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I spent a month in Sweden this summer attending Swedish language and culture courses through Uppsala International Summer Session in Uppsala and conducting pre-dissertation research. I was enrolled in a Swedish language course, which provided a good foundation in grammar and many opportunities to practice speaking. Additionally, I was enrolled in the culture course “Det moderna svenska samhället,” (Modern Swedish Society), which was also taught entirely in Swedish. Both courses, along with the field trips and cultural evenings organized by the program, greatly helped me improve my Swedish and deepened my understanding of various aspects of Swedish culture.

My stay in Sweden did not only improve my language skills, but also aided me in preparation for my dissertation on personal names on Swedish Viking Age runestones. Although the transcriptions of runic inscriptions are accessible through the Rundata project, it is necessary and important to physically inspect the runestones, since some interpretation is required of stones which are often eroded or damaged. While in Uppsala, I was able to inspect and photograph a number of runestones around and inside the cathedral, and also had the opportunity to view and photograph the runestone built into the church wall at Gamla Uppsala.

Prior to the courses in Uppsala, I visited the museum and reconstructed Viking city of Birka on the island of Björkö, as well as the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm, which hosts one of the best Viking Age exhibits in the world. I also visited the island of Gotland, whose museum houses several important runestones and other artifacts. After finishing the language and culture program in Uppsala, I travelled to the island of Öland, where I inspected and photographed the Karlevi runestone, which bears one of the most famous runic inscriptions from the Viking Age. Seeing the objects on display in the museums, the reconstructed Viking city, and runestones in their original context was a valuable experience, which I could only gain by physically travelling to the sites.

In addition to my planned research goals, I also met with Professor Henrik Williams of Uppsala University. He is a member of my dissertation committee and specializes in personal names on runestones. Among other things, he guided me to some sites of interest with runestones around Kalmar. This was especially important, because my opportunities to meet and talk with Professor Williams in person are limited.

My study and research trip to Sweden this summer was a success on many levels. My written and spoken Swedish has markedly improved, and I gained valuable insights into modern Swedish culture and society. Visiting museums and historical sites in person has helped expand my knowledge of the Viking Age in Sweden which will aid me in my work on my dissertation. Moreover, I was able to connect with a committee member in person who is normally geographically distant. I am immensely thankful to the Mellon Foundation Fellowship for making my research trip possible this summer.