the power to create the hypostatic abstraction (Parmentier 1994:28). However, the interpretant does not exist in vacuum, of course, and therefore the abstraction is not just subjectively based, but is framed within contexts of social conventions and institutionalized practice. Also, the abstraction usually comes with other qualities or properties, which Keane (2003:414) refers to as co-presence or bundling, that is, they are effects of materiality. What Munn pointed out further was that qualitative experiences, and qualisigns, work within a system of cultural value. When a quality, such as lightness, is conventionalized, “culturally valorized qualisigns emerge as points of orientation in social action” and they may get a privileged role within a larger value system (Harkness 2013:15).

When this reasoning is transferred to rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions, it can be expressed that I am interested in knowing the iconic grounds through which the different material entities of mounds, standing uninscribed stones, and rune-stones resembled one another. Another way of putting this is how different qualia came to be perceived as instances of the same quality. And further, what social values were associated or created through this quality?

Rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions share much of the characteristics of other rune-stones dating to the Scandinavian Late Viking Age. Necessarily the following discussion therefore proceeds from rune-stones in general (including *kuml* stones), in order to get some idea of the social conventions and institutionalized practices that surrounded them. With this foundation I then focus more closely on the rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions, to discuss the quality that could have worked as the iconic identification for all the different *kuml*.

## RUNE-STONE, BODY AND LANDSCAPE

A rune-stone is defined as a runic inscription found on a worked, raised and/or transported stone or else carved on *in situ* boulders or rock



Figure 1. These three stones stand at their original location along a road in Tystberga, close to Tystberga church, in Södermanland. Two of them are inscribed with runes (Sö 173 and Sö 374), and the stone furthest away is uninscribed. The rune-stone Sö 173 has a *kuml* inscription. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

outcrops. While the tradition of inscribing stones with runes has pre-Christian origins back to the Migration Period, the efflorescence in runestones dates to the Late Viking Age (tenth to twelfth centuries). Hence, runestones are largely considered Christian monuments (e.g. Gräslund 1991, 1992; Johansen 1997:159; Lager 2002). The earlier runestones of the tenth and early eleventh centuries tend to carry text only, whereas late eleventh- and twelfth-century runestones were given ornaments and more elaborate zoomorphic images.

The alleged general meaning of runestones is that they are memorial stones (Jesch 2005; Stoklund 2005). This very declaration in itself may be said to demand a more embodied approach towards them. This is the case since memory work is practical, performative and therefore necessarily embodied in its constitution (e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1962; see also Mauss 1992 [1934]; Hamilakis 2013). Only the experiencing body remembers and is able to render objects or places meaningful, and repeated encounters with places or objects invoke memories (Van Dyke 2011:41). Runestones were commonly found in connection with roads or routes, fairways or along places where people travelled (figure 1), which means that it can be suggested that the stones indeed were encountered repeatedly. Runestones were frequently raised beside grave-fields also (figure 2), where the grave-fields in turn might have been connected to the

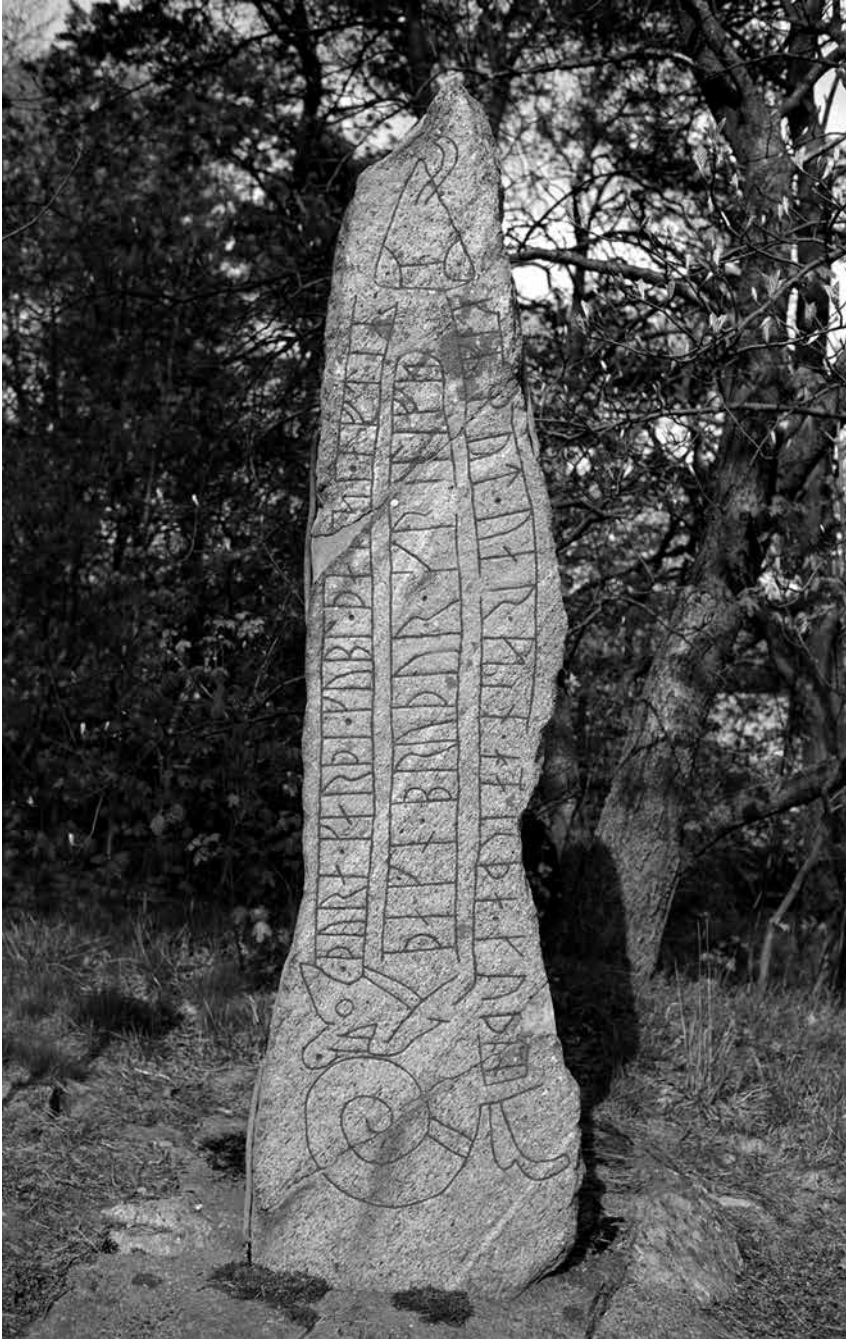


Figure 2. Rune-stone Vg 115, Grästorp, Västergötland, with *kuml* inscription in its original position. It was raised on a grave-mound on a grave-field. Photographer: Bengt A. Lundberg, Riksantikvarieämbetet. Licence: CC-BY.

roads or routes just mentioned (e.g. Jacobsen & Moltke 1942:910–911; Ekholm 1950:140; Engesveen 2005; Klos 2009:117; 343–344, cf. Larsson 2010). The carved surface of the rune-stones has been found to be turned towards the routes of travel that went by, or through, the burial grounds (e.g. Ekholm 1950:138–139; Johansen 1997). The rune-stones were thus directed towards the living people who travelled and moved in a shifting landscape (figure 1).

Rune-stones were individual monuments, but they were also monuments that shaped and influenced social memory, which provided a foundation and context for them (Middleton & Edwards 1997). The rune-stones resulted in shared experiences of landscape, life, and death, that is, commemoration. While at the same time expressing individual memories, these were inserted into social memory, gaining meaning and enabling renegotiations and hence change in general memory itself (Back Danielsson 2015:80).

The surrounding landscape often constitutes the backbone of the myths of origin that are told or recounted in prehistory, and events in the past are often woven together with the landscape and its different places and features. The narrated past is embodied in the landscape, claiming various monuments and other features as narrative evidence (Chapman 1997; Williams 2006). The landscape therefore has mnemonic qualities and might be regarded as the largest memory prompt of all (Gosden & Lock 1998:5). Inhabiting the landscape, and performing activities and tasks, is an embodied activity that is constitutive of place (Jones 2006:212). Therefore, there is a temporality to the landscape; it is processual, ongoing, and non-static (Ingold 1993; Bender 2002; Jones 2006:212). This suggests that encountering and engaging with rune-stones in the landscape was not only a process of visual interaction; rather it involved the entire body, as you perhaps unwittingly were forced to engage with them in a variety of ways and, importantly, at a variety of locales (Back Danielsson 2015:65).

It is noteworthy that rune-stones were not haphazardly placed along the routes, but instead were often located in places where different sets of landscapes or routes met, or simply put: at crossroads (e.g. Zachrisson 1998:194). Crossroads mean that you have to slow down. When you slow down your encounters with rune-stones are prolonged. Also the sheer appearance of the stone itself probably demanded of you to slow down, or even stop, to engage with it.

What then did the rune-stones do in the landscape? In more than one way rune-stones may be said to have enabled, accentuated and facilitated bodily passages and boundary crossings for the living as well as the dead. The living moved along roads and paths, and when the



landscape shifted the rune-stones standing by a bridge, a grave-field, a port, a court place (Sw. *tingsplats*), etc., might have been perceived of as thresholds announcing and directing the passing of boundaries (cf. Andréén 1993:292–294 on Gotlandic picture stones as symbolic doors between inner and outer land; Zachrisson 1998:197 on rune-stones as guarded entrances to the farmyard; and Arrhenius 1970 on rune-stones as the doors of the dead). The deceased would also be guided in their travels, though at a spiritual level due to the blessing of the soul as inscribed in the stone. The inscription would also help the soul reach light and paradise (Zachrisson 1998:147–148).

The places where rune-stones were erected were probably also spaces and thresholds for different kinds of dwelling (cf. Lund 2005 on the meanings of bridges and crossings in the Viking Age). On the rune-stone Sö 174 from Selebo in the province of Södermanland, the inscription declares that a father made the *kumbl* (the rune-stone), the *likhus* (the corpse house) and the bridge after a son who died on the island of Gotland (Brate & Wessén 1936:135–136). Another rune-stone, U838, in Kulla Parish likewise mentions a *likhus*, which was built together with a bridge (Andersson 2005:139). Different interpretations of the word *likhus* have been presented (Brate and Wessén 1936:135–136); the issue revolves around the question of whether the house was intended as a resting place for dead or living bodies. The building of a *likhus* nonetheless underlined the place where the road met a bridge (a stream), a rune-stone, and of course the body house, as spaces one dwelled in, whether dead or alive. The last part of the inscription of Sö 174 has the usual blessing of the soul of the deceased.

## ZOOMING IN ON RUNE-STONES

Mitchell (2005) has described pictures as animated beings, and I believe that rune-stones, as images, can be described as a kind of animated being also. As images, rune-stones affect and engage the beholder, and they are actively entangled in social structuration (Mitchell 2005; Jones 2007; Back Danielsson, Fahlander & Sjöstrand 2012:5–7). As such, the rune-stones introduce phenomenological registers that exceed the thought of rune-stones as mere encoded memorial statements. For simplicity reasons I here refrain from discussing the differences between affect and qualitative experiences, though see for example Northoff (2014:506) for differences. The ways the rune-stones affect the beholder include, for instance, their size, the stone's origin, inscriptions, their colours, their locations in the landscape (discussed above), contour, etcetera (e.g. Williams 2013).

When it comes to size, rune-stones could come in life-size or at times in more gigantic or even miniscule forms (figure 3). Often, though, rune-stones were of comparable stature to people, and their silhouettes could have reminded the viewer of a person waiting for them, imbued with stories or something to behold.

A few rune-stones declare the stone's origin (e.g. Hs 14, U 414 and U 735 and possibly U 736), in the sense that they state that they have been brought from somewhere. A declaration of the stone's origin might perhaps imply descent. The inscription of U 414 (now lost) says that the stone has been taken (brought) from Gotland, and because images of the stone are known from the seventeenth century, we know that the stone had a shape that is typical of Gotlandic picture stones. Another inscription is formulated as if the stone itself was a person. Then the stone refers of itself as "me" in the rune-stone text (G 317); "... Botulf in Medeby brought *me* here" (Gustavson 2013:5, my italics). The inscriptions also occasionally relate that the stone is alive through the memory writings of runes, that is, by making the inscriptions the stones come alive (Jansson 1984:169). Of the stones just mentioned with inscriptions declaring where the stones were brought from, U 735 has a *kuml* inscription. According to runologic research, the verb "bring" (ancient Swedish *fyrþi*), is only used for persons, that is, dead or alive human beings that have been brought somewhere, or are known to have brought something (Langhammer 2009). In my view, the use of the verb "bring" in connection with rune-stones implies that the stones might have been perceived of as a kind of person since the word was commonly used for human persons/beings (dead or alive). This might also have been the effect intended by those making the rune-stone, that is, the stones helped to facilitate agency, while not being agents themselves (Ingold 2011:89–94), or the stones can be perceived as secondary agents referencing and amplifying the agency of their creators (Gell 1998:20–21). Returning to the question of being a person, whether agents in themselves, as stones facilitating agency, or as secondary agents, earlier research within archaeology, and anthropology, has pointed out that a person need not be a human being, but anything that is handled and conceptualized as a person (Fowler 2004:7). Consequently, it is the relationships between different entities that attain and maintain different states of being a person. The entities may be human, but the relationships may equally be between humans and things, animals, plants, and/or places. Such relationships might have been reflected through, for instance, personal names. Examples of this are animal qualities that could be reflected in Scandinavian personal names such as *Ulf* or *Ylva*, meaning wolf in the masculine and the feminine respectively. Other examples constitute per-



Figure 3. Rune-stone U 323 with *kuml* inscription was originally more than 3 m tall and stood next to the Sälna bridge along the road between Skånela and Vallentuna. Photographer: Bengt A. Lundberg, Riksantikvarieämbetet. Licence: CC-BY.

sonal Scandinavian names that reflect relationships with specific things or materials such as *Sten*, meaning stone, *Kjell*, meaning cauldron, or the edgy family names on the rune-stone Ög 133: *Brodd* (meaning crampon), *Saxe* (meaning scissors), and *Udd* (meaning point).

The rune-stones as images or indeed (secondary) agents worked as focal points that transformed the place and affected your directionality in the landscape (cf. Weismantel 2012:124). At times such qualities were aided by the narrowing of a path or a road, for instance through the building of a bridge or an embankment, or by making runic inscriptions at places with threshold qualities, by which you would be forced to close encounters (Back Danielsson 2015:74, 76). They gave you directions on where (and how) to go, but also surely mediated sensations of both orientation and disorientation (cf. Ahmed 2006:181).

Finally, it must also be mentioned that it is generally assumed that rune-stones were painted in different colours (Jansson 1984:167). The colours must have stimulated the bodily senses too, thus meaning that colour, as Deleuze (1986:118) has argued, is an affect in itself. To this description must also be added, for example, the possible play of light and shadow on the rune-stone, as well as the effect of weather conditions, time of day and season, etc. Altogether it may be suggested that the stones were ascribed life and hence agency or cognitive and emotional capacities, as if they were living persons. Of course, the perception of a rune-stone as a living entity is a metaphor, a meta-picture, “a secondary, reflexive image of images” (Mitchell 2005:10), highlighting the relationality of image and beholder. We now turn to rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions, for further scrutiny and analysis.

## KUML

The word *kuml* is found on several rune-stones from the Scandinavian Late Iron Age. As stated earlier, *kuml* could refer to different material phenomena. The polysemous character of the word *kuml* has caused earlier researchers some headache (Jacobsen & Moltke 1942:677; Johansen 1997), since the search for the meaning of the word has had as its only focus to find one specific, and implicitly singular, meaning of the concept. The point of departure must be that *kuml* in itself could be polysemous in character, and thus could refer to different material things. In Scandinavia in total, there are, according to *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* (version Rundata 3.1), 126 rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions (table 1). From table 1 it can be seen that the *kuml* stones are found throughout Scandinavia, but with a certain emphasis on Eastern Scandinavia. Stones

Table 1. Rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions. Specified are also those that stand *in situ*, or those that have a known original placing (statistics gathered from *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* and Klos 2009:415–421).

Country/province	Rune-stone number	Total
Södermanland (Sö) <i>at original location</i>	18, 46, 88, 116, 143, 174, 281, FV1948:289 47, 103, 173, 296, 319	13 stones
Öland (Öl) <i>at original location</i>	6, 10, 27, 37, 52, Köping 40, ATA4064/60C 0 (zero)	7 stones
Uppland (U) <i>at original location</i>	4, 585, 620, 649b, 1066 323, 616, 735	8 stones
Östergötland (Ög) <i>at original location</i>	8, 40, 65, 73, 75, 89, 94, 131, 139, 154, 160, 174, 200, 220, 229, 231, 1958:252, FV1970:310, FV1965:54, HOV34:28; SKL1:174, ATA322-165-2006B, NOR2000:35 29, N267	25 stones
Västergötland (Vg) <i>at original location</i>	67, 100, 101, 103, 106, 118, 119E, 125, 171, 176 115, 168, 169, 194	14 stones
Småland (Sm) <i>at original location</i>	16A, 27, 40, 46, 65, 113, 121, 126, 163\$, SVS1973 13, 32, 35, 36, 37, 45, 60, 62, 138, 139, 142, 143	22 stones
Denmark (DR) <i>at original location</i>	2, 4, 17, 30, 36, 41, 55, 56, 81, 106, 110, 133, 143, 211, 219, 239, 271, 293, 294, 318, 337, 370, 383, EM85:221 42, 209, 277	27 stones
Gotland (G)	72, 80, 94, 138, 203, 252, 343	7 stones
Närke (Nä)	3	1 stone
Gästrikland (Gs)	19	1 stone
Norway (N)	300	1 stone
<b>Total</b>		<b>126 stones</b>

with *kuml* inscriptions belong to both the early and the late phase of rune-stone raising, although the former are in the majority.

Some twenty-nine of the *kuml* stones can be found standing *in situ*, or having a known original placing (table 1, statistics gathered from *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* and Klos 2009:415–421). When the places and surroundings of these stones are scrutinized, it becomes clear indeed that the word *kuml* could refer to different material phenomena, such as the standing stone with runic inscription, standing stones without inscriptions, and/or referring to the abode of the dead, as in a mound or cairn, of various dating (figure 4).

A common phrase on a *kuml*-inscribed stone would be along the lines: “... had these *kuml* made ...” in the plural, or in the singular “... made this *kuml* ...” (see Peterson 2006). In some instances the noun has



Figure 4. Rune-stone Sm 35 from Replösa, Småland, has a *kuml* inscription and stands at its original location. In its immediate vicinity is a ship setting, seen in the figure, and two grave-fields. Photographer: Bengt A. Lundberg, Riksantikvarieämbetet. Licence: CC-BY.

been turned into a verb as in “to *kuml*” (Ög 200) and “to be *kumled*” (Ög 174). There are also a few inscriptions dictating the sensations that should be aroused by the material. The inscription “Enjoy the *kuml*!” (Transcription: *Njót kumls!*, my translation into English) and “Enjoy the *kuml* well” (Transcription: *Njót vel kumls!*, my translation into English) can be found on two Danish rune-stones (DR 211 and DR 239 respectively). The inscriptions are translated into English as “Make good use of the monument” in the *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*. This translation is in line with the suggestions put forward by Jacobsen and Moltke (1942:256), as well as Söderwall (1884–1918:553) and Heggstad *et al.* (NO:456). Here an understanding of *njót* comprises either the binding of the deceased to the monument by the living, or that the person who made the inscription expressed the wish that the deceased should make good use of the monument. Whereas this may of course have been the case, the word “use” does not equal the sensations the monuments were meant to stimulate, conveyed by the word “enjoy”. Lena Peterson (2006) translates *niúta* on the stone Sm 144A as both “enjoy”, and “make good use of”. Consequently, the imperative *Njót!* can be interpreted also at its face-value: you are to enjoy the *kuml*. Importantly, the exhortation could have been directed towards both the deceased and the living be-

ings that read the inscriptions on their travels in the landscape. To enjoy something, as well as to make good use of something, involves qualitative experiences that are meant to be positive in some respects. I will now make a short summary of all of the above, to suggest what the iconic grounds were through which the different *kuml* resembled one another.

## THE QUALITY OF *KUML* – SENSATIONS OF SAFETY

By giving different material phenomena the same name you were offered predictability and the possibility of establishing the same or similar relations between different phenomena – material and immaterial. Further, giving the materials the same name *kuml* implies stability, masking the fact that both *kuml*, in whatever material form, and the meaning of *kuml*, were materialized through practice (Back Danielsson in press). Another part of the material-discursive practice, and the conventionalized practice, consisted of encountering and experiencing the material phenomena of *kuml* on a perhaps daily or weekly basis, that is, when you were travelling in the landscape.

What would inscribed stones with the word *kuml* on them, uninscribed accompanying stones, and a mound or a grave have in common? Regarding rune-stones and other inscribed stones, it can be declared that they together structured the landscape in a certain way. Thereby they also regulated how the body was to enter, encounter and experience the rune-stones and other standing stones, that literally and figuratively speaking were gates to other worlds or different parts of the landscape. When graves are added to the equation, other possibilities emerge. In my view the three kinds of material share conceptual similarities, since they all are connected to transformations and/or transitions of different kinds. In fact, they enable and facilitate them. Turning our attention to graves – as in mounds or cairns, for instance – it is obvious that these are material remains of transitional events. A once living person has died and a funeral has taken place, transferring the person from the land of the living to the land of the dead. Rune-stones are material manifestations of transformations or transitions too. They were raised in memory of the death of someone. Rune-stones, and other standing stones, may be said to have enabled, accentuated and controlled bodily passages and boundary crossings for the living as well as the dead. The living moved along roads and paths, and when the landscape shifted the rune-stones, sometimes accompanied by other uninscribed stones, might have been perceived of as thresholds announcing, directing and

aiding in the passing of boundaries. The deceased would also be guided in their travels, though at a spiritual level. Thus the different material shapes the Late Iron Age word *kuml* came in – rune-stone, other stone, and grave – ultimately expressed the idea of transitions. What is more, the transitions focused on bodily journeys and passages at spiritual and spatial levels where the transitional objects acted as helpers, enunciators and navigators for both living and dead human beings.

Having said that, there still remains to be discussed what kind of quality was associated with these materials and events. I argue that the material phenomena were to offer safe guidance during such instances, for both living and dead people, that moved in physical and/or celestial landscapes. To facilitate such endeavours inscriptions could express that the *kuml* should be enjoyed or be made of good use, as described above. Other facilities, such as bridges, *likhus*, etc. were likewise built to make your travelling, or temporary resting in the landscape by the rune-stone, safe. The qualitative experiences *kuml* produced together with those encountering them thus encompassed the sensation of safety. The sensation of safety is suggested to be the iconic ground through which the variety of *kuml* resemble one another. As mentioned before, when an interpretant takes a quality as an abstract subject, in this case sensations of safety (“safeness”), Peirce calls it hypostatic abstraction (Parmentier 1994:28 with references). In the qualisign the abstracted property itself signifies, not only the thing or object (Chumley & Harkness 2013:6). The experiential quality of safe guidance during transitions worked as a qualisign of value. In line with the discussion presented by Harkness (2013) I would suggest that the qualisigns of *kuml* were conventionalized, that is, *kuml* were recognized by social actors as having certain qualities. As such, they were easy to recognize, widespread, and socially effective. From table 1 it is clear indeed that *kuml* was geographically widespread, and thus probably was easily identifiable and also socially effective. These characteristics could also have been one of the reasons why the word *kuml* was used on presumably prominent monuments that were made to have a lasting impact, such as for instance rune-stones DR 41 and DR 42 (legacies of kings Gorm and Harald Bluetooth). Rune-stones with *kuml*, and likely rune-stones in general, along with the qualitative experiences they generated, were liable to be endowed with positive cultural value (cf. Munn 1986; Chumley & Harkness 2013). Even today *kuml* is associated with safe guidance in the sense that the abbreviation KL (short for *kummel* in Swedish), is written on nautical charts of Swedish waters. *Kummel* is a pile of stones that work as a navigation mark (SAOL 2000) and thus safely shows the way to your destination.



In a social analysis of the stones we must also consider the roles of indexicality and iconicity in mediating causality, or how they are related to possible actions (cf. Keane 2003:409). Munn (1986) speaks of logical-causal relations, and Keane (2003:414) follows her path and takes his cue from Peirce when he stresses the ontological character of the symbol, and how the Peircean Thirdness points to the future, a potentiality, that is implicated through human agency (cf. Gibson 1979 and his affordances). If I described above how the stones acted as safe guides, navigators for dead and living beings in shifting landscapes, people's actions with these stones include making them, encountering them, and engaging with them in a variety of ways, generating an equal variety of embodied and qualitative experiences. I thus insist that it is the cultural totality, social conventions and practices, that make the different *kuml* materials being "the same" (cf. Keane 2003:415). Through the passing of time, however, as well as depending on the materiality of the stone, the engaging person's age, gender, class, etc., we must envision shifting actions and engagements with the rune-stones. In other words, the relationships to stones have shifted, and continue to shift.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper explores the iconicity, or iconic identification, of rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions from the late Viking Age in Scandinavia. During the period of investigation *kuml* could mean or refer to different things. They include a rune-stone, an uninscribed standing stone, and/or a grave, as in the abode of the dead. By sharing the same name, it is implied that the different material phenomena were similar in certain respects. This resemblance can be called an iconic identification within Peircean semiotics, and this resemblance is also connected to a specific, sometimes desirable, or positive, quality. The semiotics of Charles Sander Peirce (1839–1914) is different from the semiotics of Ferdinand Saussure (1857–1913) in that it not only uses the sign and the signifier but also puts an interpretant into the equation. With inspiration from the anthropologist Nancy Munn's application and further development of Peircean semiotics concerning value transformation on the island of Gawa, the present discussion and exploration of rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions has been conducted.

The iconic identification is tied to a quality that can be found within, or coming from, several or multiple qualia. Within semiotics qualia are known as qualitative experiences. They refer to properties of experience in the form of sensuous qualities and feelings. Examples of experiences

of feelings include satiety, anxiety, and otherness. In this paper, I have stressed, and demonstrated, that encountering and engaging with rune-stones is very much an embodied process. Therefore it is appropriate to discuss what qualitative experiences rune-stones might have generated. However, I have refrained from discussing exactly what the qualitative experiences were, and approached the matter from another perspective. Proceeding from rune-stones in general, and rune-stones with *kuml* inscriptions in particular, I have discussed the quality that could have worked as the iconic identification for rune-stone, uninscribed stones and mound (*kuml*). That is, different qualitative experiences resulted in one and the same quality. The analysis suggests that this quality could have been a sensation of safety that was offered during transitional periods in life and death, and in physical and celestial landscapes. I have contended that the qualitative experiences were set within a cultural value frame that was positive, and also described under which conditions they became endowed with this specific cultural value. The qualisigns of *kuml* are argued to have been conventionalized and thereby widespread and socially effective. It is also demonstrated that qualitative experiences are not only subjective in character. In fact the qualia of *kuml* are social, and dependent on, for instance, historical and discursive conditions as well as other sociocultural factors. This in turn can generate other interesting questions and discussions concerning what constitutes, for instance, materiality, immateriality, the senses, embodiment, and disembodiment, for different social groups (cf. Chumley & Harkness 2013).

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ATA = Antiquarian Topographical Archive

CC-BY = Licence under Creative Commons, <http://www.creativecommons.se>

DR = Denmark

G = Gotland

Hs = Hälsingland

KVHAA = Kungliga Vitterhets- Historie- och Antikvitets Akademien.

RAÄ = Riksantikvarieämbetet (The National Heritage Board)

SAOL = Svenska Akademiens Ordlista

SHM = Swedish History Museum

Sm = Småland

Sö = Södermanland

U = Uppland

Vg = Västergötland

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