

**Dr Terje Spurkland, Institute for Linguistics and Nordic Studies, University of Oslo**

‘Rune stones in an Anglo-Saxon-Norse and Norse-Celtic perspective’

The early Viking Age seems to manifest a strong decline in rune stone activities in Scandinavia compared to the previous and following epochs. The Swedish stones from Rök in Östergötland and Sparlösa from Västergötland are exceptions in this respect. The main rune stone area in the period 700/750 – 900 is Denmark and the number of Danish rune stones dated to this period is about 20. 20 rune stones during a period of 150/200 years reflects an activity that could be taken care of by one man only. In the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century the custom of erecting rune stones resuscitated, first in Denmark, then spread to Norway and Sweden and culminated in Upland in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. What could be the reasons for this decline in the rune stone activities in the early Viking Age? Can the revival of the rune stone activity in Scandinavia in any way be connected to the Scandinavians’ encounter with Anglo-Saxon and Celtic literacy in the British Isles?

The total number of Viking Age rune stones erected in Norway amounts to around 50. More than half of them were raised in coastal areas from Aust-Agder up to Møre and Romsdal, with a striking concentration in the area of Jæren in Rogaland. On the Isle of Man 30 rune stones were erected supposedly by Norwegians in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. These stones share some distinctive features with the Norwegian Viking Age stones from Jæren. There can be no doubt that the rune stones on Jæren and the Manx runic crosses are evidences of cross cultural contacts. But which way did the impulses go? Is the concentration of rune stones on the south west coast of Norway manifestations of impulses imported from the colonies in west, or manifestations of impulses people from this area brought with them when they settled over seas?