

Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning - Workshop Series for New Faculty
Minnesota State University, Mankato - Academic Year 2005/2006

Capstone Project: Maria-Claudia Tomany, Scandinavian Studies

Class: The Vikings in Scandinavia and the British Isles

Unit on Runes and Runic Inscriptions (4 sessions)

1. Pre-Assessment: Language and Writing

What is a speech act (physical, non-material, ephemeral)?

What is writing?

Which purposes does it serve?

How does a speech act and an "act of writing" differ?

Homework:

Take a look at different writing systems on the website www.omniglot.com/writing/ and look at the different ways of turning spoken sounds into written signs (abjads, syllabaries, complex scripts like Chinese or Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs). Choose one writing system to briefly explain to class.

2. Have students present results. Make them realize that alphabetic script is only one and one very specific way of writing.

Look at alphabetic scripts and distribution (Phoenicians to Roman alphabet, Western Europe). Discuss reasons for prevalence today.

Compare runic scripts and Roman letters.

Homework: Find a runestone that you like through a common search engine like Google. Prepare a short presentation on your chosen stone, provide visual aids, explain inscription.

3. Compare runic stones that everyone has chosen, in class. Find common topics/ motifs in ornamentation/shapes/ usage. Write a few words in runic alphabet.

Homework: Make runestone of clay (1 pound of DAS and tools provided).

4. Explore topic of commemoration. Find common purposes and threads. Discuss reasons for prevalence of rune stones from the 10th to the 12th century (clearly "non-pagan" time of early medieval state-building and -organization).

Unit served as a successful bridge between the two major blocks "archaeological (material)" and "linguistic (literary) evidence".

Concepts of clan organization, honor, and commemoration proved useful for exploration of various literary genres (sagas, skaldic poetry, Edda) in subsequent unit.