

Study of the Kensington Stone

By T. P. CHRISTENSEN

The ancient Northmen began the record of white men in America. The traditional date for the discovery of North America by Leif Ericson is 1000 A.D.

Because the Northmen found wild grapes in the new country, they named it Vinland the Good. They also found a kind of "self-sown" grain, probably wild rice, which was the staff of life of the Chippewas and other Indians. It really *was* a Good Country the Northmen had found.

The Icelandic Sagas inform us about continued expeditions for several centuries to Vinland, and at least about one attempt at settlement.

Writing about the year 1070 A.D. the learned clerk, Adam of Bremen, mentions Vinland and the wild grapes and the self-sown grain. He writes that he had obtained his information from the king of Denmark, Svend Estridsson.

An Icelandic source notes the arrival of a ship from Markland, near Vinland, in 1347. The inscription on the Kensington Rune Stone refers to an expedition of Norwegians and Goths, who reached southwestern Minnesota in 1362.

By this time the former Northmen were organized in kingdoms, and were then known as Scandinavians—Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes. The Swedes consisted of two groups—Goths (Göter) and Swedes (Svear). They spoke various kindred dialects but national languages were emerging.

The Kensington Rune Stone was found in 1898 by a Swedish-American farmer near Kensington, Minnesota. He found it while he was grubbing out trees on his farm. The Stone lay under a tree, thought to be about 70 years old. The main roots clasped the Stone, which weighed over 200 pounds. There were marks on the Stone, which later proved to be runes with some

Latin letters, and numerals according to a peculiar Medieval system of notations. It bore the date 1362. The inscription was cut on one side and one edge of the upper half of the Stone. This would indicate that the Stone was stuck in the ground when the inscription had been made. In time it had fallen, earth accumulated, and the tree had started to grow.

SCHOLARS DECLARED INSCRIPTION A FRAUD

Two American scholars familiar with Scandinavian history and languages to whom the Stone was submitted for study could read the inscription except the numerals, but still they declared the whole inscription to be a fraud. Professors at the University of Christiania, Norway, to whom copies of the inscription were sent, read all of it including the numerals. Still, they also declared the inscription fraudulent. Some of the runes, words, and word forms did not seem consistent with the usages of the fourteenth century when the inscription purported to have been cut. And as for the story told by the inscription of thirty Norwegians and Swedes (Goths) having reached the interior of North America in the year 1362, that simply was too preposterous to be creditable. The Northmen had been in America in the eleventh century, but not later as explorers. The inscription must have been cut by some jokester or jokesters. Perhaps even by the man who found it, although we have his affidavit that he hadn't.

Disgusted with the whole business the finder put the Stone in front of his granary where it served for several years as a stepping stone.

In 1907 the Norwegian-American historian, H. R. Holand, heard about the find and began a study of it, which he has continued to the present time.

Mr. Holand's study of the Stone aroused a great deal of interest in the matter pro and con. A Norwegian literary society in Minneapolis and the Historical Society of Minnesota each appointed a committee to investigate the find. Each reported after several years of study in favor of the authenticity of the inscription. It was thought to be a "true historic record."

One of the linguists, whom one of these committees had consulted was Professor George T. Flom, a noted authority on the Scandinavian languages at the University of Illinois. He had objected to the authenticity of the inscription on the same grounds that the professors at the University of Christiania had: the runes were of later origin than the fourteenth century, the language was ungrammatical for that century, some of the words seemed to be such corrupt forms of English as a Scandinavian immigrant might have used. The word "Opdagelsesfaerd" (exploration expedition) which is used in the inscription couldn't be found in any of the word lists he knew about of the rather scanty extant literary remains of the fourteenth century Scandinavian languages.

Professor Flom wrote his own extensive report on the inscription which was indorsed by the philological society at the University of Illinois and published by the University. Copies of it were sent to Europe and made the Scandinavian linguists shout all the louder against the genuineness of the inscription, without, however, making little or no further study of the problem.

In his report Professor Flom made some damaging admissions to his own point of view. He admitted that the inscription was cleverly composed and that the date 1362 was especially well chosen.

STUDY OF STONE PROGRESSES

While linguists and some historians continued their hue and cry against the Rune Stone, Mr. Holand quietly continued his intensive study of the whole subject. The resulting literature is truly remarkable, consisting of numerous articles in the current press, scientific journals and two books—"The Kensington Stone" (1930) and "Westward from Vinland" (1940). He has accounted for every word, rune, letter, and numeral in the inscription; and has shown—in spite of much opposition from runologists and linguists in the Scandinavian countries and a few here in the United States—that words, word forms, and numerals *were* or *could have been* used in the fourteenth century.

History came to the assistance of Mr. Holand. He could point to an authentic account of an expedition sent out in 1355 by the king of Sweden, who was also then king of Norway, to go to the Western Settlement (Vest Bygd) in Greenland to help the Scandinavian colonists there who were reported to be falling away from the true Christian faith because they had no bishop, and were also exposed to attacks from the Eskimos. It is not at all unlikely that this expedition may have gone from Greenland to Vinland. Indeed, very likely the expedition did go to Vinland for the dates of the expedition and that on the Stone are in beautiful harmony.

Interest has continued unabated to the present time. Negativists persist in shouting—some virtually raging—against the inscription. But a number of competent linguists are continuing a more unbiased and orderly study of the Stone including the circumstances of its finding—which alone, in the writer's opinion, preclude the possibility of fraud.

Recently two Scandinavian scholars were invited by the American-Scandinavian Foundation to come to this country to study the Stone. One declared the inscription to be false, the other "limping on both sides" after *three months* of investigation was not certain whether it was spurious or genuine.

Recently also the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., invited Dr. William Thalbitzer, Professor Emeritus of the University of Copenhagen, to make a thorough study of all the data relating to the Stone. Dr. Thalbitzer came to the same conclusion as Mr. Holand and the Museum's Committee, namely that the inscription is a true historic record.

An excellent article on the problem by Professor N. S. Hagen appeared in *Speculum* for July, 1950. The article is critical and its author differs with Holand on some points but upholds him in general. Professor Hagen closes his article with the following observation:

"A future generation of scholars will find it hard to understand how an older one could have been so blind.

They will find the inscription as genuine as those of Gallehus and Glavendrup, Stentofte and Rök, Tune and Eggjum, and they will consider it important. They will find it neither too long nor too well preserved to be genuine. At some future time children may be reading in their school books about the tragic fate which befell a group of Scandinavian explorers who penetrated into the interior of North America one hundred and thirty years before Columbus landed on an island in this West Indies. It is a great satisfaction to know that this priceless inscription is now safe against fire and defacement in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. Here it will eventually be valued as an important Scandinavian and American historical document and as a deeply moving human document."

An enlarged replica of the Rune Stone has been erected in the triangle formed by two converging highways near Kensington, Minnesota. An identical replica of it is in the possession of the Smithsonian Institution. But the actual Rune Stone has been sent to Alexandria, the county seat of the county where also Kensington is located.

Other relics of the Northmen have been found in North America. The most remarkable of these consist of pieces of eleventh century Viking armor and weapons, which were found near Beardmore in southwestern Ontario, Canada. Competent museum authorities believe these relics to be genuine. The Northmen then already in Leif Ericsson's century sailed into the Hudson Bay. There is other evidence of this.

Dr. Hagen ventured the prediction that school children in the future will be reading in their books about the Kensington Stone. The prediction has already come true. In the writer's "The Discovery and Rediscovery of America" (1934) has a brief chapter on the Kensington Stone. This book is found in more than half of the high school libraries in the State of Iowa and in many of the public libraries of Iowa and other states.

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