Subject: news from the northland

I have just finished reading a doctoral dissertation which is being
defended here in Uppsala tomorrow. It should be of considerable
interest to Early Russianists, Balticists, etc. They publish the
dissertations here as regular books ahead of the defense. I am not
sure the best bet for acquiring a copy (here on campus they give them
away), but you can try Akademiska bokhandeln in Stockholm. The data:

Gunilla Larsson. *Ship and Society: Maritime Ideology in Late Iron Age
Sweden*. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet: Department of Archaeology and
Ancient History, 2007 (series: AUN, vol. 37). 426 pp. (in large format-
-a big book).

The author is already much published on the subject. She ranges over a
huge landscape of archaeological material and texts. A sizeable
section (although not necessarily the most original or discriminating
in the book) deals with the Svear (Swedes from Central Sweden) on the
Eastern river routes. There is bound to be a lot of controversy about
a major part of her thesis, which focuses on political and social
organization in Central Sweden in the Late Iron Age (ending ca. 13th
c.). She argues for maritime activity and its associated supporting
mechanisms and representations as the fundamental organizational
principle for the political and social order.

I find some of the most interesting parts of the dissertation deal with
maritime technology, where she draws on the archaeological record,
ethnoarchaeology and experimental archaeology (reconstructions) to
develop rather convincingly a picture of the kinds of boats that were
critical for those long distance Viking ventures, the boats not being
the big heavy ones akin to the ones such as the Gokstad ship. The
construction technology which was employed enabled the very
sophisticated builders to develop light-weight boats that were fast,
adept to moving in shallow waters and easily portageable. Apart from
the information on boat constructin, among the most interesting parts
of the dissertation are the ones discussing the portages and the actual
testing of speed of portaging using properly reconstructed versions of
the boats.

In connection with reading this, I came across the online Runic
Database, which is the work of a Ph.D. in computer science, Lars
Engebretsen, who now works for Google in Switzerland. You can find the
links at: http://www.engebretsen.se/run-konk/, where you want to click
on "the text of the inscriptions" to bring up the actual inscriptions.
What you get here is the Old Norse, arranged in the order of the
regional publication of the inscriptions (a big, ongoing series). The
concordances he has compiled would let you locate particular names and

words; they are in separate files. All of it is in pdf format files. There are no translations.

Regards from Uppsala,