

The Kensington Rune Stone: A Study Guide

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Many North Americans, especially in the Upper Midwest, have heard about a mysterious carved stone that was discovered in Douglas County, Minnesota, in 1898. It was incised with 207 Scandinavian letters (known as runes), three Latin letters (A V M), and twelve numeral characters (pentadic numerals). The stone can be seen in the Runestone Museum in Alexandria, Minnesota. Hereafter it is referred to as **KRS** (Kensington Rune Stone, after Kensington, a town near the farm where it was found). Opinions about this monument range from a resolute belief in its genuineness and significance (often stated as evidence of Viking presence in the fourteenth century), at one extreme, and scornful vilification as a clumsy hoax, at the other.

From the moment of its discovery some 120 years ago the stone has been the center of a whirlwind of controversy. I shall not attempt to list all the developments, already well covered, for the first seven decades, by the historian Blegen (1968); a more recent book by Nielsen & Wolter (2006) painstakingly catalogs almost all of the significant events and most important treatises, both in favor of and against the authenticity (*i.e.*, fourteenth century origin) of the KRS. Here I shall only briefly summarize some of the high points, and work done since 1968.

One of the first authorities to pronounce judgment on the KRS, Professor Olaus J. Breda of the University of Minnesota, quickly (in 1899) came to a conclusion that the stone was a hoax because the language on the stone was not classical Old Norse, but seemingly a mixture of modern Swedish and Norwegian, and he even thought it contained several English words.¹ Breda based his conclusions not on an actual examination of the stone, but on a transcription on paper made by Samuel Siverts, a bank cashier in Kensington. Breda himself was a teacher of Scandinavian languages, but was not otherwise known as an expert in Old Scandinavian or runic writing. He could not interpret the date later explained as 1362, and therefore assumed that the language on the stone should have been the Old Norse of the Viking Age, three centuries earlier. (See below about the changes to Scandinavian languages attested in the 14th century.)

Hjalmar Rued Holand (see below) judged that “the conclusions of Professor Breda were without basis. He was unable to read the inscription, he disregarded the facts concerning the circumstance of the discovery, he ignored the weathering of the inscription,

¹ Seemingly, “of,” “from,” “ill,” “dead,” and “mans” (for “men”). See below for the alternative Scandinavian interpretations of these words.

and without hesitation condemned the inscription as a fake and boasted of it. Was there ever such a pompous display of ignorance?” (Holand 1957: 190; quoted by Kehoe 2005: 6–7). Nevertheless, several other linguistic and runic authorities soon followed suit and announced their opinions about the KRS, most of them concurring that the stone was a modern forgery. Hagen (1950: 321) called this a “chain reaction” and Nielsen & Wolter (2006) devoted a whole chapter to what they called “Scandals in Scholarship.” The discoverer, farmer Olof Ohman, then lost interest in the stone and kept it in a farm shed for several years.²

Holand, a Norwegian-American historian (see Holand 1908), obtained the KRS in 1907. Ohman wished it to be examined and eventually deposited in a museum. To that end Holand studied the KRS intensively himself and submitted it to examination by numerous investigators. Among these was the Museum Committee of the Minnesota Historical Society, headed by State Archaeologist N.H. Winchell. After a year of investigation they issued a report in 1910 with “a favorable opinion of the authenticity of the Kensington rune stone.”³

Holand then became the primary advocate for the authenticity of the KRS, and authored numerous books, journal articles, and newspaper stories on the subject over a span of more than five decades (1908–1962). Within the same time-span a few other respected scholars, bucking the tide of negative opinion, published studies favorable to the probable or possible authenticity, of the KRS. Among these were the Danish scholar William Thalbitzer (1946/47) and the Norwegian-American linguist Sivert N. Hagen (1950).

Another Norwegian-American scholar, Ole E. Hagen, was a specialist in Old Scandinavian and other Germanic languages, as well as in Assyriology (cuneiform writing). O.E. Hagen studied the KRS for many years, and was preparing a “lengthy monograph for the purpose of proving the authenticity of the [KRS] inscription,” but unfortunately in 1926 the manuscript was burned up along with his home. Hagen died soon after that, but in a letter printed in *Reform* (Eau Claire, Wis.)⁴ he stated “[in] epigraphic respects I find in the inscription no evidence that it is anything except what it purports to be. ... In linguistic respects [it] presents certain peculiarities ... but real philological errors

² The oft-repeated story that Ohman used the KRS as a doorstep to his granary from 1899–1907 was refuted by Olof’s son Edward Ohman in 1949 (Nielsen & Wolter 2006: 222). Ohman (Swedish Öhman) translates as “Island-man.” According to the Swedish Central Statistical Bureau Öhman and its spelling variant Öman is not uncommon and is borne by almost 8,000 citizens of Sweden. <https://www.scb.se/>

³ But the sentence continues with a condition, “provided, that the references to Scandinavian literature given in this Committee’s written report and accompanying papers be verified by a competent specialist in the Scandinavian languages, to be selected by this Committee, and that he approve the conclusions of this report.” The specialist was George Flom, of the University of Illinois, who delineated twenty-one points against the authenticity of the KRS, “not one of which is valid in 2005” (Nielsen & Wolter 2006: 489). Nevertheless, in July 1910 the Historical Society backpedaled on their April report and decided to “reserve their conclusion”; the official declaration was published five years later (Kehoe 2005: 8).

⁴ Quoted by Holand (1932, p. 59).

showing it to be a forgery I do not find. ... My advice is therefore that the [KRS] be ... preserved as an important epigraphic document concerning American History.”

However, in the fifties and sixties two books by prominent scholars seemed to seal the fate of the KRS as a hoax in the minds of most serious historians and linguists. University of California linguist Erik Wahlgren (1958) concluded that the hoax was probably perpetrated by one or more of several Kensington locals: the farmers Ohman and Andrew Anderson, itinerant teacher Sven Fogelblad, and real estate agent J.P. Hedberg, though he found no absolute proof of who did it. Minnesota historian Theodore Blegen (1968) wrote a detailed account of the seven decades of controversy surrounding the KRS, and concurred that it was most likely a hoax, though leaving the question of authenticity slightly open to future research. Blegen also mentioned another possible “suspect” in the hoax (“if hoax it be”), Professor O.E. Hagen (see above).

Within the past four decades another series of events has seemed to turn the tables back toward the possibility that the KRS may, after all, turn out to be a genuine fourteenth-century document. Robert A. Hall Jr., an eminent linguist specializing in Romance languages, published a book (1982) in which he weighed all the evidence (linguistic, geological, historical) and concluded “with perhaps 98% likelihood, that the inscription of the [KRS] is to be considered genuine.” A Danish-American engineer, Richard Nielsen, had taken over the role that Holand filled for so many years, and published a series of articles (1986, 1987, 2001, etc.) showing that many of the “aberrant runes” and linguistic oddities of the KRS have attested parallels in medieval Scandinavian literature.

Recently a Minnesota attorney, Thomas E. Reiersgord (2001), synthesized the KRS story with a wealth of historical information to produce a new interpretation of the origin and subsequent movements of the KRS. Very succinctly, Reiersgord theorized that the Scandinavian explorers were Cistercian monks from Gotland, along with some Norwegian sailors and navigators, and the “ten men red with blood and tortured” were victims, not of an Indian massacre, but of an outbreak of bubonic plague. (The plague, or Black Death, had swept through Europe shortly before the date on the KRS: 1346–50, and continued to flare up for decades after that.) Reiersgord’s scenario could account for the rapid decimation of Native Americans long before the westward migrations of European settlers, the Dakota legends of a pre-Columbian visit by white men with iron tools and weapons (see below), and other mysteries of American history.⁵

University of Wisconsin anthropologist Alice Beck Kehoe (2005) brings a different approach to the KRS controversy, a holistic anthropological view assessing data from archaeology, natural science, history, and human behavior. Kehoe concludes that “the weight of probability now favors the authenticity of the Kensington Runestone inscription.”

⁵ The pre-Columbian depopulation and abandonment of Cahokia, a large city in southern Illinois, is another example of mysteries that could be explained by the bubonic plague sweeping through North America (Reiersgord 2001: 200).

Recent geological studies by Scott Wolter have sought to show that the weathering of the KRS inscription indicates at least 200 years of exposure before its discovery in 1898. If so Ohman (or any other alleged nineteenth-century hoaxer) could not have incised the inscription, and dating it before 1700 reduces the opportunity, means, and motive for such a hoax to the vanishing point. In fact, nine decades earlier Minnesota state geologist N.H. Winchell, Wisconsin state geologist William Hotchkiss, and geologist Warren Upham had already agreed that the weathering of the KRS indicated such a great age that Ohman or any other European settlers could not have carved the runes (Kehoe 2005: 32).⁶ If this geological finding holds up, all the objections to “aberrant runes” and anachronistic words will be rendered irrelevant. The KRS will have to be accepted as a genuine fourteenth-century document, and its odd words and phrases will eventually be added to dictionaries of medieval Scandinavian.

Some issues around the KRS

Alleged English words: Some of the scholars who looked at the KRS (or transcriptions of it) soon after its discovery remarked that the text was a mixture of Scandinavian and English. The supposed English words, in the order in which they appear on the stone, are //of//, //pēp// ‘dead’, //illu//,⁷ //mans//, and //from//. All of the words have since been shown to be authentic Scandinavian:

- //of// has nothing to do with English *of*, but is an archaic Scandinavian word for ‘over’, equivalent to Old Norse *of*, Old Runic Swedish //ub//.⁸
- //pēp// is either a misspelling of Old Swedish *döþ(e)* ‘dead’, or an entirely different word, OSw **þēðe* ‘tortured’ (S. Hagen).
- //illu// is a dative form, attested as ON OSw *illo, illu* ‘(from) evil’, found in the oldest versions of the Lord’s Prayer.
- //mans// is not the incorrect English *mans*, for *men*, but the Old Scan. genitive singular *manns* (= Eng. *man’s*), commonly used in expressing numbers of men or people.
- //from//, while coinciding with the spelling of English *from*, appears to be **frām*, an old variant of Sw *från*.

(These words are discussed in more detail in *Appendix A*, under comments to the KRS text.)

⁶ In 1910–1911 Upham’s opinion of the authenticity of the KRS was “50-50,” while he pronounced Winchell’s confidence as “95%.” However by 1916 Upham wrote that “I am completely confirmed in my belief, with the late Professor Winchell [†1914], that the Rune Stone is 554 years old and a true historic record” (Nielsen & Wolter 2006: 285).

⁷ I see no reason to perpetuate the usual reading //illy// (see *Appendix A*).

⁸ //skialti ub fatlaþR// ‘(with) shield draped (hanging) over’ on the Rök rune stone, ca. 900 AD.

Other Linguistic Problems: Aside from the alleged English words, many linguistic experts have not been able to accept the KRS as a genuine fourteenth-century document, because it seems to contain *anachronisms*, words or grammatical forms that did not exist in Old Norse.⁹ This began with O.J. Breda (see above), the first linguist to examine the KRS inscription. Breda could not decipher the date, and so he naturally assumed that the inscription had to do with the early voyages of Leif Eiriksson and company, and thus was carved in the eleventh century. An inscription from that period would be expected to be in Classical Old Norse, and when Breda saw that the KRS text was not in Old Norse, but in a more modern form, he immediately declared it a fraud. The first person to decipher the date as 1362 was apparently the Swedish linguist Adolf Noreen (1906),¹⁰ but since he also thought some of the words were English, Noreen thought an immigrant from Dalecarlia, a part of Sweden where runic writing persisted into the nineteenth century, had carved the stone.

Anachronisms or innovations: Some of the perceived anachronisms of the KRS are:

- //oppagelse-// ‘discovery’: not recorded in Old Norse dictionaries;
- //rise// ‘journey’: a loanword from Low German *reise* that became *resa* in Middle and Modern Swedish;
- //fro : peno : sten//, //we : hawet//, //äptir : wore : skip//, //from : peno : öh//: in Old Norse we expect dative forms, such as *fra þæssom stēne*, *viþ havinum*, *æptir vārom skipum*, *fra þæsso ö*, respectively. However, the KRS does have dative forms in: //illu// ‘(from) evil’, and //peno// ‘(from) this’.
- //wi : war//, //wi : kom//, //[wi] : fan// ‘we were, we came, [we] found’: these verbs would have had plural forms in Old Norse: *vārom*, *kōmom*, *funnum*, respectively.

On the other hand some commentators (mainly since 1940) have pointed out several **archaisms** in the KRS text. Among these are: //of : west// ‘over the west, through the west’; //peno// ‘this’ (dative singular); //äptir// ‘after’; //10 : mans// ‘ten men’; //peþ//, if it means ‘tormented, stricken, worn, smarting (of sickness, grief, or the like)’, rather than the usual ‘dead’ or ‘death’; //fräelse : af : illu// ‘deliver [us] from evil’; //from// ‘from’; and the prolepsis found in the first KRS sentence. (See *Appendix A* for comments on each word, and see the note to //wi// ‘we’ for the prolepsis.)

What are we to make of this apparent mixture of archaisms and innovations? If we, unlike Professor Breda, take cognizance of the date of the KRS, we may have the beginning of a solution. All authorities on Scandinavian language history agree that the year 1350, or

⁹ “Old Norse” is used here in the broad sense, *i.e.*, embracing Old Swedish, Old Danish, Old Norwegian, and Old Icelandic. Cf. Gordon (1927, 1938).

¹⁰ University of Uppsala, author of *Altschwedische Grammatik* (Old Swedish Grammar: 1904). As quoted by Hagen (1950). (See bibliography.)

thereabouts, was an important dividing point. Vemund Skard,¹¹ for example, divides the history of the Norwegian language into several periods, among which are the Old Norse Period (*Gammelnorsk tid*) = 1050–1350 and the Middle Norse Period (*Mellomnorsk tid*) = 1350–1523.¹²

Of the Middle Norse Period (MNP) Skard says, “It is in the [MNP] that the written [Norwegian] language takes note of the breakdown of the grammatical framework,”¹³ a breakdown that had already existed in speech since the later ONP. Among other changes, the dative and accusative cases of nouns are no longer distinguished: the accusative replaces the dative, except in a few fossilized phrases.¹⁴ At the same time, the distinction between singular and plural verb forms was given up. Many new words (loanwords) were adopted, especially from Low German. New words were also formed with the suffix *-else* / *-ilsi* / *-isli*, which appears to be a blend of the native Scandinavian *-ls* / *-sl* with Low German *-nisse* (= Eng. *-ness*).

Swedish linguists Elias Wessén¹⁵ and Gösta Bergman¹⁶ use slightly different terminology, dividing the history of the Swedish language into periods including “Earlier (or Classical) Old Swedish” (äldre [klassiska] fornsvenskan) = 1225–1375 and “Later Old Swedish” (yngre fornsvenskan) = 1375–1526. Note the latter period beginning in 1375. Skard’s date is not so different, since he allows that the Middle Norwegian period really began around 1370,¹⁷ when the full effects of the Black Death were felt.

In his outline of the Scandinavian languages Einar Haugen¹⁸ recognizes the following periods: Old Scandinavian (OSc) = 1050–1350, and Middle Scandinavian = 1350–1550. Of the latter era (MSc) Haugen says that “The MSS ... reflect, in the form of numerous ‘errors’, the problems scribes were having with the traditional paradigms. These began within the OSc period, and their increase after the middle of the fourteenth century could have been due to inadequate training; the clergy were hard hit by the Black Death.”¹⁹ Skard also emphasizes the role of the Black Death, which hit Norway in the summer of 1349, and caused as much as two thirds of Norwegians to perish.²⁰

As we have seen, the KRS is dated 1362, some thirteen years after the onslaught of the Black Death, and it should not be surprising that the MSc linguistic changes (**innovations**) described by Skard and Haugen are very much in evidence in the KRS

¹¹ University of Oslo.

¹² Skard (1967).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 141, *et passim*: “Det er i mno. tid at skriftspråket registrerer sammenbruddet i det grammatiske formverk.”

¹⁴ Still in modern Norwegian, *e.g.*, *de gikk mann av huse* = ‘every man turned out’, *i tid og utide* = ‘in season and out’, etc.; Swedish *gick man ur huse* (= the Nw phrase mentioned), *å sidö* = ‘aside’, etc.

¹⁵ 1965, *Svensk språkhistoria*. (8th Ed.). Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.

¹⁶ 1968, 1970, *Kortfattad svensk språkhistoria*.

¹⁷ Skard, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁸ Harvard University.

¹⁹ Haugen (1976, p. 286).

²⁰ Skard (1967, p. 77).

inscription. The perceived “linguistic problems” disappear when we recognize that the KRS is an *early Middle Scandinavian document*, not the Old Norse text Breda and others expected it to be. Since the language is *early MSc*, it still retains some of the characteristics of Old Norse: the **archaisms** mentioned above. If the KRS is a hoax, the hoaxer had an astounding amount of knowledge about the transitional linguistic period that the late fourteenth century was, since he used forms that were exactly appropriate to an Old Scandinavian language on the cusp of changing into Middle Scandinavian. Who could have had this knowledge on the American frontier in the nineteenth century?

“Vikings”: With all due respect to the Alexandria (Minnesota) Chamber of Commerce, any notion that the KRS was carved by “Vikings” is anachronistic, since the Viking Age ended in 1066. If the KRS is to be believed, the explorers who explored Minnesota three centuries later were clearly Roman Catholic Christians, as seen in the KRS’s //AVM// ‘Ave Maria’ and //fræelse : af : illu// ‘deliver from evil’. According to the Dakota legend recited by Makawašewiŋ, the 38 white men who visited her people long ago were very well-behaved: they had no “firewater” and did not “marry” (have sexual contact with) Native American women — characteristics that are consistent with Reiersgord’s theory that they were Cistercian monks. Instead of the huge Big Ole statue in Alexandria, Minnesota, complete with a winged (not horned) helmet, tourists should mayhap be viewing the image of a meek, ascetic man wearing the cross and cowl of a monk — but what fun would that be?

Indian massacre? ... or the Black Death?: Almost all interpreters of the KRS, coming across the phrase “we found ten men, red with blood and dead (or tormented)” have leapt to the assumption that the men had been the victims of a hostile attack by Native Americans. But “there is not one word in the lengthy inscription that mentions Indians, fighting, or killing. ... The erroneous assumption that produced the massacre interpretation simply reflected the attitudes and fears of European-Americans of that period” (Reiersgord 2001: 7, 11). Instead, Reiersgord called attention to the Black Death pandemic that swept through Europe in the 14th century and impacted the KRS story in several ways.

We have already discussed above about the struggles scribes were having with maintaining the traditional Old Scandinavian grammatical paradigms that had changed in popular speech. Language historians have attributed this to the decimation of clergy by the Plague, and this may have been a factor in explaining the unorthodox grammatical forms found in the KRS. The fact that victims of the bubonic plague suffer from internal hemorrhage and bleed from the mouth and nose before dying would explain how the ten men would have become “red with blood” (Reiersgord 2001: 71–80).

Another fact supporting the Black Death explanation is that the phrase // AVM : fræelse : af : illu // “Hail Mary! Deliver (us) from evil” on the KRS is essentially the same as the prayer recorded in the Norwegian ballad “Førnesbronnen” from the fourteenth

century: “Hjelpe os Gud å Maria møy å frels os alle av illi,” i.e. “Help us God, and the Virgin Mary, and deliver us all from evil.”²¹ This prayer was in common use, apparently all over Scandinavia, for funerals of the victims of bubonic plague. This Norwegian ballad, from Telemark, was known already to the archaeologist Winchell in the early twentieth century, as reported by historian Blegen.²² It seems likely that any fourteenth-century Scandinavian coming across a stone telling of men red with blood, followed by the prayer to the Virgin, would instantly know it was reporting about the Black Death and not an attack by hostile natives. (See also Makawaštewiŋ’s story, below, which also confirms peaceful relations between the explorers and natives.)

Makawaštewiŋ’s story: Reiersgord (2001) discusses a story told by Makawaštewiŋ,²³ a Dakota woman who lived on Prairie Island (Minnesota). She told the story to anthropologist Ruth Landes in 1935, when she was about 90 years old. It is thought to reflect events that happened centuries ago, when the Dakota lived to the north and east of their recent homeland in southern Minnesota. In the story a sailboat arrived on the shore of Lake Superior²⁴ early one spring:

It had mastheads of carved snakes and a great figurehead with scaly body, horns, and wings, topped by a horse’s head. Aft was carved a monster with a beak. The boat had three sails and was rowed with long oars; on each side were strung ten shields, and there were cabins above and below. Thirty-eight sailors or warriors manned the boat; their clothes had scales painted on them; and they wore horned headpieces. They carried spears, knives, and axes on poles.²⁵

Reiersgord notes the number of explorers: 38 in the Dakota story and 40 on the KRS (8 Göter + 22 Norwegians + 10 men “by the sea”), and suggests that two of the KRS men may have been Native American guides who had shown the Scandinavians the way through the Great Lakes from the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Makawaštewiŋ related that the strange visitors gave the Dakota people gifts of iron tools and weapons, and taught their proper use. The Indians in turn taught the visitors the use of bows and arrows, to use canoes, and to portage. The strangers were “jolly,” had no

²¹ This version of the line is taken from O.E. Hagen (1911: 364). The phrase “hjelpe os Gud å Maria møy/ Help us God, and the Virgin Mary” recurs in all seven verses of the ballad, as cited by Hagen.

²² (1968: 107, 150); see also Hall (1982: 61–62; 1994: 33–35); Reiersgord (2001: 76, 77); Rage (2013: 105–06).

²³ Dakota *maká* ‘earth’, *wašté* ‘good’, *wiŋ* ‘woman’, i.e., ‘Good Earth Woman’ (Riggs 1890; /s/ is like English *sh*, and /ŋ/ denotes the preceding vowel as nasalized). Her English name, Susan Windgrow, was probably bestowed arbitrarily by an American government official or teacher.

²⁴ The storyteller did not name the lake, but it must have been Lake Superior, according to Reiersgord (2001), identical with //hawet// ‘the sea’ of the KRS. The 14th century explorers most likely had no clear idea of the size of the lake, which is comparable to or larger than various seas around the world, though it lacks salinity.

²⁵ Landes (1968: 22-23). The bit about “horned headpieces” might remind us of the fallacious images of “Vikings” sporting horned helmets. I have tried to track down what this would have been in the original Dakota text elicited by Landes, but have not found it yet.

“firewater,” and did not “marry” Native American women. They stayed through the summer, fall, and winter, and left the next spring and never came back.

As Reiersgord asks, what would motivate a ninety-year-old Dakota woman, who did not speak English (let alone Scandinavian), to perpetrate a hoax about Scandinavian visitors? We should more likely regard the story as based on historical fact.

The fallacy of the “switched stones”: Wahlgren (1958) seemed intent on contriving any number of unfounded assertions and scenarios in order to explain away any chance of the authenticity interpretation. This practice has been severely criticized, especially by Hall (1994: chapter 15) and Nielsen & Wolter (2006: 146–52). “In several places, Wahlgren simply invents alleged phenomena out of whole cloth,” one being the speculation that

... there were, not one, but two stones on which the ‘rival versions’, as [Wahlgren] terms them, would have been carved. Where the extra stone would have come from, how it would have been prepared with no-one seeing it or knowing about it, or what would have happened to it — Wahlgren gives no indication of how these questions would have been answered (Hall 1994: 96–97).²⁶

KRS critics in general have not paid any attention to the issue of the difficulty and skill required in cutting and preparing the stone.

Skeptics of the KRS seem to assume that carving the inscription was a simple task, like writing a postcard to send home while on vacation. To the contrary, the fact is that it required a high degree of skill. ... It would appear that the authors of the KRS inscription began by selecting a greywacke boulder that had fairly regular parallel sides caused by jointing. ... Probably the stone masons trimmed the top and bottom to create a more rectangular shape, and hammered the left side smooth to receive the inscription on that side ... (Reiersgord 2001: 47–48, 67).

To sum up, it is very difficult to reconcile the unusual and specialized skill of the stone mason(s) who prepared the raw stone for the inscription with any notion that farmer Ohman or any of the other Kensington locals could easily have conjured up even one suitable stone, let alone two of them, without the Ohman family or anyone else in the neighborhood noticing. The idea that Ohman, who was fully occupied with wresting a livelihood from a relatively unproductive tract of land, would have had time to amuse himself with expertly dressing one or more 200-pound boulders and painstakingly carving runic letters in a language (medieval Swedish) unknown to him, is inconsistent with everything we have

²⁶ Wahlgren’s so-called “rival versions” are probably better explained as copies on paper made independently by Olof Ohman and the Kensington banker Samuel Siverts (Hall 1994: 19; Nielsen & Wolter 2006: 6–7). Each copy had divergent variations from the text on the stone.

learned about the farmer. Olof Ohman’s wife Karin affirmed to Holand that her husband was “not a mason” (Holand 1962: 36–37; quoted by Kehoe 2005: 7).²⁷

The Larsson Papers: Papers belonging to Edward Larsson, a tailor from the Swedish province of Dalecarlia, were recently donated to a Swedish folklore institute in Umeå. Two of his papers, dated in 1883 and 1885, listed several alphabets, including two rows of runes. The first row consisted of a standard set of medieval runes (𐀀 𐀁 𐀂 𐀃 𐀄 𐀅 = //fuþork// = Futhork)²⁸ seen on stones and other objects dating from the eleventh century to about the thirteenth. What is of special interest is the second row of runes, which Larsson designated as “a complete alphabet” of twenty-seven letters, developed later to extend the old Futhark. Now about ten of the KRS runes are usual or standard, while the other twelve are aberrant, rare, or even unknown in the recorded runic tradition. Runic experts theorized that the

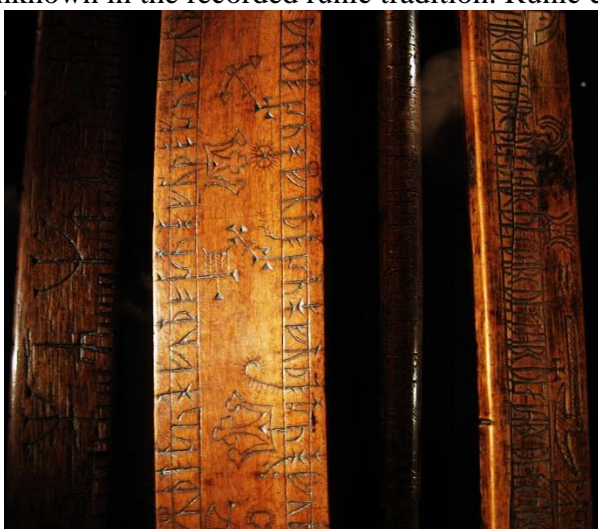


Figure 1: Rune staves in the Historical Museum, Lund, Sweden.

purported hoaxer made some of them up on the spot. What is interesting about Larsson’s second row of runes is that five of them, X //a//, ʒ //g//, ʒ //k//, ǰ //ä//, and the pentadic number ʒ //10//, are identical with the equivalent aberrant KRS runes. Four others are similar to, but not quite identical, with, the KRS runes: KRS ʒ //u// vs. Larsson’s ʒ //u//, KRS ʒ //w// vs. Larsson’s ʒ //w//, and KRS ǰ //ö// vs. Larsson’s ǰ //ö//. As summarized by Swedish linguist Henrik Williams, the Larsson papers “provide evidence that a special

²⁷ “The men who found the stone are plain and simple farmers, working hard to derive a subsistence for themselves and families from their land. The honesty and candor of Mr. Olof Ohman become evident to anyone who converses with him. He does not speak English readily, but seems to understand English when he hears it spoken in common conversation. He states that his education comprised six terms of school in Sweden, of six weeks each, in an elementary country school, where the children gathered for instruction, first at one farm house for a week and then at another, six weeks in all making one term” (Minnesota Historical Society 1915: 225).

²⁸ Note that there was never any true “standard” runic alphabet. It varied significantly over time and from place to place. Futhark refers to the older runes used before 1050 A.D.

set of runes, resembling the characters on the Kensington stone, was known in Sweden before the latter was found in 1898.”

These facts have been taken as support for both sides of the KRS authenticity debate. To proponents of the hoax theory the Larsson papers prove that the second rune-row is of nineteenth-century origin, and thus the KRS was also made during the same century. To advocates of KRS (fourteenth-century) authenticity, the Larsson papers show that an alleged nineteenth-century hoaxer did not “make up” the aberrant runes. It may be possible that Larsson copied his second rune-row from a much older document, perhaps a wooden rune-staff similar to one the KRS carver may have had at hand.²⁹

Language (speech) & runes (graphemics): two independent (but intertwined) issues:

It is easy, especially for laymen, to confuse the *language* (Middle Swedish) with the *runes* of the KRS; the latter entail a unique mixture of runic letters, unmatched by any other documents. Here I would just emphasize that *language* (speech) and *alphabet* (graphic system) may, and often do, function independently. For example, Urdu and Hindi are in many respects the same language (Hindustani), especially in sounds and grammar, but Urdu is traditionally written in a modification of the Arabic alphabet, while Hindi (like Sanskrit) is written in the Indian Devanagari syllabary. Likewise, Serbian and Croatian are virtually the same (Serbo-Croatian), but Serbian is written in a variant of the Cyrillic alphabet, and Croatian in a modified Roman script. In these examples the script used for each language is linked with religious and national identities.³⁰

In the current case, the KRS, we have the combination of an *unorthodox written language* (colloquial Middle Swedish) with an *unorthodox, and possibly unique graphic system* (the KRS set of runes). I have discussed the language in some detail, in the text above and in the appendices that follow. Hagen (1950: 340) described this language as “a delightfully honest and unsophisticated record of [the KRS] author’s own speech,” which stands in stark contrast to the standard, stilted, and artificially correct language of the clerical class.

As to the runes of the KRS, I will refrain from commenting much about this topic, which is outside of my expertise. It is enough to say that (a) there has never been a “standard” runic alphabet; forms of runes varied significantly over time and from place to place; (b) some early runic experts who commented on the KRS inscription were certain that some of the aberrant or unusual runes on the KRS were simply “made up” on the spot by the rune carver and thus “prove” that the KRS was a hoax, but more recent studies by Hall, Nielsen and others have shown that every KRS rune can be accounted for; (c) pronouncements by experts on runes who to the effect that the KRS runes could not have existed in the 14th century should be taken with a large grain of salt, since only the

²⁹ By Hedning - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4944565>

³⁰ Hindi – Devanagari script – Hinduism – India; Urdu – Arabic script – Islam – Pakistan | Serbian – Cyrillic script – Orthodox Christian – Serbia; Croatian – Roman script – Roman Catholic – Croatia.

inscriptions fortunate enough to have survived, due to being carved on stones, and a small fraction of runic inscriptions on wood or bone, have been available for their study. “Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”

In the 1950s some 670 runic inscriptions were found in Bergen, Norway in the area known as *Bryggen* (The Wharf). Most were carved on wood, and their uses, ranging from religious and commercial to profane graffiti, show that runes were used by the common people as late as the 16th century. As summarized by Robert A. Hall Jr.:

... although we may be astonished at the number of texts in the Bergen find, it represents in all probability a very small quantity in comparison with the totality of such documents on wood in circulation just on the day of each conflagration, the rest of which would have perished either in the fire or through eventual natural decay. From this material alone, which has been preserved to us by chance, it seems reasonable to conclude that there must have been an untold amount of such runic writings on wood used for communication in the Germanic North of Europe ... surviving in some areas among the people into modern times (Hall 1994:22).

* * * * *

My personal journey in relation to the hoax theory and the authenticity theory has not remained static. When I first learned about the KRS as a teenager and discussed it with my father, who had brought home some of Hjalmar Holand’s books from a library, the authenticity theory held sway and the hoax theory was relatively unknown to me. After going to college and reading the books by Wahlgren (1958) and Blegen (1968) the hoax theory began to seem more probable, especially since the language of the KRS deviated so radically from the Old Scandinavian I studied at the University of Minnesota, under Nils Hasselmo, Kaaren Grimstad, and Cecil Wood.

Almost a decade after graduating the university I was pleasantly surprised to meet Richard Nielsen at a conference in Toronto and discover that somebody was still working on the issues that I thought had been settled by Wahlgren and Blegen. I picked up some of his papers (Nielsen 1986, 1987) and studied them. The KRS remained an intermittent interest, until almost two decades later when I met Nielsen again at a celebration launching the 2006 book he co-wrote with Scott Wolter.

Recently, with the demonstration that the incisions on the KRS stone exhibit evidence for centuries of weathering, and the growing realization that nobody in nineteenth-century Douglas County was qualified to pull off such a hoax (complete with perfect vowel harmony), the authenticity theory may once again seem to be as probable as, or possibly even more probable than, the hoax theory. (See especially the tables by Hall [1982: 89–92; 1994: 80–81] for weighing the probabilities of each explanation.)

Hagen (1950: 340) remarked that “[the KRS] inscription should be a perfect joy to the linguist because it is such a delightfully honest and unsophisticated record of its

author’s own speech.” Thalbitzer (1946/47: 35) surmised that the Swedish and Norwegian travelers, after years of close contact, had developed a common Scandinavian *lingua franca* with a simplified grammar. Hall, an expert on pidgin and Creole languages, found Thalbitzer’s thesis of a (slightly) pidginized *lingua franca* plausible (Hall 1982: 22). I suggest that the presence of vowel harmony further adds to the facts that tip the ‘balance of probability’ (Hall 1982: 89; cf. Kehoe 2005: 79–87) toward the possibility of the fourteenth-century authenticity of the KRS. At the very least these facts may contribute to a reappraisal of the questions surrounding this enigmatic monument.

My goal in this is not to support a “blind faith” in the authenticity of the KRS, but to emphasize that opinions on this issue vary widely, and that the decision between authenticity and forgery should not be based on an uncritical belief, in either direction, but on a sober and objective assessment of the evidence for and against. Respected scholars, such as Adolf Noreen, Erik Wahlgren, Theodore Blegen, and Einar Haugen, have written in favor of the hoax theory, while other equally esteemed academics, like Sivert Hagen, William Thalbitzer, Robert A. Hall Jr., and Alice Beck Kehoe, have argued that the scale tips toward authenticity. How then are we to decide? If the rejection of the KRS is based on a false objection, like the widely believed but long discredited notion that the text contained English words, is this not just as unsound as a “belief” in the KRS based on a false premise like ethnic pride?

So let us put away all emotionally based reactions. The Kensington Rune Stone is an empirical problem, not a matter of belief or disbelief.

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**Appendix A:
The Kensington Rune Stone Text**



On the face of the stone:³¹

- (1) 𐀀 : 𐀁𐀂𐀃 : 𐀄 : 𐀅𐀆 : 𐀇𐀈𐀉𐀊𐀋 : 𐀌 :
- (2) 𐀍 : 𐀎𐀏𐀐𐀑𐀒𐀓𐀔𐀕 : 𐀖𐀗 :
- (3) 𐀘𐀙𐀚𐀛 : 𐀜 : 𐀝𐀞𐀟 : 𐀠 :
- (4) 𐀡𐀢 : 𐀣𐀤𐀥 : 𐀦𐀧 : 𐀨 : 𐀩𐀪𐀫 : 𐀬 :
- (5) 𐀭𐀮 : 𐀯𐀰 : 𐀱𐀲 : 𐀳𐀴 : 𐀵𐀶 : 𐀷𐀸 :
- (6) 𐀹 : 𐁀𐁁 : 𐁂 : 𐁃𐁄𐁅 : 𐁆 : 𐁇𐁈 : 𐁉𐁊𐁋 :
- (7) 𐁌 : 𐁍𐁎 : 𐁏𐁐 : 𐁑𐁒 : 𐁓 : 𐁔𐁕 : 𐁖𐁗 :

³¹ Thanks to Richard Nielsen for providing a KRS font. Naturally, the carved runes are not as uniform as appears here.

(8) Xƿ : ƆΓƆƆ : ƆƆ : Ɔ+Ɔ : A V M :

(9) ƿRǼtΓƆt : Xƿ : lΓΓƆ :

On the side of the stone:

(10) *ǼR : Ɔ : ƳXtƆ : Ƴt : *XƳtT : Xt : Ɔt :

(11) ǼBTIR : ƳƆRt : ƆRIB : ΓƆ : ƆXƆ* : RlƆt :

(12) ƿRƆƳ : ƆtƆt : Ǿ* : X*R : ΓƆƆΓ :

There are many interpretations of the KRS text. The following transcription and translation (in my opinion one of the best) is by Sivert N. Hagen (1950). The symbol //p// transcribes a rune (Ɔ) of similar shape, and originally denoted *th*-sounds,³² as in English *thin* (unvoiced) and *this* (voiced). Sometimes it also denoted the *d*-sound, as in //winlanp//.

(1) 8 : göter : ok : 22 : norrmen : po : (12) from : þeno : öh : ahr : 1362

(2) [þen]o : oppagelsefarþ : fro :

(3) winlanþ : of : west : wi :

(4) haþe : läger : weþ : 2 : skjar : en :

(5) þags : rise : norr : fro : þeno : sten :

(6) wi : war : ok : fiske : en : þagh :
äptir :

(7) wi : kom : hem : fan : 10 : man : röþe

(8) af : bloþ : og : þeþ : AVM :

(9) fräelse : af : illy :

(10) här : 10 : mans : we : hawet : at : se
:

(11) äptir : wore : skip : 14 : þagh : rise :

³² This letter *p* is still used in Icelandic for the unvoiced *th*-sound, as in ‘thick’ (*þykk[ur]*).

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Eight Götlanders and twenty-two Norwegians on | we came home, found ten men red |
| [this] exploration-journey from | with blood and tortured. Hail, Mary! |
| Vinland over the west. We | Deliver from evil! |
| had camp beside two sheds, one | Have ten men by the sea to look |
| day's journey north from this stone. | after our ships, fourteen-day journey |
| We were [out] and fished one day; after | from this island. Year, 1362. |

Notes on individual words and phrases:³³

//8, 22// All numbers on the KRS (except //en// 'one') are in *pentadic* form, a medieval system of numeral notation. As found on the KRS these are: ⅃ = 1, ⅆ = 2, ⅆ = 3, ⅆ = 4, ⅆ = 6, ⅆ = 8, ⅆ = 10. What is unprecedented on the KRS is the arrangement of pentadic numerals with the place values of the Arabic numeral system: ⅆⅆ = 22, ⅆⅆ = 14, ⅆⅆⅆⅆ = 1362. All previous runestones, insofar as they recorded dates, either spelled the words out,³⁴ or used Roman numerals.

//göter// 'Götlanders': = ON *Gautar*, Old English *Géatas* 'Geats'; residents of Götaland, now part of Sweden. Some (e.g., Reiersgord) have equated //göter// with Goths, but the latter would be *Gotar* or *Gutar* in Old Swedish, referring properly to natives of Gotland.³⁵

//ok// 'and': the ordinary Scan. word for 'and' = Sw *och*, Nw Da Ic *og*. The variant //og// is found later in the text (line 8). Archaic rune stones have //auk//.

//norrmen// 'Norwegians': Some have thought //norrmen// = 'Northmen' could also be taken in the broad sense of any Scandinavian, but juxtaposed with the specific ethnonym //göter// I think it must mean specifically 'Norwegians'. Hall (1982: 38) suggests that the double /r/s represent trisyllabic /nor-ɾ-män/, in which /ɾ/ denotes a syllabic /r/. This /nor-ɾ/ would be a contraction of OSw *norþer*, *nordher*. See also //norr//, below.

//po// 'on': The usual Scan. word for 'on', Sw Da Nw *på*, contracted from ON *upp á* 'up on'. Use of the vowel //o// indicates the early change of ON long *á* /ā/ to a rounded sound *å* /ɔ/ in the KRS dialect: see also //fro//, //from// 'from' and //wore// 'our' with the same change = Modern Sw *från* and *våra*, respectively.

//[pen]o// 'this' (dative singular feminine): Only //o// is now visible on the stone. Hagen (1950) surmised that the rest of the word //peno// 'this' was worn or weathered away. For //peno// 'this' see //peno : sten//, below.

³³ Words and phrases transcribed from the KRS (or other rune stones) are placed between slashes, e.g. //göter//; words cited from non-runic sources are in italics, e.g. *Geatas*.

³⁴ E.g., //pushundraþ . tu . hundraþ . tiuhu . uintr . ok . atta . fra . byrþ . gus .// 'one thousand two hundred twenty winters and eight after the birth of God' = 1228, on the Saleby rune stone in Västergötland (Sweden).

³⁵ It does appear that the words *Götar* / *Gautar* (Götlanders) and *Gutar* (Goths) are ultimately related.

//*oppagelsefarþ*// ‘exploration-journey’: Critics have argued that the KRS could not have been made in the fourteenth century because //*oppagelse*// ‘discovery’ is not found in dictionaries of Medieval Scandinavian, though it exists in modern Scandinavian, for example Nw *oppdagelse*. “But the mere absence of a word from the surviving records of any language does not by itself prove its non-existence” (Hagen 1950: 331). Nielsen (1987) suggests the alternate reading *optagelse* ‘acquisition, taking up’. //*farþ*// is a variant of the usual Scan. word for ‘journey’ = ON Ic *ferð*, OSw *færþ*, Sw *färd*, Nw *ferd*, Da *færd* (Hagen 1950: 328). For Low German influence, see also //*läger*// ‘camp’ and //*rise*// ‘journey’, below.

//*fro*// ‘from, fro’: see //*from*//, below.

//*winlanþ*// ‘Vinland’: A part of North America mentioned in Icelandic Sagas. Reiersgord (2001) identifies it as Anticosti Island (Île d’Anticosti) in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

//*of : west*// ‘over the west’: Soon after discovery of the KRS this phrase was mistakenly identified as English *of west*, and a sign that a nineteenth-century forger had mixed English and Scandinavian. Later research showed that the phrase is actually archaic Scandinavian (*um vestr* = **of vestr*) and means ‘over the west, towards the west, in a westerly direction’ (Hagen 1950: 332–33).

//*wi*// ‘we’: = Sw Da Nw *vi*, OSw *vir*, ON Ic *vér*, etc. ‘we’. Hall (1982) argues that this first occurrence of //*wi*// is the subject of the first sentence rather than of the second sentence. Thus, we would read “Eight Götlanders and twenty-two Norwegians on [this] exploration-journey from Vinland over the west [are] we.”

//*hæpe*// ‘had’: = Sw *hade*, Nw *hadde*, Da *havde*. Classical ON and OSw had *hafpe*, Middle Sw *hadhe*. This and other verbs in this text are more Middle Swedish than Old Swedish. *hadhe* is attested in a Swedish document dated 1385, *hæpe* in Norse of the 14th century (Hagen 1950: 33, and footnote 54).

//*läger*// ‘camp’: = Sw *läger* < OSw *læggher* ‘bed, lying place’ = Eng *lair*. The newer meaning ‘camp’ is due to the influence of Low (Northern) German *leger*. If, as Kehoe and others have theorized, the KRS party included at least some traders, the latter would probably have been familiar with the Hanseatic league, who had already established a permanent colony of Low German-speaking traders in Bergen, Norway, by about 1350 (Kehoe 2005: 63). These traders very likely had learned to speak Low German to some extent. See also //*oppagelse*//, above, and //*rise*// ‘journey’, below.

//*wep*// ‘by’: ON OSw *vip*, Sw *vid*, Nw Da *ved* (Eng. *with*). Middle Swedish also had *vedh*. This word occurs later (line 10) without the final *p*: //*wē*//. The disappearance of *p* (= *dh*) in final position began in the Middle Scandinavian period (after 1350), and is now standard in Norwegian, and heard in some dialects of Swedish (*ve* ‘by’, *blo* ‘blood’, etc.).

//*skjar*// ‘sheds’ (?): This word has been variously interpreted. Most early interpreters took //*skjar*// to be ON *sker*, Sw *skär* ‘skerries’; Rygh (1899)³⁶ read //*sklear*// ‘sleds’;

³⁶ As quoted by Hagen (1950).

Hagen (1950) thought //skjar// was the plural of ON *skjá* ‘shed, shack, shanty’; Nielsen (1987) reads //skylar// ‘hiding places, shelters’. I think Hagen’s interpretation fits the best, phonetically, and for him the *skjár* referred to houses erected by local Dakota Indians and later abandoned.

//en// ‘one’: //en//, //sten//, //hem// ‘one, stone, home’ represent OSw *ēn*, *stēn*, *hēm*, respectively, from older *ein*, *stein*, *heim*. These words, along with //göter//, //röpe//, //öh// ‘Götlanders, red, island’ show that the KRS dialect is East Norse (Swedish or Danish), since West Norse has diphthongs (*ei*, *au*, *øy*) in all six words:

| KRS | Old Swedish | Old Norse | Gothic ³⁷ | Old English |
|-------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| //en// ‘one’ | <i>ēn</i> | <i>einn</i> | /áins/ | <i>ān</i> |
| //sten// ‘stone’ | <i>stēn</i> | <i>steinn</i> | /stáins/ | <i>stān</i> |
| //hem// ‘home’ | <i>hēm</i> | <i>heim</i> | /háims/ ‘village’ | <i>hām</i> |
| //göter// ‘Geats’ | <i>Gōtar</i> | <i>Gautar</i> | */gáutōs/ | <i>Gēatas</i> |
| //röpe// ‘red’ | <i>rōþa</i> | <i>rauða</i> | /ráuþans/ | <i>rēad</i> |
| //öh// ‘island’ | <i>ō</i> | <i>øy</i> | */awi/ | <i>īg</i> , <i>īeg</i> |

Other features of the KRS indicate Swedish rather than Danish origin: the sharp consonants in //göter//, //skip// ‘Götlanders, ships’ (rather than ODa *Gøde*, *skib*), the clear final *-o* in //peno//, and the phrase //frælse : af : illu// ‘deliver from evil’ (see below).

//pags : rise// ‘day’s journey’: //pags// is the ordinary Scandinavian genitive for ‘day’s’ (Sw Nw Da *dags*), but //rise// has been cited as suspect by some critics, since the usual ON word for journey was *ferð*, *færþ*, and the later loanword from Low German *reise* became OSw *rēsa*, not **rise*. Some early commentators thought //rise// was influenced by Eng. *rise*. I think it more likely that the author of the KRS knew Low German (as many medieval Scandinavians did),³⁸ and wrote an approximation of LG *reise* rather than the adapted form *rēsa*. See also //oppagelse// and //läger//, above,

//norr// ‘north’: Probably a Middle Swedish contraction of OSw *norþer*, *nordher*. Hall (1982: 38) suggests that the double /r/s indicated disyllabic /nor-ɾ/ and trisyllabic /nor-ɾ-män/, in which /ɾ/ denotes a syllabic /r/: see //norrmen//, above.

//peno : sten// ‘this stone’: //peno// ‘this’ (dative singular) occurs in at least twice on the KRS: //peno : sten// ‘this stone’ on line (5), //peno : öh// ‘this island’ on line (12), and, (Hagen [1950] thought) //peno : oppagelsefarþ// ‘this exploration-journey’ on line (2), as noted above. //peno// corresponds to an unusual OSw variant: *þenno*, *thenno* (dative

³⁷ The “Gothic” forms */gáutōs/ and */awi/ are not attested but reconstructed according to the correspondences established by other Gothic words.

³⁸ “[T]he most powerful dominance ever exerted over Scandinavia by a foreign language, that of Middle Low German ..., failed to sweep the [Scandinavian] languages away, though there were times when it seemed as if this very thing might happen” (Haugen 1976, p. 65).

- singular neuter), here extended to masculine //sten// and feminine //öh//.³⁹ Since the form *þenno*, *thenno* was first published in 1904, in Noreen’s grammar of Old Swedish, how would an alleged hoaxer have known about it in the 1890s? For //sten//, see the note to //en//, above.
- //wi : war : ok : fiske// ‘we were [out] and fished’: Hagen (1950) thought this was a “corruption” of earlier **wi war o fiske* = ON *vér várum á fiski* ‘we were a-fishing’. Here (and in the following //wi : kom//, //[wi] : fan//) the KRS has singular forms rather than the expected ON/OSw plurals *vārom*, *kōmom*, *funnum*. “It has been argued that the Kensington inscription is a forgery because its verb forms are ‘modern’. The answer to this is that insofar as some Scandinavian dialects used singular verbs with plural subjects they were ‘modern’ already around 1300” (Hagen 1950: 333).
- //en : pagh// ‘one day’: //pagh// ‘day’ reflects the common OSw spelling *dagher* ‘day’, accusative *dagh*.
- //äptir// ‘after’: This is the usual OSw *æptir*, *æftir* = ON *eptir*, Sw Da *efter*, Nw *etter*. Also found in line 11. The archaic vowel /i/ in the second syllable is, in my opinion, some of the evidence for vowel harmony: It matches *æftir* in the Scanian Law and *æptir* in the West Götaland Law. (See *Appendix B*.) The consonant /p/, rather than /f/, may indicate that the KRS author spoke the West Götaland dialect.
- //wi : kom : hem : fan// ... ‘we came home [and] found ...’: see the note to //wi : war : ok : fiske//, above, for the singular verb forms.
- //10 : man// ‘ten men’: Some have thought //man// to be an error by the rune-carver for what should be *//män//, but we saw above that ‘men’ was //-men// in the name //norrmen// ‘Norwegians’. I think //10 : man// is rather an idiomatic phrase, like Swedish *på tu man hand* ‘privately’ (lit., ‘on two men’s hand’), reduced from *på tu manna hand*, where *manna* is a relic genitive plural ‘of men’. Cf. Norwegian *alle mann* ‘all hands’, *tusen mann* ‘1000 men’ (troops).⁴⁰ Thus, //10 : man// on the KRS stands for **tio manna* ‘10 of men’. See also //10 : mans//, below.
- //röpe// ‘red’ (pl.): Classical Old Swedish had *rōþa* (accusative plural). KRS’s *rōþe* is consistent with *Gøter* (for *Gøtar*) in line 1 (“e=dialect”).
- //af : bloþ// ‘with (of) blood’: OSw *af blōþe* (dative), later *af blōþ* (accusative).
- //peþ// ‘tortured, tormented’: Most interpreters have taken //peþ// to mean ‘dead’, either as an intrusion of English *dead*, or as a medieval misspelling of Sw *död* ‘dead’.⁴¹ Hagen (1950)

³⁹ The origin of OSw *þenno* (*thenno*) is well explained by Sivert Hagen (1950: 337) as a blend or compromise between dative singular masculine *þennom* (*thennom*) and dative singular neuter *þæsso* (*thæsso*). Modern standard Swedish has only *denne* (masc.), *denna* (fem.), and *detta* (neuter) ‘this’.

⁴⁰ Hagen (1950: 329) also cites the Setesdal (Norw) phrase “*I kvar greft la dei tie mann*” (‘in every grave they buried ten men’).

⁴¹ Attested as *ded* in a Swedish text from 1390 (Holand 1932, p. 267).

- suggests instead //peþ// from (hypothetical) OSw **pēþer*, corresponding (with the usual phonetic changes) to ON *þjáðr* ‘afflicted, tormented’.⁴²
- //AVM// *Ave Maria* ‘Hail Mary’, or *Ave Virgo Maria* ‘Hail Virgin Mary’: The only part of the KRS text in Latin letters. Reiersgord (2001) takes this invocation as evidence that the KRS exploration party included Cistercian monks on a religious mission.
- //frælse : af : illu// ‘deliver from evil’ or ‘save from evil’: //illu// was taken by some early interpreters as English *ill*, but later research (Holand 1932: 268) showed that the phrase was virtually identical with that of the Swedish Bible of 1300 (*frælsæ os af illu*) and the Icelandic Bible of 1540 (*frelsa þu oss af illu*), both from the part of the Lord’s Prayer that reads “deliver us from evil” in English. I agree with Thalbitzer (1946/47) that the reading should be //illu//, not //illy//. Reiersgord (2001) prefers to read “save [us] from illness,” *i.e.*, the bubonic plague.⁴³
- //här// ‘have/has’: Hagen (1950) reads **ǫ̅R* //här// where most previous discussants read **X̅R* //har//. (The latter did not see a dot above the rune.)⁴⁴ Hagen reads the word //här// as an unusual variant of the verb ‘have’ or ‘has’, though OSw usually has *haver* or *havir*, later *har* (1503). Nielsen (p.c.) suggests //här// with extra aspiration for //är// ‘(there) is’. I suggest that //här// might instead be a noun, equivalent to Sw *här* ‘army, troop’ (= Ger *Heer* ‘army’, etc.). If so, //här : 10 : mans : we : hawet// would mean something like “[There is] a troop of ten men by the sea ...”.
- //10 : mans// ‘ten men’: //mans// was taken by some early commentators to be (ungrammatical) English “*mans*” meaning ‘men’. Later research showed that it is actually a genitive singular (‘man’s’), and was used idiomatically in Old Scandinavian (and still in Icelandic) in expressing collective numbers of people (ON *mugi manns* ‘crowd of people’, Ic 250 *manns* ‘250 persons’, etc.). In Icelandic literature numerations such as *10 menn* (nom. pl.), *10 manns* (gen. sg.), and *10 manna* (gen. pl.) all occur.
- //we// ‘by’: see //weþ//, above.
- //hawet// ‘the sea’: ON *hafit*, Sw *havet* ‘the sea, ocean’, taken by some interpreters (*e.g.*, Holand) to mean Hudson Bay, and by Reiersgord (2001) to be Lake Superior. The KRS inscription states that “the sea” was a fourteen-day journey from “this island.”
- //at : se : äptir// ‘to look after’: OSw at *sēa äptir*. *sēa* ‘see’ was also recorded as *sīa* or *sē* = modern Sw Da *se*.

⁴² Icelandic reflexive verbs *pínast ok þjást* ‘to feel great pain’; participles *þjáðr*, *ör-þjáðr*, *sár-þjáðr* ‘stricken, worn, smarting, of sickness, grief, or the like’ (Cleasby 1874).

⁴³ O.E. Hagen (1911) commented on this phrase in a study of the Norwegian ballad “Førnesbronnen”: “In the phrase *av illi* on the Kensington Runestone, some contributors to the newspapers have wanted to see an Anglicism. This ballad [Førnesbronnen], with the same expression, should now make such evasions unnecessary. In addition, the expression is also found in the dialect of Lom [in Gudbrandsdal], where one says to this day, *mæ ille å mæ go’e* [with ill and with good, or for better or worse], *ilt ska ille fordrive* [evil drives away evil], and even the expression [*av illi*] in the ballad is permissible, though it may sound somewhat obsolete. The noun *ille* is a widely used word and has ethical as well as physical significance.” [Translated by JDB]

⁴⁴ Scott Wolter’s close examination of the KRS supports the reading **ǫ̅R* //här//.

- //wore : skip// ‘our ship(s)’: If singular, Classical OSw would be *vāro skipi* (dative) or *vārt skip* (accusative); if plural, OSw *vārom skipum* (dat.) or *vār skip* (acc.). It seems to me the KRS //wore : skip// is most likely plural, corresponding to modern Sw *våra skepp* ‘our ships’.
- //14 : þagh : rise// ‘14 days’ journey’: I think this is an elliptical form of **ffjurtân dagha reise*, where *dagha* is genitive plural (‘of days’), parallel to //10 : man// = **tio manna*, above.
- //from// ‘from’: This was one of the words taken by early interpreters to be “English,” since the usual word for ‘from’ is Sw *från*, Nw *frå* or *fra*, Da *fra*, Ic, ON *frá*. The KRS uses //fro// twice and //from// once for this word, which Hagen (1950) treats as archaic variants of the same word, Late Old Swedish/Early Middle Swedish *frå* / **frām*, and he compares the KRS alternation with the variation of *fro* / *from* in Chaucer’s Middle English,⁴⁵ and *frá* / *frán* in the *Äldre Västgötalagen* (a medieval Swedish law text). The Gothic language (4th c.) had *fram* ‘from’; *fram* in the meaning ‘from’ is found in a runic text at Åkirkeby, Bornholm (ca. AD 1200).⁴⁶ The KRS //from// *frām* is intermediary in the chain *fram* > *frām* > *frām* > *från* > *frå*. Richard Nielsen found that *from* or *frām* is found in the Swedish dialects (until recently) spoken on islands off the coast of Estonia.⁴⁷
- //þeno : öh// ‘this island’: OSw, Da *ø*, ON Nw *øy*, Ic *ey* ‘island’. Most interpreters identify ‘this island’ with the hill on Olof Ohman’s farm where the KRS was found. The hill rises above swampy land and was a true island in 1362. Reiersgord (2001) thinks that the KRS was carved at a different location (Knife Island in Knife Lake, near Mille Lacs), and was transported to Douglas County by Dakota Indians, who buried it there and planted an aspen tree over it. (See his book for the complete hypothesis.)
- //ahr : 1362// ‘year 1362’: //ahr// as a spelling of ON *ár* OSw *ār* ‘year’ has been criticized as anachronistic (influenced by German *Jahr* ‘year’) . Alternatively, //ahr// could be interpreted as an abbreviation of a longer phrase, such as OSw *ār vārs herra* ‘year of our Lord’.

The following is my rendition of the KRS text as it might have sounded in Middle Swedish of the 14th century:

- (1) [Åtta] Göter ok [tiughu ok tvēr] Norrmæn på
- (2) [ðenn]o optagelse-farð frå
- (3) Vīnland ov vest [ære] vī.
- (4) Haðe læger veð [två] skjar ēn
- (5) dags reise norr frå ðenno stēn[e].

⁴⁵ Of course *fro* persists in modern Eng., but mainly in the phrase *to and fro*.

⁴⁶ //þa iR . þet . hiar . fram . s(ah)u// “then there is here [the following] from the story.”

⁴⁷ Freudenthal & Vendell (1886); Vendell (1882–1887).

- (6) Vī var ok fiske ēn dagh; æptir
 (7) vī kom hēm fan [tīu] mann[a] röðe
 (8) av blōð og þēð[e]. *Ave Maria!*
 (9) Frælse av illu!
 (10) Hær [tīu] manns ve havet, at sē
 (11) æptir våre skip, [fjurtán] dagh[a] reise
 (12) frám ðenno ö. [år vārs herra] 1362.

Eight Götlanders and twenty-two
 Norwegians, on
 [this] acquisition-journey from
 Vinland over [to the] west, [are] we.
 Had [a] camp beside two skerries, one
 day's journey north from this stone.
 We fished one day; after
 we came home, found ten men red
 with blood and tortured. Hail, Mary!
 Deliver [us] from evil!
 [There is] a troop of ten men by the sea to look
 after our ships, fourteen-day journey
 from this island. [The year of our Lord] 1362.

Appendix B

Progressive Vowel Harmony On The Kensington Runestone

Abstract: Progressive vowel harmony in Scandinavian languages is discussed, specifically in regard to the controversial Kensington Runestone (KRS) found in Minnesota. An examination of the text of the runestone reveals the presence of forms consistent with the vowel harmony that was characteristic of central Scandinavian dialects between AD 1100–1430. This linguistic feature can be added to the list of factors that may be interpreted as supporting the authenticity theory (*i.e.*, that the KRS be taken at face value dating it at AD 1362).

This essay explores the possibility of progressive vowel harmony in the text of a controversial American monument, the Kensington Runestone (KRS) of Minnesota. Some background on both topics, vowel harmony and the KRS, will be presented first.

Among European languages progressive vowel harmony is usually associated with the Finno-Ugric (< Uralic) and Turkic (< Altaic) languages, most immediately, Finnish, Hungarian, and Turkish.⁴⁸ In these languages the vowels in a given word must harmonize, and the nature of the vowels is determined by the first (root) vowel. In Finnish, for example, the vowels are divided into *back* (a, o, u), *front* (ä, ö, y) and *neutral* (e, i). Back and front vowels cannot co-exist in the same word, so if the root vowel is back, all the following vowels must be back or neutral. If the root vowel is front, all the following vowels must be front or neutral. These rules can be seen in the common greeting, *hyvää huomenta* ‘good morning’. The Hungarian system is generally similar, with back, front, and neutral vowels. In Turkish there are two classes of vowels, *back* (a, ı, o, u) and *front* (e, i, ö, ü). In these languages the vowel harmony is a form of *progressive* (or *lagging*) assimilation (Anttila 1972: pp. 73-74).

In the Germanic languages a form of *regressive* (or *anticipatory*) vowel harmony known as *umlaut* has had wide repercussions. In umlaut the original Germanic stem vowels were changed to harmonize with a vowel in a following syllable. The most widespread form is known as *i-umlaut*, found in all West and North Germanic languages, and resulting in forms such as the common plural of words such as ‘foot’ (**fōt-i* > **fō̄ti* > English *feet*; cf. Swedish *fötter*, German *Füsse*, etc.). There were also *a-umlaut* and *u-umlaut* (the latter only in North Germanic), with less extensive reflexes (Haugen 1976: 152–153).

The vowel harmony to be discussed here is a form of *progressive* vowel assimilation that took root in some Scandinavian dialects after umlaut was well in

⁴⁸ Vowel harmony is absent from Sami (Lappish), and present only in dialects of Estonian.

place, and is independent of umlaut.⁴⁹ As far as we can tell from the written record vowel harmony originated around A.D. 1100 in central (Sjælland = Zealand) and eastern Denmark (now known as Scania = Skåne in southern Sweden). From there it apparently spread to the northwest through West Götaland (Västergötland) into eastern Norway, and to the northeast through the Swedish Väner and Mälars lake country (Södermanland and Uppland) all the way to the Swedish-speaking area of southern Finland (Åbo = Turku). Vowel harmony of this progressive type seems to have been totally absent from the westerly Scandinavian dialects, those spoken in Jutland, western Norway, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland (Hesselman 1948–52: 280; Haugen 1976: 207, 211).

Some of the literary texts bearing witness to vowel harmony are the Danish *Scanian Law* (*Skånske lov*; Runic text of late 13th century), the Swedish *West Götaland Law* (*Västgötalagen*; ca. 1280), the Norwegian *Olafs Saga* (Trøndelag; ca. 1250), and *Barlaams Saga* (Southeastern Norway, ca. 1250) (Hesselman 1948–52: 278).

Progressive vowel harmony is rather odd as phonological changes go, since it developed and spread over a large area of eastern Scandinavia during a specific medieval period, only to almost totally disappear three centuries later. For example, in Scania vowel harmony first appeared around 1100, and by about 1430 it was gone (Brøndum-Nielsen 1927). At the present day vowel harmony, as a comprehensive system, remains in only one Scandinavian dialect: the Stod (Trøndelag) dialect of Norwegian, and even there it mainly involves *-i/ -e* harmony (see below). Sporadic traces of vowel harmony can be found elsewhere, mainly in Trønder and other East Norwegian dialects (Hesselman 1948–53: 279).

For the actual manifestations of vowel harmony, the general rules (Hesselman 1948–53: 279)⁵⁰ are the following, regarding unstressed Common Scandinavian (CS)⁵¹ **i*, **u*:⁵²

(a) The CS unstressed vowels **i*, **u* remain unchanged after reflexes of CS **i*, **ī*, **y*, **ȳ*, **u*, **ū*, **e*, **ø*, **iø*, **ei*, **ou*, **ey*;

(b) The CS unstressed vowels **i*, **u* change to the lower vowels /e/, /o/ (respectively) after reflexes of CS **e*, **ē*, **o*, **ō*, **ø*, **ō*, **a*,⁵³ **ā*, (**ǫ*), **ē*, **ia*.⁵⁴

Note that the rounded vowel **ø* is a western dialectal development of **a* (when followed by unstressed **u*). *a* usually remains in East Scandinavian, e.g., Old Danish and Old Swedish *allum mannum* = Old Norse, Old Icelandic *qllum mǫnnum*

⁴⁹ Progressive vowel harmony is not to be confused with another Scandinavian phenomenon, *vowel balance* (see, e.g., Haugen 1976: 207).

⁵⁰ Cf. also: Kock (1889: 80; 1921: 44-50, 359-363); Noreen (1904: 124-127; 1913: 19, 131-134).

⁵¹ The concept of ‘Common Scandinavian’ and the transcription of vowels follow Haugen (1976: 150 ff.); cf. ‘Gemeinnordisch’ (Noreen 1913). Common Scandinavian (CS) is not a reconstructed language in the usual sense since it is actually attested (with dialectal and graphic variations) on rune stones and early manuscripts. The asterisked forms represent normalized CS.

⁵² See below for vowel harmony affecting CS unstressed **a*.

⁵³ This applies only to **i*, i.e., **u* remains after Common Scandinavian **a* (which becomes the rounded vowel *ø* in western dialects). The development of **ia* is analogous, i.e., **u* remains after CS **ia* (**iø*).

⁵⁴ See the note to **a*.

‘all men’ (dative plural).⁵⁵ Note also that the different kinds of *e* (**e*, **ē*, **ɛ*, **ē̄*) produce different reflexes in vowel harmony. The open vowels **ɛ* and **ē̄* (also written **æ*, **ǣ*) are umlaut products from Proto-Germanic **a* and **ā* (respectively), as opposed to the close **e* and **ē*, which represent original Germanic **e* and **ē*.⁵⁶

Some examples of the above rules are drawn from the *Scanian Law* (SkL)⁵⁷ and the *West Götaland Law* (VgL):⁵⁸

For rule (a), cf. (SkL) *uitni* ‘witness’, *huilkit* ‘which’ (neut.), *mykit* ‘much’ (neut.), *synir* ‘sons’, *æftir* ‘after’, *stæfni* ‘meeting’; *faþur* ‘father’ (acc., gen.), *gatu* ‘street’ (acc., gen.), *kirkiu* ‘church’ (acc., gen.); (VgL) *æptir* ‘after’, *vndir* ‘under’, *cristnir* ‘Christian’ (pl.), *knivi* ‘knife’ (dat.), *þingi* ‘Thing (assembly)’ (dat.); *faþursystir* ‘aunt (father’s sister)’ (= ON *faþursystir*), *sarum* (*sārum*) ‘wounds’ (dat. pl. = ON *sōrum*), *allum mannum* ‘all men’ (dative = ON *ǫllum mǫnnum*), etc.

For rule (b), cf. (SkL) *barne* ‘child’ (dat.), *uare* ‘be’ (pres. subj.), *faþer* ‘father’, *eþe* ‘oath’ (dat.), *bole* ‘dwelling’ (dat.), *bæþe* ‘both’ (CS **bēði*), *læte* ‘let’ (pres. subj.), *bøte* ‘pay a fine’ (pres. subj.), *søker* ‘seeks’; *ato* ‘ate’ (pl.), *moþor* ‘mother’ (dat., gen.), *nokot* ‘some(thing)’; (VgL) *eþe* ‘oath’ (dat.), *folke* ‘folk, people’ (dat.), *forboþet* ‘forbidden’, *svoret* ‘sworn’; *kono* ‘woman’ (dat.), *konong* ‘king’ (acc.), *opnom dorom* ‘open doors’ (dat.), *dottor* ‘daughter’ (dat.), *døþom* ‘the dead’ (dat. pl.), *roppo* ‘tail’ (dat.), etc.

In the present-day dialect of Stod in Trøndelag we can cite examples such as (a) *skri(k)kji* ‘screeched’, *funni* ‘found’, *tulling* ‘fool’ vs. (b) *broste* ‘burst’, *frös(s)e* ‘frozen’, *rareng* ‘peculiar one’ (Hesselman 1948–53: 279).

The contrast between rule (a) and rule (b) words is emphasized in certain phrases such as (SkL) *faþur broþær* ‘father’s brother’, (VgL) *faþir ok moðer* ‘father and mother’, *guðfaþur oc guðmoþor* ‘godfather and godmother’ (acc., dat.), *moþorbroþer ok faþursystir* ‘mother’s brother and father’s sister’, *allum gøtom* ‘all the Geats’ (dat.), *quikum ællær døþom* ‘the quick or the dead’ (dat. pl.), etc. In each pair one word follows rule (a) and the other rule (b).

There were some dialectal variations in the realization of vowel harmony.⁵⁹ We can see from the above examples that in East Scandinavian dialects such as those of Scania and West Götaland the ‘new’ long closed *ē*, created by the monophthongization of CS **ei* (= Norw., Icel. *ei*) and the ‘new’ long *ø̄*, derived from CS **qu* (= Norw., Icel. *au*) and **ɛy* (= Norw. *øy*, Icel. *ey*) took their place alongside the older *ē* and *ø̄*, resulting in the application of rule (b). Thus SkL and VgL *eþe* (phonetically *ēðe*) correspond to Old Norse *eiði* ‘oath’ (dat.), SkL *rætløso* to Icel *réttlausu* ‘rightless, outlaw’ (dat.), and VgL *gøtom*, *døþom* (see above) correspond to ONorse and Icel *gautum*, *dauðum* ‘Geats, dead’ (dat. pl.).

⁵⁵ But Old Danish *børnum* ‘children’ (dat.) < CS **børnum*.

⁵⁶ In some cases the length is secondary, e.g. **rehtaR* > *rēttR* ‘right’, etc. (Haugen 1976: 154).

⁵⁷ As cited by Kock (1889).

⁵⁸ Following the text edited by Wessén (1954).

⁵⁹ See Noreen (1913: 131, 134).

Scania and West Götaland differ in the treatment of unstressed vowels after short *a*: in SkL the harmony vowel for short *a* is *e*, not *i*: *barne* ‘child’ (dat.), *uare* ‘be’ (pres. subj.), *faber* ‘father’, while in VgL *a* regularly takes *i*: *fabir* ‘father’, *manni* ‘man’ (dat.), *allir* ‘all’ (pl.), *hauir* = *havir* ‘has’, *hafpi* ‘had’, *baki* ‘back’ (dat.), etc. Kock (1889, pp. 83–84) remarks that SkL also wavers in the harmony vowel in forms of the verb ‘to have’, viz. *hafpi* ~ *hafpe* ‘had’, due to analogical reshaping of older East Danish *hæfir* ‘has’ to *hafir* (cf. Icel. *hefir* with umlaut, Early Modern Swedish *hafver* without umlaut). In SkL the dative plural ending *-um* is exempt from harmony, never alternating with *-om* as expected, while in VgL *-um* and *-om* alternate according to rules (a) and (b), e.g. *allum gøtom* ‘all Geats’. In SkL words with CS long open **ē̄* (spelled *æ*) follow rule (b), *bæpe* ‘both’ (CS **bē̄ði*), *læte* ‘let’ (pres. subj.), while in VgL they follow rule (a): *bæpin* ‘both’, *clæpum* ‘clothes’ (dat.).

Besides *i*, *u* (*e*, *o*) harmony, unstressed CS **a* also had harmonic variants in some medieval Scandinavian dialects. The general rule was that CS unstressed **a* remained unchanged after the vowels *a*, (closed) *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, but changed to *æ* when preceded by the vowels *æ* (i.e., CS **ē* and **ē̄*), *ø*, *y*.⁶⁰ In this respect Scandinavian vowel harmony was at least superficially similar to that of Finnish (see above). According to Noreen (1904: 125) this kind of harmony is found in the Finland-Swedish book by the monk Jöns Budde (*Cod. Holm.* A 58), the *Södermanland Law* (main manuscript, *Cod. Holm.* A 53), and a few others, but not in the *West Götaland Law*, and only traces in one manuscript of the *Scanian Law* (Kock 1889: 76).

In none of the medieval documents is vowel harmony perfectly consistent. In the SkL there are occasional anomalies such as *skorit* ‘cut’ (past participle, rather than the expected **skoret*), *skifte* ‘change, division’ (for **skifti*), *hafpo* ‘(they) had’ (for **hafpu*), and the alternation of *hafpi* ~ *hafpe* ‘had’, *summi* ~ *summe* ‘some’ (Kock 1889: 80–84). In VgL we find *mylnu dørom* ‘mill doors’ (dat., with expected harmony) alongside *mylnohivl* ‘mill-wheel’ (which violates rule [a]). VgL *øghun* ‘eyes’ is inconsistent with *døpom* ‘the dead’ (dat. pl.), etc.

* * * * *

Now we are ready to consider the case of the Kensington Runestone (KRS). Found in Douglas County, Minnesota, in 1898, the stone and its inscription have been the center of constant controversy for more than a century, between those who accept it at face value as a monument carved in the year 1362, and those who think it a forgery or hoax perpetrated sometime in the later years of the nineteenth century. The following paragraph is hardly an exhaustive summary of the huge amount of discussion of this topic, and is only meant to be a cursory survey for the reader who may be unfamiliar with the literature.

As far as I can determine the ‘hoax (or forgery) theory’ was first promulgated by O.J. Breda, Professor of Scandinavian Languages at the University of Minnesota,

⁶⁰ Kock (1889, p. 75); Noreen (1904: 125; 1913: 126).

scarcely three months after the stone was unearthed.⁶¹ The same opinion was concurred in by most Scandinavian experts in what Hagen (1950: 321) called a ‘chain reaction,’ and the hoax theory found its fullest expression in two books by respected scholars: University of California professor Erik Wahlgren (1958) and University of Minnesota professor Theodore Blegen (1968). Arguments for the stone’s authenticity came in the early years from Holand (*e.g.*, 1932, 1940) and later from Thalbitzer (1946/47), Hagen (1950), Hall (1982), and Nielsen (1986, 1987, 2001). Books published recently by Reiersgord (2001), Kehoe (2005) and Nielsen & Wolter (2006) further amplify the case for the ‘authenticity theory’ of the KRS.

Virtually all commentators on the KRS (both for and against its authenticity) have agreed that the runes and the language of this monument are aberrant and stand apart from all other Scandinavian texts. To Thalbitzer (1946/47: 33), for example, the KRS inscription was ‘a hodgepodge of archaic and modern forms,’ attributed by him to a young man who recorded on the KRS the natural colloquial forms (*talesprog*) of the later fourteenth century.

The **archaic** features of the KRS, as compared with modern Scandinavian, include (a) the word $\mathfrak{H}\mathfrak{P}$ //of// ‘over, across, towards’, or possibly ‘too, overly’;⁶² (b) the word $\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{R}\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{Y}$ //from// ‘from’ (beside $\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{R}\mathfrak{F}$ //fro// on the second line of the KRS), an archaic form recorded in the dialectal Swedish of Estonia;⁶³ (c) the phrase $\mathfrak{X}\mathfrak{P}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{R}\mathfrak{V}$ //af illu// ‘from evil’, found in the early Swedish Bible,⁶⁴ but superseded in later versions by *ifrån ondo*;⁶⁵ (d) the dative demonstrative $\mathfrak{P}\mathfrak{T}\mathfrak{F}$ //þeno// ‘(from) this’; (e) *prolepsis* in the first three lines of the KRS text, if we follow Hall (1982: 19–20).⁶⁶

Innovative features of the KRS, as compared with classical Old Scandinavian, include (a) the rounding of CS **ā* > *ā* (written *o*) in the words $\mathfrak{B}\mathfrak{F}$ //po// ‘on’ (OSw *uppā*), $\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{R}\mathfrak{F}$ //fro// and $\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{R}\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{Y}$ //from// ‘from’ (OSw *frā*, *frān*), and $\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{R}\mathfrak{T}$ //wore// ‘our’ (OSw *vāra*); (b) the use of the accusative instead of the dative case, for example $\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{T}\mathfrak{X}\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{T}\mathfrak{T}$ //we hawet// ‘by the sea’, instead of classical OSw *viþ havinum*;⁶⁷ (c) the use of singular verb forms with plural subjects: $\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{X}\mathfrak{R}$ //wi war//, $\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{Y}$... $\mathfrak{F}\mathfrak{X}\mathfrak{T}$

⁶¹ Minneapolis *Journal* Feb. 22, 1899: cited by Hagen (1950: 323). Breda concluded the runestone was a clumsy attempt to forge an eleventh century runestone, and that the text consisted of a mixture of Swedish, Norwegian, and English.

⁶² See Thalbitzer (1946/47: 27) and Hagen (1950: 332); OSw *off(-)stárker* ‘too strong’, etc. (Noreen 1904: 367). I am grateful to Richard Nielsen for providing the runic font.

⁶³ The following forms were recorded in the Swedish dialects of Estonia: Nuckö *from*, *frām*, Runö *fruam*, all corresponding to Standard Swedish *från* ‘from’ (Vendell 1882-1887, Freudenthal & Vendell 1886). Most of the Estonian Swedes were resettled in Sweden after World War II (Haugen 1976: 352).

⁶⁴ *frælsæ os af illu*,’ cited by Holand (1940: 307).

⁶⁵ Ironically, soon after the discovery of the KRS all three of these archaic words were mistakenly assumed to be intrusions from English (*of*, *from*, *ill*, respectively) by a clumsy hoaxer.

⁶⁶ According to Hall, the first three lines are to be read as ‘Eight Götlanders and twenty-two Norwegians on [this] exploration-journey from Vinland over the west [are] we’.

⁶⁷ On the other hand, a dative form of the demonstrative $\mathfrak{P}\mathfrak{T}\mathfrak{F}$ //þeno// ‘(from) this’ occurs twice on the KRS, and $\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{R}\mathfrak{V}$ //illu// ‘(from) evil’ is a dative form (the latter reinforced by influence of the Bible text).

//wi kom ... fan// ‘we were, we came ... found’ instead of classical OSw *vī(r) vārom*, *vī(r) kōmom ... funnum*.⁶⁸ (See below for further explanations of these innovations.)

What does the KRS text reveal about the current topic, vowel harmony? The following words, in the order they occur in the inscription, are relevant to the discussion of unstressed vowels:⁶⁹

- ᚹÖTIR //gøter// ‘Geats’ = CS **gōutaR* > ON *gautar*, OSw *gōtar* (cf. OE *géatas*)
- ƿBƿXƿtƿt(-ƿXƿ) //oppagelse(-farþ)// ‘acquisition-journey’ = CS **upp-takilsī*⁷⁰
- ƿXƿt //hæpe// ‘had’ = CS **hafpi* (1st pers. singular = 2,3 singular)
- ƿXƿt //læger// ‘camp’ = CS **legR* > ON *legr*, OSw *lægher* ‘bed, lair’ (cf. Goth *ligrs*); the meaning ‘camp’ was influenced by, or borrowed from, Middle Low German *leger*, a cognate of CS **legR* (Hellquist 1922).
- ƿtƿt (2 occurrences) //rise// ‘journey’ < Middle Low German *reise*
- ƿtƿt (2 occurrences) //þeno// ‘(from) this’ (dative) = Middle Swedish *thenno*, *þænno*, an aberrant form of dative neuter corresponding to the usual OSw *þæssom*, *þæmma*, or *þænna* (masc.), *þæsse* (fem.), *þæsson* (neut.)⁷¹
- ƿtƿt //fiske// ‘(to) fish’⁷² = CS **fiska* > ON, OSw *fiska*
- ƿtƿt (2 occurrences) //æptir// ‘after’ = CS **eftir* > ON *eptir*, OSw *æptir*, *æftir*
- ƿÖƿt //røpe// ‘red’ (accusative plural) = CS **rōuða* > ON *rauþa*, OSw *rōþa*
- ƿRƿtƿt //fræelse// ‘save, deliver’⁷³ = CS **fręlsa* > OSw *fręlsa*, *fręlse*, *fręlsä*, ON *fręlsa*

⁶⁸ Some have added ƿXƿt //hæpe// ‘had’, thinking the subject to be the preceding ƿt //wi// ‘we’, but arguably ƿt //wi// is instead the subject of the first sentence (see Hall’s theory of prolepsis, above), and the elliptical subject of ƿXƿt //hæpe// could be singular (= OSw *hafpe* ~ *hafpi*).

⁶⁹ The compound words ƿtƿtƿt //norrmen// ‘Norwegians’ and ƿtƿtƿt //winlanþ// ‘Vinland’ are not relevant to vowel harmony (each consisting of two monosyllabic words), but the first element of the compound ƿBƿXƿtƿtƿt //oppagelse(-)farþ// ‘acquisition-journey’ (a four-syllable word) is pertinent.

⁷⁰ Accepting Nielsen’s (1987) reading of *opptakelse* ‘acquisition, taking up’ rather than the usual assumption that the word is *oppdagelse* ‘discovery’.

⁷¹ Noreen (1904: 397-399); Hagen (1950: 337-338). In the language of the KRS the form ƿtƿt //þeno// is extended to masculine (ƿtƿt //sten// ‘stone’) and feminine (Öƿ //øh// ‘island’) nouns.

⁷² My reading is *å fiske* (for *at fiska* ‘to fish’) rather than Hagen’s (1950: 334) *å fiske* = Icel *á fiski* ‘on fishing’.

⁷³ It is difficult to determine for certain whether ƿRƿtƿt //fræelse// represents an optative (= subjunctive: Thalbitzer 1946/47: 34) or an imperative (Hagen 1950: 336; Hall 1982: 20). The subjunctive form is CS **fręlsi* = OSw *fręlsi* (1, 2, 3 sg.) and the imperative is either *fręlsa* or *fręls* in OSw (this verb fluctuated between the 1st and 2nd weak conjugations [Noreen 1904: 451], as it still does in modern Sw). The proper biblical mode is imperative (Jesus speaking to his Father), as in the modern Sw Bible (*fręls oss ifrån ondo*), and since the KRS //fræelse// is more consistent with OSw 1st conj. imperative *fręlsa* than with the subjunctive *fręlsi* (with vowel harmony we expect */fręlsē//), I prefer the imperative mode for this word.

- ጠገፋ //illu// ‘(from) evil’⁷⁴ = CS *illu > ON, OSw *illo* ~ *illu* (dative of *illa* ‘evil’)
- *ጸፕጠ //hawet// ‘the sea’ = CS *haf-it > ON *hafit*, OSw *havit*, *havet*
- ፕገገጠ //wore// ‘our’ (accusative plural) = CS *wāra > ON *vāra*, OSw *vāra*

Of these thirteen words one can be eliminated immediately from the discussion of vowel harmony: ጠጸፕጠ //læger// ‘camp’, where the second vowel //e// is not an original CS vowel, but an intrusive *svarabhakti* vowel (Noreen 1913:142) that developed to break up a sonorant cluster, thus CS *legR > *legr* (= the Old Icelandic form) > OSw *lægher*. Vowel harmony only pertains to vowels that existed as such in CS. Another word (with two occurrences in the inscription) is ገገጠ //rise// ‘journey’, a loanword from Middle Low German *reise*. In OSw it generally took the form *rēsa* (= Modern Sw *resa*) and fell in with the *ō*-stem feminine nouns like *vika* ‘week’, *gnista* ‘spark’, and the earlier loanword *kirkia* ‘church’ (Noreen 1904: 320ff.).

Another set of five words consists of those in which the second and unstressed vowel was CS *a:⁷⁵

- ገፀጠጠ //gøter// ‘Geats’ = CS *gōutaR
- ፕገጠጠ //fiske// ‘(to) fish’ = CS *fiska
- ገፀፀጠ //røpe// ‘red’ (accusative plural) = CS *rōuða
- ፕገጠጠጠ //fræelse// ‘save, deliver’ = CS *fręlsa
- ፕገጠጠ //wore// ‘our’ (accusative plural) = CS *wāra

There seems to be no trace of *a* vs. *æ* vowel harmony (as described above) in these five words, else we would expect a contrast between *gōtær*, *rōpæ*, *frælsæ* as opposed to *fiska* and *wāra*. Instead we see here a wholesale reduction or ‘weakening’ of all unstressed *a* to an indeterminate vowel, written *æ* or *e* in medieval times,⁷⁶ and usually *e* in modern Scandinavian (cf. Danish and Norwegian [Bokmål] *fiske* ‘[to] fish’, *røde* ‘red’ [pl.], *våre* ‘our’ [pl.], etc.). In the *West Götaland Law* we apparently see this change in progress. A spot-check of the ‘Rætløsæ Bolkær’ (Wessén 1954: 28) produces forms with the original vowel such as *hava* ‘have’, *taka* ‘take’, *fara* ‘go, fare’, *þingat* ‘thither’, *sunnan* ‘from south’, etc., alongside those with the weakened vowel: *hingæt* ‘hither’, *norþæn* ‘from north’, *giva* ‘give’, *bæræ* ‘bear’, *fylgia* ‘follow’, etc. The same word can appear with both forms: *fara/faræ* ‘go, fare’, *gōta/gōtæ* ‘of the Geats’, *gisla/gislæ* ‘hostages’, *sipan/sipen* ‘since’, and generally the

⁷⁴ I concur with Thalbitzer (1946/47: 28) that the word be read simply *illu*, not *illy*.

⁷⁵ ገገጠ //rise// ‘journey’ (see the preceding paragraph) can be added to these, assuming weakening of final *-a* > *-e*.

⁷⁶ The KRS writer was inconsistent in his rendering of OSw *æ* (the merger of CS **e* and **ę*): the rune ጠ //e// is used in the words //norrmen// ‘Norwegians’ = OSw *normæn*, //þeno// ‘this’ (cf. OSw *þæssom*), and //west// ‘west’ = OSw *væst(er)*, while the rune ጸ //æ// is used for //æptir// ‘after’ and //læger// ‘camp’, and both in //fræelse// ‘save, deliver’. The KRS rune ጠ //e// thus has (at least) three phonetic values: (a) stressed short *æ* in //west//, etc.; stressed long *ē* in //en// ‘one’ = OSw *ēn*, //sten// ‘stone’ = OSw *stēn*, //hem// ‘home’ = OSw *hēm*; and the unstressed *schwa*-like vowel of //hæpe// ‘had’, etc. The rune ጠ //e// is the most frequent rune on the KRS, and appears 24 times.

forms with *æ* predominate. The KRS plural form 𐀧𐀮𐀢𐀢𐀢 //gøter// ‘Geats’ is consistent with the many *-ær* plurals of *a*-stem nouns in VgL: *konongær* ‘kings’, *biscopær* ‘bishops’, *sveær* ‘Swedes’, *utgarþær* ‘outlying farms’, etc. (beside a few forms with the older vowel: *klerkar* ‘clerks, clerics’).⁷⁷

Finally, we are left with six words in which the unstressed vowel is a reflex of CS **i* or **u*; these are the only words with a potential for vowel harmony:

- 𐀧𐀢𐀢𐀧𐀢𐀢𐀢(-𐀢𐀢𐀢) //oppagelse(-farþ)// ‘acquisition-journey’ = CS **upp-takilsī*
- 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //hæpe// ‘had’ = CS **haffpi* (1 person singular)
- 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //þeno// ‘(from) this’ = Middle Swedish *þænno*
- 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //æptir// ‘after’ = CS **ęftir*
- 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //illu// ‘(from) evil’ = CS **illu* > OSw *illo* ~ *illu*, OIc *illo*, later *illu*
- 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //hawet// ‘the sea’ = OSw *hafit*, *havit*, ON *hafit*

It can be seen that these six words are in perfect accord with the rules for *i/u* vowel harmony, as summarized above. 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //æptir// and 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //illu// follow rule (a), and 𐀧𐀢𐀢𐀧𐀢𐀢𐀢- //oppagelse-//, 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //hæpe//, 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //þeno//, and 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //hawet// are consistent with rule (b). The presence of /e/ after /a/ in the words 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //hæpe// and 𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢𐀢 //hawet// is more consistent with the Scanian dialect than with the West Götaland dialect cited above.

Vowel harmony can thus be added to the list of archaic features of the KRS, since it is a phenomenon that first appeared in the written record around 1100 and almost totally vanished by about 1430 (Brøndum-Nielsen 1927; Haugen 1976: 260).

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Appendix C

To help weigh the probabilities of the ‘hoax theory’ versus the ‘authenticity theory’ of KRS origins I will borrow a technique used by Hall (1982: 90–92), in which some of the linguistic features of the KRS are juxtaposed with their explanations according to the hoax theory and the authenticity theory, respectively:

| Linguistic feature | Hoax theory explanation (19 th century origin) | Authenticity theory explanation (14 th century origin) |
|--|---|--|
| 𐀧𐀢𐀢𐀧𐀢𐀢𐀢 //oppagelsefarþ// ‘journey of | Anachronistic use of modern Scandinavian word <i>oppdagelse</i> | Can be read instead as <i>optakelsefarþ</i> ‘journey of acquisition’ (Nielsen) |

⁷⁷ Standard Swedish still has the plural *-ar* in these words: *konungar* ~ *kungar*, *biskopar*, etc.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| discovery’ or ‘journey of acquisition’ | ‘discovery’ by 19 th c. immigrant hoaxer | |
| 𐌺𐌱 //of// ‘over, across, towards’ | Borrowing of the English word <i>of</i> by 19 th century hoaxer | Archaic Scandinavian word, attested in the <i>Edda</i> , sagas and runestones |
| 𐌺𐌹𐌺 //from// ‘from’ (beside 𐌺𐌹 //fro//) | Accidental influence of the English word <i>from</i> on 19 th century hoaxer | Archaic form similar to those preserved in Swedish dialects of Estonia (Freudenthal, Vendell) |
| 𐌿𐌰𐌿 //mans// ‘men’ | Ungrammatical rendering by 19 th c. immigrant hoaxer of Eng. * <i>mans</i> = <i>men</i> | Standard Old Scandinavian genitive form <i>manns</i> , typical in collective use |
| 𐌿𐌹𐌺 //af illu// ‘from evil’ | Borrowing of English <i>ill</i> by 19 th century hoaxer | Archaic form found in the early Swedish Bible |
| 𐌺𐌹𐌺 //þep// ‘dead’ or ‘suffering, in torment’ | Borrowing of English <i>dead</i> by 19 th century hoaxer | Archaic word * <i>þēp(er)</i> ‘suffering, tormented’ (Hagen), perhaps a result of Bubonic plague (Reiersgord) |
| 𐌹𐌺𐌹 //rise// ‘journey’ | 19 th c. hoaxer’s rendering of Norw <i>reise</i> , influenced by spelling of English <i>rise</i> | 14 th c. rendition of Low German <i>reise</i> |
| 𐌺𐌹𐌺 //þeno// ‘(from) this’ | Unusual dative neuter mistakenly used by hoaxer as masculine and feminine | Otherwise unrecorded extension of neuter form to masculine and feminine |
| rounding of CS * <i>ā</i> > <i>â</i> (written <i>o</i>) in the words 𐌺𐌹 //po// ‘on’, 𐌺𐌹𐌺 //fro// and 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹 //from// ‘from’, 𐌿𐌺𐌹𐌺 //wore// ‘our’ | Intrusion from 19 th century hoaxer’s modern Scandinavian speech | Examples of early Middle Scandinavian rounding |
| use of the accusative instead of the dative case in 𐌿𐌹𐌺 * <i>X</i> 𐌿𐌹𐌺𐌹 //we hawet// ‘by the sea’ | Intrusion from 19 th century hoaxer’s modern Scandinavian speech | Typical Middle Scandinavian loss of case distinctions; datives persist in the words 𐌺𐌹𐌺 //þeno// ‘(from) this’; 𐌹𐌺𐌹 //illu// ‘(from) evil’ |
| use of singular verb forms with plural subjects: 𐌿𐌹𐌺 𐌿𐌰𐌿 //wi war//, 𐌿𐌹𐌺 𐌺𐌹𐌺 ... 𐌺𐌰𐌿𐌹 //wi kom ... fan// ‘we were, we came ... found’ | Intrusion from 19 th c. hoaxer’s modern Scandinavian speech | Examples of early Middle Scandinavian loss of plural verb forms, or a pidginized dialect (Thalbitzer, Hall) |
| vowel harmony (described in detail above) | 19 th c. hoaxer either accidentally happened to use forms that exemplify vowel harmony of AD 1100–1430, or had specialized knowledge | Composer of KRS text spoke an early Middle Scandinavian dialect that had vowel harmony |

Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|
| CS | Common Scandinavian (Haugen 1976) |
| Da | Danish |
| Ic, Icel | Icelandic |
| KRS | Kensington Runestone |
| LG | Low German (Northern German) |
| MNP | Middle Norse Period (1350–1523) |
| MSc | Middle Scandinavian (1350–1550) |

| | |
|-----|--|
| Nw | Norwegian (modern) |
| OE | Old English |
| OIc | Old Icelandic |
| ON | Old Norse (including Old Norwegian, Old Swedish, Old Danish) |
| ONP | Old Norse Period (1050–1350) |
| OSc | Old Scandinavian (1050–1350) |
| OSw | Old Swedish |
| SkL | Scanian Law (Skånske lov) |
| Sw | Swedish |
| VgL | West Götaland Law (Västgötalagen) |

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