

# The Kensington Rune Stone: A Study Guide

John D. Bengtson

Many of us have heard about a mysterious 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).

From the moment of its discovery in 1898 the stone has been the center of a whirlwind of controversy. I shall not attempt to list all the developments, already well done (for the first seven decades) by the historian Theodore Blegen (1968), but only briefly summarize some of the high points, and work done since 1968.

One of the first authorities who examined the KRS, Professor O.J. Breda of the University of Minnesota, quickly 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. Several other linguistic and runic authorities followed suit and concurred that the stone was a modern forgery. The discoverer, farmer Olof Ohman (Öhman), then lost interest in the stone and kept it in a farm shed for several years.<sup>1</sup>

Hjalmar Rued Holand, a Wisconsin farmer and writer, 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.” Holand himself 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 authenticity, 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.)<sup>2</sup> 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 showing it to be a forgery I

---

<sup>1</sup> The oft-repeated story that Ohman used the KRS as a doorstep to his granary has been found to be false by Scott Wolter (p.c.).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Holand (1932, p. 59).

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 two 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, 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, has taken over the role that Hjalmar Holand filled for so many years, and has 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.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, recent geological studies by Scott Wolter have shown that the weathering of the KRS inscription indicates at least 200 years of exposure before its discovery in 1898.<sup>4</sup> 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. 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.

---

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> In 2005 two new books were published about the KRS. See the references under Kehoe (2005) and Nielsen & Wolter (2005).

## 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/, /þep/ ‘dead’, /illu/,<sup>5</sup> /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/.<sup>6</sup>

/þep/ is either a misspelling of Old Swedish *döþ(e)* ‘dead’, or an entirely different word, OSw *\*þēðe* ‘tortured’ (Hagen).

/illu/ is a form of 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 the Appendix, under comments to the KRS text.)

**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.<sup>7</sup> 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),<sup>8</sup> but since he also thought some of the words were English, Noreen thought an immigrant carved the stone from Dalecarlia, a part of Sweden where runic writing persisted into the nineteenth century.

**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 : þeno : sten/, /we : hawet/, /äptir : wore : skip/, /from : þeno : öh/: in Old Norse we expect dative forms, such as *fra þæssom stēne, við havinum, æptir vārom*

<sup>5</sup> I see no reason to perpetuate the usual reading /illy/ (see Appendix).

<sup>6</sup> /skialti ub fatlaþR/ ‘(with) shield draped (hanging) over’ on the Rök rune stone, ca. 900 AD.

<sup>7</sup> “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]).

<sup>8</sup> University of Uppsala, author of *Altschwedische Grammatik* (Old Swedish Grammar: 1904). As quoted by Hagen (1950).

*skipum*, *fra þæsson* ö, respectively. However, the KRS does have dative forms in: /illu/ ‘(from) evil’, and /þeno/ ‘(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’; /þeno/ ‘this’ (dative singular); /äptir/ ‘after’; /10 : mans/ ‘ten men’; /þep/ ‘tormented’; /frælse : af : illu/ ‘deliver from evil’; /from/ ‘from’; and the prolepsis found in the first KRS sentence. (See the Appendix 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 thereabouts, was an important dividing point. Vemund Skard,<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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,”<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 Wessén<sup>13</sup> and Gösta Bergman<sup>14</sup> use slightly different terminology, dividing the history of the Swedish language into periods including “The Earlier (or Classical) Old Swedish” (Den äldre [klassiska] fornsvenskan) = 1225-1375 and “The Later Old Swedish” (Den 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,<sup>15</sup> when the full effects of the Black Death were felt.

In his outline of the Scandinavian languages Einar Haugen<sup>16</sup> 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

<sup>9</sup> University of Oslo.

<sup>10</sup> Skard (1967).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141, *et passim*: “Det er i mno. tid at skriftspråket registrerer sammenbruddet i det grammatiske formverk.”

<sup>12</sup> Still in modern Norwegian, *e.g.*, *de gikk mann av huse* = ‘every man turned out’, *i tide og utide* = ‘in season and out’, etc.; Swedish *gick man ur huse* (= the Nw phrase mentioned), *å sido* = ‘aside’, etc.

<sup>13</sup> 1965, *Svensk språkhistoria*. (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.

<sup>14</sup> 1968, 1970, *Kortfattad svensk språkhistoria*.

<sup>15</sup> Skard, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> Harvard University.

century could have been due to inadequate training; the clergy were hard hit by the Black Death.”<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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 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 Makawaštewiŋ, 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) Indian women – characteristics that are consistent with Reiersgord’s theory that they were Cistercian monks.

**Makawaštewiŋ’s story:** Reiersgord (2001) passes on a story told by Makawaštewiŋ,<sup>19</sup> 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 appeared on the lake<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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

---

<sup>17</sup> Haugen (1976, p. 286).

<sup>18</sup> Skard (1967, p. 77).

<sup>19</sup> Maka-wašte-wiŋ = ‘earth-good-woman’, *i.e.*, ‘Good Earth Woman’. Her English name, Susan Windgrow, was probably bestowed arbitrarily by an American government official or teacher.

<sup>20</sup> Lake Superior, according to Reiersgord (2001), identical with /hawet/ ‘the sea’ of the KRS.

<sup>21</sup> Landes (1968: 22-23).

may have been Indian 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 “firewater,” and did not “marry” Indian 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 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)<sup>22</sup> 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 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/, ʏ /g/, ʒ /k/, ǰ /ä/, and the pentadic number Ɔ /10/, are identical with the equivalent aberrant KRS runes. Four others are similar to, but not quite identical, with, the KRS runes: KRS ʒ /y/ = Lars[son] B /u/, KRS ʏ /w/ = Lars C /w/, and KRS ǰ /ö/ = Lars D /ö/. As summarized by Swedish linguist Henrik Williams, the Larsson papers “provide evidence that a special 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.

---

<sup>22</sup> Note that there was never any true “standard” runic alphabet. It varied significantly over time and from place to place. /fuþark/ refers to the older runes used before 1050 A.D.

## Appendix: The Kensington Rune Stone Text

On the face of the stone:<sup>23</sup>

- (1) 𐀀 : 𐀁𐀂𐀃 : 𐀄 : 𐀅𐀆 : 𐀇𐀈𐀉𐀊𐀋 : 𐀌 :
- (2) 𐀍 : 𐀎𐀏𐀐𐀑𐀒𐀓𐀔𐀕 : 𐀖𐀗 :
- (3) 𐀘𐀙𐀚𐀛 : 𐀜𐀝 : 𐀞𐀟𐀠 : 𐀡 :
- (4) 𐀢𐀣 : 𐀤𐀥𐀦𐀧 : 𐀨𐀩 : 𐀪 : 𐀫𐀬𐀭 : 𐀮 :
- (5) 𐀯𐀰𐀱 : 𐀲𐀳 : 𐀴𐀵𐀶 : 𐀷𐀸 : 𐀹𐀺 : 𐀻𐀼𐀽 :
- (6) 𐀾 : 𐀿𐁀𐁁 : 𐁂 : 𐁃𐁄𐁅 : 𐁆 : 𐁇𐁈𐁉 : 𐁊𐁋𐁌𐁍 :
- (7) 𐁎 : 𐁏𐁐 : 𐁑𐁒 : 𐁓𐁔 : 𐁕 : 𐁖𐁗 : 𐁘𐁙𐁚 :
- (8) 𐁛𐁜 : 𐁝𐁞𐁟 : 𐁠𐁡 : 𐁢𐁣 : A V M :
- (9) 𐁤𐁥𐁦𐁧 : 𐁨𐁩 : 𐁪𐁫 :

On the side of the stone:

- (10) 𐁬𐁭 : 𐁮 : 𐁯𐁰𐁱 : 𐁲 : 𐁳𐁴𐁵 : 𐁶𐁷 : 𐁸 :
- (11) 𐁹𐁺𐁻𐁼 : 𐁽𐁾𐁿 : 𐂀𐂁𐂂 : 𐂃𐂄 : 𐂅𐂆𐂇 : 𐂈𐂉 :
- (1) 𐂊𐂋𐂌 : 𐂍𐂎𐂏 : 𐂐𐂑 : 𐂒𐂓 : 𐂔𐂕𐂖 :

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 /þ/ transcribes a rune (𐀀) of similar shape, and originally denoted *th*-sounds,<sup>24</sup> as in English *thin* (unvoiced) and *this* (voiced). Sometimes it also denoted the *d*-sound, as in /winlanþ/.

<sup>23</sup> Thanks to Richard Nielsen for providing a KRS font. Naturally, the carved runes are not as uniform as appears here.

<sup>24</sup> This letter *þ* is still used in Icelandic for the unvoiced *th*-sound.

(1) 8 : göter : ok : 22 : norrmen : po :	Eight Götlanders and twenty-two Norwegians on
(2) [þen]jo : oppagelsefarþ : fro :	[this] exploration-journey from
(3) winlanþ : of : west : wi :	Vinland over the west. We
(4) haþe : läger : weþ : 2 : skjar : en :	had camp beside two sheds, one
(5) þags : rise : norr : fro : þeno : sten :	day's journey north from this stone.
(6) wi : war : ok : fiske : en : þagh : äptir :	We were [out] and fished one day; after
(7) wi : kom : hem : fan : 10 : man : röþe	we came home, found ten men red
(8) af : bloþ : og : þep : AVM :	with blood and tortured. Hail, Mary!
(9) fräelse : af : illy :	Deliver from evil!
(10) här : 10 : mans : we : hawet : at : se :	Have ten men by the sea to look
(11) äptir : wore : skip : 14 : þagh : rise :	after our ships, fourteen-day journey
(12) from : þeno : öh : ahr : 1362	from this island. Year, 1362.

**Notes on individual words and phrases:**<sup>25</sup>

/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 = 1, 2 = 2, 3 = 3, 4 = 4, 6 = 6, 7 = 8, - = 10. What is unprecedented on the KRS is the arrangement of pentadic numerals with the place values of the Arabic numeral system: 22 = 22, 14 = 14, 1362 = 1362. All previous runestones, insofar as they recorded dates, either spelled the words out,<sup>26</sup> or used Roman numerals.

/göter/ 'Götlanders': = ON *Gautar*, Old English *Geatas* '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.<sup>27</sup>

/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'. See also /norr/, below.

/po/ 'on': The usual Scan. word for 'on', Sw Da Nw *på*, contracted from ON *upp á* 'up on'.

<sup>25</sup> 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*.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., /þushundraþ . tu . hundraþ . tiuhu . uinr . 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).

<sup>27</sup> It does appear that the words *Götar* / *Gautar* (Götlanders) and *Gutar* (Goths) are ultimately related.



- /[bɛn]o/ ‘this’ (dative singular feminine): Only /o/ is now visible on the stone. Hagen (1950) surmised that the rest of the word /bɛno/ ‘this’ was worn or weathered away. See /bɛno : sten/, below.
- /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). 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*.
- /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’.
- /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.”
- /hape/ ‘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.
- /läger/ ‘camp’: = Sw *läger* < OSw *læggher* ‘bed, lying place’ = Eng *lair*. The newer meaning ‘camp’ is due to the influence of Low German *leger*.
- /weþ/ ‘by’: ON OSw *viþ*, Sw *vid*, Nw Da *ved* (Eng. *with*). Middle Swedish also had *vedh*. This word occurs later (line 10) without the final *þ*: /we/. The disappearance of *þ* (= *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 the word /skjar/ to be ON *sker*, Sw *skär* ‘skerries’; Rygh (1899)<sup>28</sup> read /sklear/ ‘sleds’; Hagen (1950) thought /skjar/ was the plural of ON *skjá* ‘shed, shack, shanty’; Nielsen (1987) reads /skylar/ ‘hiding places, shelters’.
- /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 in all six words:

KRS	Old Swedish	Old Norse	Gothic	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>ey</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

<sup>28</sup> As quoted by Hagen (1950).

- final *-o* in /**peno**/, and the phrase /**fræelse** : **af** : **illu**/ ‘deliver from evil’ (see below).
- /**pags** : **rise**/ ‘day’s journey’: /**pags**/ is the ordinary Scan. 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),<sup>29</sup> and wrote an approximation of LG *reise* rather than the adapted form *rēsa*.
- /**norr**/ ‘north’: Probably a Middle Swedish contraction of OSw *norþer, nordher*.
- /**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 singular neuter), here extended to masculine /**sten**/ and feminine /**öh**/. 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 1890’s? 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*.
- /**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.
- /**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 /**norrmenn**/ ‘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). 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 (“=dialect”).
- /**af** : **bloþ**/ ‘with (of) blood’: OSw *af blōþe* (dative), later *af blōþ* (accusative).
- /**þep**/ ‘tortured, tormented’: Most interpreters have taken /**þep**/ to mean ‘dead’, either as an intrusion of English *dead*, or as a medieval misspelling of Sw *död* ‘dead’.<sup>30</sup> Hagen (1950) suggests instead /**þep**/ from (hypothetical) OSw *\*þēþer*, corresponding to ON *þjáðr* ‘enslaved, oppressed, afflicted, tormented’.
- /**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.
- /**fræelse** : **af** : **illy**/ ‘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

<sup>29</sup> “[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)

<sup>30</sup> Attested as *ded* in a Swedish text from 1390 (Holand 1932, p. 267).

- was virtually identical with that of the Swedish Bible of 1300 (*frælse 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.
- /här/ 'have/has': Hagen (1950) reads \*ǺR /här/ where most previous discussants read \*XR /har/. (The latter did not see a dot above the rune.)<sup>31</sup> 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 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 æptir*. *sēa* 'see' was also recorded as *sā* or *sē* = modern Sw Da *se*.
- /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 : pagh : rise/ '14 days' journey': I think this is an elliptical form of \**fjurtån 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,<sup>32</sup> and *frá* ~ *frán* in the *Äldre Västgötalagen* (a medieval Swedish law text). The Gothic language (4<sup>th</sup> c.) had *fram* 'from'; *fram* in the meaning 'from' is found in a runic text at Åkirkeby, Bornholm (ca. AD 1200).<sup>33</sup> 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.
- /peno : 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

<sup>31</sup> Scott Wolter's close examination of the KRS confirms the reading \*ǺR /här/.

<sup>32</sup> Of course *fro* persists in modern Eng., but only in the phrase *to and fro*.

<sup>33</sup> /pa iR . þet . hiar . fram . s(ah)u/ "then there is here [the following] from the story."

anachronistic (influenced by German *Jahr* ‘year’) . I think /ahr/ should be interpreted as an abbreviation of a longer phrase, such as *ār vārs herra* ‘year of our Lord’.

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

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) [Ātta] Göter ok [tiughu ok twēr]<br>Norræn på | (12) frām ðenno ö. [år vārs herra] 1362.<br>Eight Götlanders and twenty-two<br>Norwegians, on |
| (2) [ðenn]o opdagelse-farð frá                    | [this] exploration-journey from   |
| (3) Vīnland ov vest [ære] vī.                     | Vinland over the west, [are] we.  |
| (4) Haðe læger veð [två] [ʔ sklar] ēn             | Had camp beside two [ʔ sheds], one  |
| (5) dags reise norr frá ðenno stēn[e].            | day’s journey north from this stone.  |
| (6) Vī var ok fiske ēn dagh; æptir                | We fished one day; after  |
| (7) vī kom hēm fan [tū] mann[a] röðe              | we came home, found ten men red   |
| (8) av blōð og þēð[e]. <i>Ave Maria!</i>          | with blood and tortured. Hail, Mary!  |
| (9) Frælse av illu!                               | Deliver from evil!  |
| (10) Hær [tū] manns ve havet, at sē               | {There is} a troop of ten men by the sea to<br>look   |
| (11) æptir vāre skip, [fjurtån] dagh[a]<br>reise  | after our ships, fourteen-day journey<br>from this island. [The year of our Lord]<br>1362.    |

## References:

- Bergman, Gösta. 1968. *Kortfattad svensk språkhistoria*. Stockholm: Prisma. [2<sup>nd</sup> printing 1970]
- Blegen, Theodore C. 1968. *The Kensington Rune Stone: New Light on an Old Riddle*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society.
- Gordon, Erick Valentine. 1927. *An Introduction to Old Norse*. Oxford University Press. [Reprinted 1938, 1957.]
- Hagen, Sivert N. 1950. "The Kensington Runic Inscription." *Speculum* 25: 321-356.
- Hall, Robert A., Jr. 1982. *The Kensington Rune-Stone Is Genuine*. Columbia, SC: Hornbeam Press. (Reprinted 1994 by the Runestone Museum, Alexandria, MN.)
- Haugen, Einar. 1976. *The Scandinavian Languages: An Introduction to Their History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Holand, Hjalmar Rued. 1932. *The Kensington Stone: a Study in Pre-Columbian American History*. Ephraim, Wisc.: Privately printed.
- Kehoe, Alice Beck. 2005. *The Kensington Runestone: Approaching a Research Question Holistically*. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Landes, Ruth. 1968. *The Mystic Lake Sioux: Sociology of the Mdewakantonwan Santee*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Nielsen, Richard. 1986. "The Arabic Numbering System on the Kensington Rune Stone." *Epigraphical Society Occasional Publications* 15: 47-61..
- 1987. "New Linguistic and Runic Evidence which Supports Hall's Thesis that the Kensington Runestone is Genuine." *14<sup>th</sup> LACUS Conference*. Toronto: York University.
- 2001. "Response to Dr. James Knirk's Essay on the Kensington Runestone." MS.
- Nielsen, Richard, and Scott F. Wolter 2005. *The Kensington Rune Stone: Compelling New Evidence*. Mason, Ohio: Outernet Publishing.
- Reiersgord, Thomas E. 2001. *The Kensington Rune Stone: Its Place in History*. St. Paul: Pogo Press.
- Skard, Vemund. 1967. *Norsk språkhistorie*. (Bind 1 – Til 1523.) Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Thalbitzer, William. 1946/47. "To fjærne runestene fra Grønland og Amerika." *Danske Studier* 43: 1-40.
- Wahlgren, Erik. 1958. *The Kensington Stone: A Riddle Solved*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Wessén, Elias. 1965. *Svensk språkhistoria*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.

## Abbreviations

-----

Da	Danish
Ic	Icelandic
LG	Low German (Northern German)
Nw	Norwegian
ON	Old Norse (including Old Norwegian, Old Swedish, Old Danish)
OSw	Old Swedish
Sw	Swedish