

THE KENSINGTON RUNE STONE

With the publication of Mr. Hjalmar R. Holand's book on *The Kensington Stone*, many who earlier had been skeptical came to a reluctant conclusion that the discussion as to the authenticity of the Kensington inscription had been brought to a close.¹ The author seemed to have met all the objections that hostile critics had been able to raise; he had built up an argument that seemed entirely plausible; and he had brought to the support of his contention an array of proofs that seemed incontrovertible and quite abundant. A few reviewers had the temerity still to condemn the book as a clever brief for an outrageous forgery, but these counted for little. Nearly all the reviews that came to the writer's attention seemed to concede that the author had proved his case.

Of those who were not impressed by Mr. Holand's argument, the first to enter a vigorous dissent was Dr. Milo M. Quaife of the Detroit Public Library. At a meeting of the American Historical Association in Urbana in December, 1933, Dr. Quaife discussed the Kensington problem in a conference of historical societies; he condemned the inscription and the legend that has been built up around it as a baseless myth. A year later the substance of his remarks was published in the *New England Quarterly* under the title "The Myth of the Kensington Rune Stone." Mr. Holand published a rejoinder in the following issue, and once more the debate was on.

In the discussion of this problem the chief considerations are four in number: (1) the environment in which the stone was found, or, as Mr. Holand phrases it, "the stone *in situ*"; (2) the route that the rune master supposedly had to travel to reach the site where the runes were chiseled;

¹ This work was privately printed at Ephraim, Wisconsin, in 1932.

(3) the language of the inscription with reference to the claim that it belongs to the fourteenth century; and (4) certain peculiarities in the runic alphabet that the master employed. There are, it is true, several other considerations that have come into the debate, such as the weathering of the stone and possible geographic conditions in western Minnesota in the fourteenth century, but these are distinctly of minor significance.

The stone was found in 1898 by Olof Ohman, a Swedish farmer, who dug it out from under the roots of a poplar tree. Naturally the question has arisen, how old was the tree? The answer to this question would have to come from an examination of the trunk; unfortunately, however, no part of the tree was preserved. Mr. Holand has, indeed, attempted to determine the size of the poplar with the aid of Ohman's memory, but the attempt has not been wholly successful.² On a visit to Kensington in 1910, Professor George T. Flom of the University of Illinois interviewed several men who had seen the tree after it had been grubbed up. Among these was one Samuel Olson, who had been much interested in the strange find. It was Olson's memory at that time that the tree was about four inches in diameter. Later he revised his estimate to something like eight or ten inches.³ But one should remember that both these estimates were made a dozen years after the facts in question had been observed.

Dr. Quaife makes much of this revision of the evidence, and one must admit that it does not strengthen one's faith in Olson as a credible witness. Mr. Holand, on the other hand, seems to doubt that Olson's first statement was correctly quoted, an observation that may be regarded as

² Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 37-46; Quaife, in *New England Quarterly*, 7: 628-630 (December, 1934).

³ George T. Flom, "The Kensington Rune Stone," in *Illinois State Historical Society, Transactions*, 1910, p. 120 (Springfield, 1912); Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 40.

wholly gratuitous.⁴ He further calls attention to the fact that several other citizens who had seen the aspen in its up-rooted state agreed with the later, and higher, estimate of its diameter. To this the obvious reply would be that, since no one had taken the trouble to measure the girth of the tree, there was nothing definite to remember. Evidence as to its size and diameter therefore cannot be regarded as reliable, especially after the passage of twelve years.⁵

To Mr. Holand and those who are in agreement with him it seems very important to prove that in 1898 the tree was at least seventy years old. They assume that it must have begun to grow some time *after* the stone had been placed in the soil, an assumption that is not necessarily valid. But if Mr. Holand's contention is admitted, the inscription goes back to a time at least as early as the thirties of the last century; and since the red man was then in sole occupation of central Minnesota, the planting of a forgery then or at any earlier time becomes unthinkable.

It is the writer's opinion, however, that nothing can be gained from a discussion of the probable size and age of Ohman's aspen tree. The question of the authenticity of the Kensington inscription cannot be affected by any conclusion that may be reached on this point. The aspen may have begun to grow in the early eighties or thereabouts in the soil covering a stone that had been there for some time, or a stone bearing a forged inscription may, as Dr. Quaife suggests, have been shoved in under a growing tree that was old enough to endure a little tampering with its roots. Mr. Holand is, of course, unwilling to entertain

⁴ Quaife, in *New England Quarterly*, 7: 632; Holand, "The 'Myth' of the Kensington Stone," in *New England Quarterly*, 8: 45 (March, 1935).

⁵ That there was considerable disagreement about the possible age of the tree among those who saw it is indicated in "The Kensington Rune Stone," a "Preliminary Report to the Minnesota Historical Society by its Museum Committee" made in 1910. See *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 15: 222 (1915).

the latter possibility; he appeals for support to a drawing made by Olson in which the stone lies in the firm grasp of the two principal roots. Dr. Quaife notes the fact that this drawing has been substantially revised. In Mr. Holand's book the stem has grown to larger proportions than those originally sketched, and the stone is held in a grip that could be attained only by the growth of years. To this one may remark that Olson sketched the root arrangement from memory years after he had observed it. It is also pertinent to add that Ohman refused to accept this drawing as a correct representation of the fact. In his memory the arrangement was quite different.⁶

The writer therefore believes that Dr. Quaife takes the problem of the aspen tree too seriously. When he proceeds to examine Mr. Holand's theory of how the rune master reached Minnesota, his findings are more conclusive. Mr. Holand has long contended that the inscription is a record, probably the final record, of an expedition that had been sent from Norway to Greenland seven or eight years before the date inscribed on the stone. It is known that in October, 1354, the Norwegian king appointed Paul Knutson, one of his barons, to lead an expedition to Greenland, apparently to check a reported apostasy from the Christian faith in one of the colonies. It ought to be safe to conclude that the expedition actually did sail, probably the following spring, but all information is lacking. Paul Knutson's name, which appears several times in earlier documents, has not been found in any record after that date. Mr. Holand believes that he may have perished in the New World, but that some of his companions may have found their way back to Norway. This is quite possible, but the evidence employed to support this belief is of the flimsiest character.⁷

⁶ *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 15:245; Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 37; *New England Quarterly*, 7:630.

⁷ Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 74-77, 93-95.

This absence of information, however, does not disturb our friends of the Kensington cult. On the basis of King Magnus' commission and the Kensington runes, they have built up a narrative, wholly imaginary, which on a casual reading seems quite plausible. This is nothing less than the itinerary of Paul Knutson and his men from the coast of Norway to the prairies of western Minnesota. It is a most amazing tale.⁸

Not finding the apostate Greenlanders in their colonial home, Paul Knutson sets forth to search for them. His first important stopping place is Vinland, where the king's baron remains for a period of three or four years, meanwhile exploring the coast in all directions, but without success. Mr. Holand appears to believe that there was, at the time, a Norse colony in Vinland, though on this point he is not explicit.⁹ The supposition is, however, extremely doubtful; at any rate the Vinland narratives of the fourteenth century are entirely silent on the subject.

Unwilling to give up the search, the faithful crusaders sail north to the tip of Labrador, a distance of more than a thousand miles. At this point they turn southward and are soon at the entrance of Hudson Strait, a passage more than five hundred miles in length and beset with perils in the form of ice throughout most of the year. Only for a few weeks in summer is the passage reasonably navigable. Next comes a sail of at least fifteen hundred miles along the shores of Hudson Bay to the mouth of the Nelson River, where the expedition establishes quarters for the winter. Since there are no trees for shelter or fuel at the river mouth, the location of the new camp would have to be several miles inland, where there would be a sufficiency of scrub spruce to serve its purposes.

Dr. Quaife argues that mariners living so long a time

⁸The hypothesis is developed by Holand in the *Kensington Stone*, 78-95.

⁹Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 25.

under Arctic conditions could hardly escape the ravages of disease, more especially of scurvy. To this Mr. Holand replies that the Greenlanders had learned how "to withstand the disease"; and since Paul Knutson and his companions must have spent a winter or two in Greenland, "it would have been strange, indeed, if they had not learned preventive measures."¹⁰ What he says about the Greenlanders is doubtless true, but whether these "preventive measures" could be successfully employed on the shores of the great bay is rather doubtful.

In 1619 Jens Munk, a Danish navigator of Norwegian birth, entered Hudson Bay and sailed west to the mouth of the Churchill River, about a hundred and fifty miles north of the Nelson, where he prepared to spend the winter months. The winter proved to be severe beyond what even seasoned northern sailors could endure. Unable to obtain supplies by hunting and fishing, they were forced to resort to a diet of salted meats, with dire results. When spring came, only three of the sixty-four men who had entered the bay were still alive. Hardship and disease, notably scurvy, had accounted for the others.

It will be noted that the men of the Munk expedition perished, indirectly at least, because they were unable to secure fresh food. In the writer's opinion the danger from starvation would be greater than that from disease on the shores of Hudson Bay. In such ships as were built in the fourteenth century, there was little space for storing provisions. An expedition into the Hudson territory would have to depend for the most part on what the region had to offer. Travelers who have gone down the Nelson are in great doubt whether it would be possible to live off the country. Hunting in summer becomes almost impossible because of the marshy character of the soil; in winter, cold and snow make it even more difficult.

¹⁰ *New England Quarterly*, 8: 55.

Summer finally comes, and if we can trust Mr. Holand and the rune master, the greater part of the expedition sets out on a journey of a thousand miles or more up the Nelson River, through Lake Winnipeg, and up the Red River to the prairies of the future Douglas County, Minnesota. This journey would have to be made for the most part in canoes. Some stretches would, of course, have to be traveled on foot. Dr. Quaife argues that such a journey was beyond the resources of ordinary men. The Nelson is a mighty stream, which tumbles along with a current so swift and powerful that canoes are not easily navigated upon it. In the earlier days of the Hudson's Bay Company, it was not regarded as a safe highway. Mr. Holand, however, holds to a more optimistic belief. He insists that the traders of the Hudson's Bay Company did use the river as a highway and that Dr. Quaife makes too much of the dangerous character of the stream.¹¹ Between these two views the writer is not qualified to make a proper choice; but information obtained from a scientist who has actually gone down the Nelson leads to the opinion that even skillful Indian boatmen fear the power and the treacherous character of the stream.

A sentence that seems to have been intended as a post-script to the Kensington inscription was chiseled into the edge of the stone. It reads as follows: "[We] have 10 of our party by the sea to look after our ships [or ship] 14 days-journey from this island Year 1362."¹² The statement that the party was camped on an island at once attracts attention. The site is not at present an island; it therefore becomes necessary for Mr. Holand and his partisans to assume that 574 years ago the land that came to be the Ohman farm was, in part at least, surrounded by water. No doubt great changes have occurred in that area in the course of the centuries, but here again we are in

¹¹ *New England Quarterly*, 7: 635-637; 8: 57.

¹² Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 6.

the field of conjecture, and unless competent geographers are ready to come forward and testify to a strong conviction that there was an island in that place in the fourteenth century, we shall have to assume that conditions in that part of Minnesota were substantially the same in 1362 as in 1898.

According to the rune master this "island" was fourteen days' journey from the *sea*. Those who believe the inscription to be authentic take this "sea" to mean Hudson Bay. There seems to be no other choice. Lake Superior was once thought of as a possibility. The distance from Duluth to Kensington, as the crow flies, is about a hundred and eighty miles, a distance that probably could be traveled in less than a fortnight, though the fact that the journey would lie through the forests of northeastern Minnesota would no doubt tend to lengthen the period. But how could a ship in 1362 get into Lake Superior? The answer might be that it was built somewhere on the upper Great Lakes; but shipbuilding would require an equipment of tools that travelers probably did not have at hand.

When we turn to Hudson Bay for the solution, we meet with another difficulty. The distance from the mouth of the Nelson River to Kensington could not be traveled in two weeks; even under the most favorable circumstances that the season could allow, such a journey would require seven or eight weeks or possibly more. Fighting the current of a great river, portaging around rapids through treacherous bogs, the expedition could have made but slow progress, at least in its earlier stages. An average of twenty miles per day for the entire distance seems more than a liberal estimate.

This difficulty remained insuperable till 1914, when William Hovgaard published his work on the *Voyages of the Northmen to America*. This author has a chapter on navigation in which he develops an apparently well-founded theory that in Norse naval parlance a "day's sail" meant

approximately seventy-five miles.¹³ Holand and his fellow-believers seized at once upon this interpretation; might not the "day's journey" (*dagh rise*) of the inscription mean the same as a day's sailing? Moreover, when seventy-five is multiplied by fourteen the product is 1,050, a number which is so startlingly near the actual distance from the bay to the "island" that the contention may be regarded as proved. The only objection that one can raise to this theory is that there is no evidence anywhere that distances on land ever were reckoned in this way. On land the men of the time traveled the miserable roads on foot or on horseback, and one did well if he covered a distance of twenty miles in a day. The ordinary measure of distance was the *rast* or *rqst*, which seems to have meant something like four or five of our own statute miles. The term was current in Sweden as well as in Norway. A "day's journey" was equivalent to four or five *rasts*; it can have meant nothing else.

Mr. Holand seems to understand all this and as usual he takes refuge in an assumption. He argues that the rune master was a sailor and that a sailor would naturally use his own terms in describing distances. From this conclusion the writer wishes to register an unqualified dissent. The rune master may have been a sailor (more likely he was a clerk), at least he had been on the sea. Ordinarily we might expect him to use the vocabulary of his craft—if it seemed to apply to the matter in hand. In this instance he was making a formal record of events that were of immense importance to him and to his companions. Naturally he would use the terms that his future readers would understand. In making a formal statement a modern sailor would scarcely affirm that his motor car traveled fifty knots an hour. And it is no more likely that a Norse or Swedish

¹³ See chapter 4 on the "Navigation of the Norsemen," in Hovgaard's work. The book was published by the American-Scandinavian Foundation as volume 1 of its *Scandinavian Monographs* (New York, 1914).

traveler in the fourteenth century would speak of distances in the wilds of Canada in terms of so many days' sailings.

If we accept the interpretation, as logic forces us to do, that the term *dagh rise* of the inscription means the normal distance that one can travel on land in a day, we have the rune master affirming that he chiseled the inscription on an island that probably did not exist and that this island was located about three hundred miles from a sea which apparently was as mythical as the island. At any rate the sea could not have been Hudson Bay.

Elsewhere in the inscription we read: "had camp by 2 skerries one days-journey north from this stone." Since Mr. Holand has determined that a day's journey is seventy-five miles, he has to travel north that distance into Becker County, and, sure enough, he finds in Cormorant Lake the site of the fateful camp. Dr. Quaife treats this identification with the ridicule that it deserves.¹⁴ And since Mr. Holand is manifestly in error as to the meaning of a day's journey, the Cormorant skerries will have to pass out of the story.

It is a fair question to ask how these travelers, after wandering for weeks through a vast wilderness, could have any conception of how many navigation units or other units they had covered. One is curious to know what the impulse was that was driving them forward. Holand gives several explanations: they were crusaders; they were searching for a portage across the country to the St. Lawrence River system. But the crusading motive fades away at the mouth of the Nelson. Paul Knutson now becomes the fanatical explorer. At this point in the narrative the author inserts this interesting comment, which deserves to be quoted in full:

Reasons of state would also recommend such an overland journey. The collection of the royal revenues from the western islands belonged to the Bergen revenue office, of which Paul Knutson was as-

¹⁴ *New England Quarterly*, 7: 626.

sistant supervisor. As he had reason to think that this new country might in time become a taxpaying colony of the King, there was urgent reason for exploring it.¹⁵

Verily, an illuminating observation! Paul Knutson evidently thought of everything.

Inasmuch as the inscription bears a fourteenth-century date, one should expect the linguistic forms employed to be such as appear to have been current in that period. That, however, is not the case. There are at least a dozen important deviations from what is regarded as literary usage in that century. One of the earliest arguments directed against the authenticity of the stone was that the language of the inscription gave an impression of having a distinctly modern character.¹⁶ That argument is still valid. Any man of average education, if he hears the inscription read aloud correctly, will be able to understand every word and every line, even though he has had no previous knowledge as to its tenor and purport. Some of the words do, indeed, have an archaic appearance; but even the archaisms are irregular and call for explanation.

That the forms employed by the rune master are not conventional is understood and recognized by all students of medieval Norse. Mr. Holand contends, however, that in the fourteenth century the northern idioms were rapidly developing in the direction of what have come to be their modern forms. This, he believes, would be particularly true of colloquial speech; the written forms changed more slowly. It is, therefore, his contention that, far from using irregular and doubtful forms and constructions, the rune master quite naturally employed such as were in current use in everyday conversation.¹⁷

It is quite possible that this theory has some basis, but unless it can be substantiated by satisfactory proofs it is of

¹⁵ Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 87.

¹⁶ See Flom's discussion of the "Dialect of the Kensington Inscription," in Illinois State Historical Society, *Transactions*, 1910, p. 117.

¹⁷ Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 97.

no value. For a number of years Mr. Holand has conducted a search for such proofs and he now believes that he has found all the evidence that anyone might demand. In a lengthy appendix to his book on the stone, he gives what he calls a "linguistic analysis of the inscription," in which he examines it word for word with a view to proving that it is really in accord with fourteenth-century standards. His interpretations are supported and fortified by citations and examples from the northern literature of the later Middle Ages and from other documents of the same period. The impression derived from the first reading of the appendix is that he has built up a structure that is strong and almost impregnable.

But when one examines the materials that the author has assembled, one is not so sure that the structure will stand. Dr. Stefan Einarsson of Johns Hopkins University has made such an examination and his results, published in a review of Holand's book, are highly damaging to the author's claim to serious scholarship.¹⁸ He finds that Mr. Holand has been careless in his use and selection of terms, that he has quoted authorities incorrectly, that he has made questionable translations, and that he has introduced irrelevant materials into his discussion, apparently expecting his readers to accept them as dependable evidence. It will not be necessary to make note of all the errors and irrelevancies that Dr. Einarsson has pointed out — there must be at least twenty. The review should be read by all who put any trust whatever in Mr. Holand's method of dealing with evidence. It may be advisable, however, to give a few characteristic specimens.

"The terms *døgr* (day's journey) and *dags sigling*," writes Mr. Holand, "were used by Scandinavian sailors in the Middle Ages as a definite unit of distance, equal to about 75 English miles." This is no doubt true of *dags sigling* (day's sailing); but *døgr* was always used as a unit of time,

¹⁸ *Speculum: A Journal of Mediaeval Studies*, 8: 400-408 (July, 1933).

designating twelve and sometimes twenty-four hours, never as a unit of distance.¹⁹ The most suspicious word in the inscription is *opdagelsefarþ* (exploration journey). *Opdagelse* (discovery) is a German or possibly a Dutch loan word which does not appear in any northern source before 1575. Mr. Holand, hoping, it seems, to escape the evidence of external origin, connects it with the Old Norse phrase *daga uppi*; but the quotation on which he depends to establish this and which he translates "one is revealed by the coming of dawn," should, according to Dr. Einarsson, be rendered, "one is taken by surprise, overtaken by dawn." Mr. Holand's attempt to relate *opdagelse* to a Norse dialect word *aabendaga* also proves a failure. In this case he confuses the prefix *aaben* (open) with *op* (up). "One of Holand's worst mistakes is made in discussing the forms *man*, *mans* of the inscription." In this part of his discussion he confuses the Old Norse word *maþr* (man) with *man*, which usually means slave; the less important members of a household may also be called *man* in a collective sense. Dr. Einarsson's discussion of these matters is too technical to allow a brief summary, but the results are not to Mr. Holand's credit.²⁰

Dr. Einarsson does not argue that Mr. Holand is necessarily on the wrong track in all of his many deductions. What he does claim is that his attempt to prove that the language of the inscription is good fourteenth-century Norwegian or Swedish is a failure. In his own words:

I believe this discussion of Holand's linguistic commentary shows that his statements have to be taken with a grain of salt. I should not be surprised if more errors were to be found in his quotations of Norwegian and Swedish sources which I have not had at hand and have thus been unable to control.²¹

Perhaps the writer may be allowed to add a note to Mr.

¹⁹ *Speculum*, 8: 403.

²⁰ Flom, in Illinois State Historical Society, *Transactions*, 1910, p. 117; *Speculum*, 8: 404-407.

²¹ *Speculum*, 8: 407.

Holand's commentary on the symbol ϕ , which he finds used as an abbreviation of *obit*. This he regards as the letter \ddot{o} , and his explanation of how this letter came to have this peculiar function is worth quoting. "This was probably less due to a mistake in spelling than to the thought that, as ϕ was the last letter of the alphabet, it better symbolized death than did *o*."²² It would be difficult to pack a greater number of misconceptions into a single sentence than Mr. Holand has done in this case. The *obituary calendar* that serves to illustrate his point is in Latin, not in Old Danish. The last letter in the Latin alphabet was *z* and not \ddot{o} . The Latin alphabet, moreover, had no letter \ddot{o} . The ϕ of the calendar was one of several abbreviations for *obit* and was used wherever Latin was written; it had nothing to do with the Old Danish \ddot{o} .

In his article in the *New England Quarterly*, Mr. Holand speaks of the rune master as a "semi-literate soldier" from whom one could not expect much in the way of literary accuracy. Only two or three years earlier we had read that the "writer of this strange inscription was an artist in paleography," one who had "considerable skill in the art of cutting runes or similar handicraft." He states further "that while the inscription linguistically shows many errors, it has epigraphically none."²³ These statements appear to be mutually contradictory. That a "semi-literate soldier" could have produced something so perfect in execution as the Kensington runes, while, of course not wholly impossible, is very unlikely and difficult to believe.

The rune master, whatever his rank and education, knew the runic alphabet that was in general use in the fourteenth century and used most of its characters. In addition he employed several symbols, seven in all, which are not known to belong to that period. The question to be answered by those who accept the stone as authentic then becomes merely

²² Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 113.

²³ *New England Quarterly*, 8: 49; Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 6, 106.

this: were these runes in actual use in the fourteenth century? If not, how can we account for them?

As usual Mr. Holand is able to produce what seems a satisfactory answer. The soldier had forgotten the conventional runic forms, but he could still remember the Latin alphabet and proceeded to adapt some of its characters to his immediate purpose.²⁴ Mr. Holand is able to show that letters resembling five of the seven characters in question can be found in manuscripts from the fourteenth century. This, however, is of no help, since it does not prove that they ever were used in runic inscriptions, nor does it avail much to point to the Kensington stone. Its authenticity has been challenged, and until this is vindicated it cannot be used as evidence.

In the list of seven symbols there is one, the A-rune, shaped like the Greek letter X with a small hook on its upper branch on the right side, which is found to have been used in other inscriptions. These occurrences appear to be late, however, and almost limited to the Swedish province of Dalarna. This is an unfortunate circumstance, especially since Professor Flom, for linguistic reasons, concludes that the dialect of the inscription is the dialect of that province, which conclusion Mr. Holand does his best to overthrow.²⁵

The most scholarly, one might almost say the only scholarly, discussion of the Kensington problem that has appeared to date is the paper by Professor Flom referred to above. In this the author examines all the facts and weighs all the considerations that had come into the discussion by 1910. So far as the writer knows, Professor Flom is the only competent scholar who has attempted to deal with the runological aspects of the problem. Though the subject of frequent attack in the twenty-five years that have passed,

²⁴ Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 108.

²⁵ Flom, in Illinois State Historical Society, *Transactions*, 1910, p. 117; Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 119-124.

his important conclusions remain unshaken. Unfortunately the paper appeared in a publication that is not generally accessible and is therefore not so widely known as it deserves to be. It is to be hoped that some day in the not too distant future it may be republished, perhaps in a revised and extended form, since among scholars on this side of the sea Professor Flom is best qualified to speak the decisive word.

To bolster up his argument on the historical side, Mr. Holand has added to the *Kensington Stone* a chapter on "Corroborative Finds," in which he makes certain claims that should not go unchallenged. He lists three Swedish battle-axes, a hatchet, a spearhead, and a fire steel which have been unearthed in Minnesota and Wisconsin and which he is sure belonged to the Paul Knutson expedition. Of the first he writes: "The reason this implement is called a battle-axe is that it is clearly not meant for chopping." Of the second he says: "Its use was clearly the same as that of the other." But now comes Dr. Einarsson with the disconcerting information that axes of the same shape have "modern Scandinavian parallels" and that these are actually used in dressing wood. "The axe is designed to smooth the walls of log houses, and 'the ridges (*bil-backana*) must be there so that the worker need not strike his fingers against the wall.'" ²⁶ "It is obvious," remarks Mr. Holand, "that these four axes [*the two mentioned above, a third, and a hatchet*] are from the same period and the same region." If that be true, nothing more need be said. Since they are all likely to be of modern manufacture, their usefulness as evidence is nil.

As to the fire steel, one need only call attention to the statement of the finder: "The fire steel is just the same

²⁶ Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 158, 160; *Speculum*, 8:402. Dr. Einarsson refers to K. P. Petterson, "Lantmannaredskap i Nagu," in *Folkloristiska och etnografiska studier*, 2: 131-197 (Helsingfors, 1917). Nagu is an island in the Åbo group.

size and form as the fire-steels which my grandmother used 65 or 66 years ago.”²⁷ The statement is dated June 8, 1914. How anyone, in the face of this statement, can claim a medieval origin for the steel is difficult to understand. The spearhead looks like a fine specimen of the blacksmith’s craft, but it need be neither Scandinavian nor medieval. Spearheads were made in all lands and in a great variety of forms; individual smiths had their own patterns. One need go no farther than Webster’s *New International Dictionary* (see under “lance”) to find a picture of such a head, which, except for the length of the blade, has all the essential characteristics of the one shown in Holand’s book.²⁸

If the Kensington inscription is a forgery, as the writer believes it to be, one wishes to know why such a fraud was perpetrated. Two choices have been suggested: the forger may have wished to add strength to the belief in the Vinland narratives, which were much in debate in the seventies and eighties; or he may have intended to foist a new sort of hoax on credulous citizens for the enjoyment that the inevitable discussion would bring. The writer prefers the latter alternative as the one that produces the fewer problems. If this is the correct solution two or three things seem quite evident.

First, the hoax was the work of two men—one who could probably make some claim to scholarship, and another who had considerable skill as a stonemason. These two could have chiseled the inscription at their leisure in a

²⁷ Holand, *Kensington Stone*, 167.

²⁸ Most of the weapons unearthed in the Northwest seem to have come from the storehouses of the Hudson’s Bay Company or of the French traders. In an account of work done on behalf of the French king by a blacksmith in Detroit, lances, axes, and arrowheads made to fit out an expedition to the Sioux are mentioned. Professor Theodore C. Pease of the University of Illinois has a photostatic copy of this document, which is in the Archives Nationales, Colonies, 11 A, vol. 117, folios 43–47. See also Theodore C. Pease and Raymond C. Werner, eds., *The French Foundations, 1680–1693*, 165 (*Illinois Historical Collections*, vol. 23—1934).

shop and afterward planted it where it was found some years later. It is, of course, possible that one man did all the work; but the weight of the stone, more than two hundred pounds, makes this an unlikely supposition. Second, the stone scarcely can have been planted later than the early eighties. Some time in 1884 seems to be the latest possible date, for in that year a home was established only five hundred feet away from the site where the stone was found. Third, the theory that the forgery was intended as a hoax disposes of all the problems that the inscription has raised. A forger who is preparing a fraud of this sort does not have to be consistent on all points. In his syntax, in his choice of runes, and in his dealing with geographical facts he is likely to allow himself much freedom, always being careful, of course, not to wander too far afield.

LAURENCE M. LARSON

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA



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