

AUTHENTIC MEDIEVAL ELEMENTS IN THE KENSINGTON STONE¹

By Keith Massey and Kevin Massey

Since its discovery in 1898, the Kensington Rune Stone has endured several cycles of acclaim and scorn. The opinion of scholarship today is as divided as it has been from the beginning. In general, Scandinavian linguists and runologists are overwhelmingly against accepting the genuineness of the Stone. Few scholars in other disciplines have challenged their ruling. Recent exceptions, such as Robert Hall (Hall: 1982, 1994) and Richard Nielsen (Nielsen: 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989), have argued that nothing in the Stone itself would preclude its authenticity and that the continued rejection of the Stone is fueled simply by an *a priori* assumption of fraud. In this article, we will examine two lines of the Kensington Stone which have generally been neglected. We believe that authentic medieval elements can be seen in these lines which will demonstrate to scholars of the medieval period, even outside of Runology and Scandinavian linguistics, that a reexamination of the Kensington Stone is necessary.

OPPONENTS OF AUTHENTICITY

Over the years, a long march of experts in Scandinavian

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Language and Runic writing have examined the stone's text and almost uniformly declared the stone to be a hoax. They have insisted that the nature of the Scandinavian language presented by the stone, the presence of perceived linguistic anachronisms, the possibility of Anglicisms, the character of its runic writing, and the circumstances of its discovery all prove that the stone is a forgery. Perhaps the most influential opponent of the Kensington Stone is Erik Wahlgren, who argued against it in *The Kensington Stone, a mystery solved* (Wahlgren: 1958).

ADVOCATES FOR THE KENSINGTON STONE

Despite the strong currents against it, the Kensington Stone was never without its supporters. Earlier in this century, a remarkable amateur linguist, Hjalmar Holand (e.g., Holland: 1956), defended the stone for about fifty years. He published numerous books and articles in which he took issue, point by point, with all the linguistic and practical objections raised by scholars. Robert A. Hall Jr, a respected American linguist of Romance Languages, published persuasive books arguing that the methodology of the stone's naysayers has been less than professional, compared to other disciplines. He has demonstrated that the Kensington Stone actually contains a number of elements which should have suggested authenticity. Richard Nielsen has published a series of articles in this publication in which he addressed and answered every objection made to the Stone by previous scholars (see bibliography). In our judgment, Holand, Hall, and Nielsen have succeeded in making ample room to give the

Kensington Stone the benefit of the doubt.

A NEW APPROACH

We too are convinced that the stone's language, writing, and circumstances are no barrier to its being accepted as genuine. Yet, the official opinion of the Kensington Stone remains today that it is a forgery and a hoax. We propose therefore to consider the authenticity of the Kensington Stone by closely examining a part of the inscription which has not gathered significant comment to date. Our study will focus solely on the phrase in lines 8 and 9 of the Stone, AV'M: fräelse:af:illy: "Hail Mary, deliver from evil." We will discuss this phrase in detail and show that, like other parts of the inscription, it displays a knowledge which not only is unlikely to have been held by a modern forger, but was probably unavailable at the time of the reputed forgery. Our assertion that this phrase suggests the Stone's authenticity concerns two points, 1) the nature of the abbreviation AV'M:; and 2) the historical significance of the statement following it, Fräelse af illy, "Deliver from evil."

This study will not deal with the runic characters themselves, therefore we will show here only a transcription of the stone which approximates its appearance. A line by line translation accompanies the transcription:

[Written on the front of the stone]

8:göter:ok:22:norrmen:po:
opdagelsefard:fro:
vinland:of:vest:vi:
hade:lager:ved:2:skjar:en:
dags:rise:norr:fro:deno:sten:
vi:var:ok:fiske:en:dagh:aptir:
vi:kom:hem:fan:10:man:röde:

af:blod:og:ded:AV`M:
fräelse:af:illy:

[Written on the side of the stone]

har:10:mans:ve:havet:at:se:
äptir:vore:skip:14:dagh:rise:
from:deno:öh:ahr:1362:

8 Swedes and 22 Norwegians on
a discovery voyage from
Vinland westward, we
had anchored by 2 rocky islets one
days voyage north from this stone.
We had fished a day, after
we came home, [we] found 10 men red
with blood and dead. AV(E) M(ARIA)
deliver from evil.

We have 10 men at sea to look
after our ship 14 days voyage
from this island. Year 1362

THE ABBREVIATION AV`M:

The belief that AV`M: fräelse:af:illy: pointed to the Stone's authenticity was forwarded quite early after the Stone's discovery. Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul Minnesota, whose knowledge of Medieval matters was respected, made the claim already in 1909. [St. Paul Dispatch, December 14, 1909]. Early comment on the abbreviation concerned itself only with the seemingly unimportant question of whether this stood for "AV[e] M[aria] (Hail Mary)" or "A[ve] V[irgo] M[aria] (Hail Virgin Mary)." The instinct to force AVM to stand for Ave Virgo Maria is understandable, since modern conventions of abbreviation tend toward a first letter format. Yet this option is unlikely. Coinages such as "Ave Virgo Maria were rare at best, and certainly not in common currency. With that in mind, we assert that not nearly enough attention has been paid to the implication of the abbreviation of Ave Maria as AVM.

There is a need to place the abbreviation AVM either within the framework of the productive and/or formal conventions in use in the

late 1300's or into the likely abbreviation which a forger would have chosen in the late 19th century. If AVM is not a generally acceptable abbreviation for Ave Maria, this would cast some serious doubt on the authenticity of the Stone. Conversely, if AVM were an acceptable abbreviation, but one which a modern forger would not have been likely to use, this would provide evidence that the Stone is genuine.

At the time the Kensington Stone was reputedly carved in 1362, abbreviation had evolved into a system of numerous conventions. From ancient times and continuing into the Middle Ages, the great expense of writing materials created a critical need to save space. Partly for that reason, the Semitic languages were written with purely consonantal alphabets and Greek and Latin Paleography used no word divisions in common use. Beyond that, extensive abbreviation was practiced to cram as much onto the page as possible. The conventions in use in the late 1300's fell generally into three categories, 1) 1st Letter Abbreviation, 2) Abbreviation by Contraction, and 3) Superscript Lettering.

FIRST LETTER ABBREVIATION

Inherited from Imperial times had come the convention of abbreviating phrases with the first letter only, such as in the well known S.P.Q.R. (Senatus Populusque Romanus), "The Senate and the Roman People." In normal Classical and Medieval usage, even these well known abbreviations used periods or suspended dots to signal the abbreviation. As stated above, the interpretation of AVM as Ave Virgo Maria is without any attested basis, and so AVM can not be an

abbreviation of this type. There is a Medieval abbreviation of Ave Maria of this type, attested as A·M· (Cappelli: 1928, p. 15; see Bischoff: 1990, pp. 150-168 for discussion and further examples of the three abbreviation conventions). The existence of another abbreviation does not, however, exclude a different abbreviated form because more than one acceptable convention was used, sometimes in mixed forms.

ABBREVIATION BY CONTRACTION

Another convention involved stripping a word of its vowels or other internal letters. This originated in the abbreviation of the frequently used divine names of the Bible. An example of this is found in the newly re-accepted Yale Vinland Map, where we read *in dnm ihm xpm credunt*, "They believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." The Yale Vinland Map, first presented in the 1960's was originally dated to 1430 and depicts the world, including a large land mass entitled Vinlanda Insula. Bound with the map is a document called the Tartar Relation, telling the story of a 13th century Franciscan mission trip to Asia. The map and the Tartar Relation manuscript seem to be written in the same hand.

At first hailed as an historical prize, the map was later discredited as a forgery. This year, however, the Library of Yale University decided once again to stand by their map as authentic and have forthcoming their evidence for its authenticity. If authentic, the map would provide collaborating evidence that some 14th and 15th century Europeans had knowledge of the North American mainland. It

is clear from the opposition the Kensington Stone and the Yale Vinland Map have met, that matters vinlandic are highly controversial and must be proven innocent in the courts of the mind before being given the benefit of the doubt.

As in the Vinland Map, medieval contractions were generally signaled by the use of a horizontal superscript line above the contracted word. Maria under this convention was normally abbreviated as MA. The use of the horizontal line signal was not an absolute requirement, especially in less formal registers. Attested cases of this type of abbreviation for the Ave Maria in runic characters from the medieval period displays a tendency to spell out Ave in full and then shorten Maria (eg., avæ: ma: [Ikast sword-pommel, Moltke: 1985, p. 474] and MA AV [the Greenlandic wooden cross (#150 b side at Herjolfsnes), Jonsson: 1924, 283]). So, despite the *nomina sacra*, AVM is not an abbreviation of this type. The form would not bear out this interpretation.

SUPERSCRIPT LETTERING

The final tool in use during the Middle Ages for abbreviation was to shorten words by the use of superscripted letters. So, for example, the Latin preposition de, "from," becomes d^e. Maria in this convention is first shortened to Ma and then writing the final "a" as a superscript, M^a. For example, the medieval Scandinavian manuscript form for jomfru (virgin) is often seen as jomf^a. In some cases, the superscript letter seems to have evolved into a mere dot, and so, for

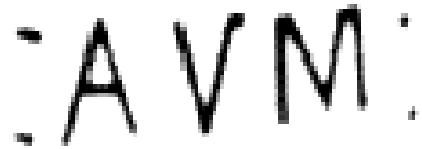
instance, aqua is found as aq̇

AV̇M: IS A MEDIEVAL SUPERSCRIPED ABBREVIATION

It is our assertion that the abbreviation AV̇M displays tendencies of both the medieval contraction and superscripting conventions. The stone medium in which the inscription is carved, combined with the mixing of Latin and Runic symbols in the Stone have obscured this recognition. The evidence for our claim is based on an observation in this abbreviation of an element which has not yet been discussed in this capacity. There is a superscript dot to the right of the V (V̇), precisely where a miniature letter e would have been found if this were written out. Even Wahlgren observes this and includes it in his general character assassination of the man who found the Kensington Stone, Ohman, by making his cryptic theories work off it:

If written out and punctuated in the same way as the rest of the words, the two words "Ave : Maria" would then be separated by a colon. There would then be a cryptic restoration of the prevailing system based on 22 : 66 words and 66 sets of separating dots. In assuming this, one is not reduced to conjecture alone, for examination of the word AVM in line 8 of the inscription shows *a circular chisel puncture in the stone adjoining the upper right-hand portion of the V* [emphasis our own] as if the runecarver had planned to carve two dots

between the AV and the M, then abandoned the notion" (Walgren: 1958, p. 212).



The pictures above show closeups of the area of the Kensington Stone in question here and a representation of the form of the inscription. One can observe, as indeed even Wahlgren did, that there is a mark in the location of the upper-right hand of the V. The authors saw the Kensington Stone itself in Alexandria Minnesota during the summer of 1997. Based on our firsthand observations, we assert that the shape and texture of the dot in question are consistent with that of a chisel mark, as opposed to being a pock mark or imperfection in the material of the stone. Therefore, we assert that the AVM abbreviation is an example of the superscript convention.

Obviously, chiseling a tiny "e" would be unreasonable, so we assert that the carver did the next best thing and carved a dot in its place. Yet even in written form, a superscript dot could be used in place of the letter. The Kensington abbreviation could be seen, then, as a mixture between a superscripted letter for the first word and the first letter of the second, thus producing AV'M.

Properly interpreted, then, AV'M: is a fully acceptable

productive Medieval abbreviation for the phrase Ave Maria. We should ask the question of whether a forger would have done the abbreviation this way. The abbreviation which would become standard in modern times for Ave Maria is A·M· (separated by subscript dots in earlier periods). Unless the forger had conducted an intentional study into the abbreviation conventions of the Middle Ages, he would almost certainly have used the well known AM. Is it possible that a 19th century forger could have known about the medieval conventions? It is possible but highly unlikely. We have to remember that the issue is not just whether there was anyone on the planet in 1898 who could have forged the Stone; the real issue is whether we can reasonably assume that Olof Ohman and Sven Fogelblad could have done it. The Stone's naysayers have not been able to produce any other likely forgers besides these two who may have had either the ability or the opportunity to pull off a hoax. Ohman was a farmer who may have known some runes. Fogelblad was a minister who may have known some runes. But our discovery forces the forger to have known considerably more than just a runic alphabet. While it is true that the information on how to do this was in existence, it could not be called readily available. Few if any facsimile guides for manuscripts had been produced. In fact, the only useful guide to Medieval abbreviation techniques in modern times was published in Italy and in Italian about the same time as the Stone's discovery. There is no evidence that Ohman had anything more than a basic education. Fogelblad had studied in Sweden, but the basic course for theology in the last century was less than a modern American Bachelor's degree. It is nearly impossible that either of

these two could have been acquainted with specific conventions of late Medieval abbreviation.

FRÄELSE AF ILLY (DELIVER FROM EVIL)

While the philological issues of the phrase *fräelse af illy* have been extensively discussed, we believe that the phrase has more to yield in defense of the Stone from an historical and contextual standpoint. Holand suggested that AV'M: *fräelse: af: illy:* is an attempt to pray both the Hail Mary and the Lord's Prayer for their fallen comrades,

We, therefore, see how their solicitous comrade couples together the two most popular prayers of the Middle Ages, the Ave Maria and the Pater Noster, by citing the first two words of the former and the last clause of the latter" (1956:319).

We find this explanation unlikely, primarily because the evidence we have of citation conventions in Scandinavian religious texts of the Middle Ages reveals that the normal citation of the Lord's Prayer in an abbreviated form was as "Pater Noster. Et ne nos inducas [Our Father. and lead us not]" (Faehne: 1962, p. 2). We will suggest, instead, that the final phrase *fräelse af illy* is not standing *pars pro toto* for the Lord's Prayer, but instead displays another deeply Medieval characteristic about which no forger could have known.

Even modern Catholics are usually not aware how recently the Hail Mary as we know it today took its form. The prayer first

originated in about the 12th century and for a long time consisted only of the first part of the modern Hail Mary. (see Ayo: 1994). This short form is found in the "Presta Handbok" (Priest's Handbook) of the pre-Reformation Nidaros Rite, the Catholic Rite used in Norway with its Archbishopric in modern Trondheim:

Ave Maria gratia plena Dominus tecum.

Benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui

Hail Mary Full of grace, the Lord is with you.

Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

(Faehne: 1962, p. 131)

It is this short form which is attested in Latin written in runic characters on medieval Scandinavian artifacts (eg., Hæstrup church-bell, Moltke: 1985, pp. 442-443, Ulbølle censer, Moltke: 1985, p. 448). Over time, additional clauses were added to the Ave Maria. In fact, the time of the reputed carving was within the period when the additions were multiplying. The Eastern Churches developed the convention of adding to the Ave Maria a statement saying "because you have brought forth Christ, the savior of our souls. Amen." Another early addition was, simply, "So be it." A runic tombstone attests the equivalent of this addition by adding "amen" (Allerum tombstone, Moltke: 1985, p. 516). Another version from the Johanne Nielsdatters Tidebog (circa 15th century) reads, "Ave Ma v. Deus in ad[jutorium meum intende] (Hail Mary. v[ersicle], God, come to my assistance.) (Nielsen: 1945, p. 35). Yet another example is in the Anna

Brades Bonnebog (AD 1497) which reads, "Ave Maria meth then annen bon" (Hail Mary, with another prayer) (Nielsen: 1949, p. 163). The rubric "with another prayer" implies that one naturally followed the Hail Mary with an ending of one's choice. The present form, with the familiar "Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." was not added until the prayer was fixed in form by Pope Pius V in 1568.

One piece of evidence for the Kensington Stone's ending to the Ave Maria comes from a 14th century Norse (Telemark) Ballad that Hjalmar Holand refers to for support of this line of the Kensington Stone, "Hjaelpe oss God å Maria Möy å fræelse oss alle av illy, 'Help us God and Virgin Mary and Deliver us all from evil'" (Holand, p. 319). This song shows not only the willingness of a medieval Norseman to link Mary with God in such an imprecation, but even provides us with the same exact prayer.

Numerous examples in which Mary is asked for such help can be found as well on runic artifacts. Medieval Scandinavian memorial stones implore Mary to help the soul of a deceased relative (Gesing Stone 1, Moltke: 1985, p. 412; Vester Marie stone 2, Moltke: 1985, p. 338; Klemensker stone 6, Moltke: 1985, p. 339).

The liturgical tradition of the Bridgettine Community tells us yet more. St. Bridget of Sweden (1304-1373) was a contemporary of the date on the Kensington Stone. The Religious Community she founded spread throughout Europe. The Bridgettine Breviary from the famous Syon Abbey in England, probably the work of Peter Olafsson (d. 1390), can be trusted to provide us with evidence of liturgical practices in Scandinavia at the time the Stone was reputedly carved in

1362. In this Breviary we find evidence of a practice in which the Lord's Prayer was followed by the Hail Mary and then followed by the last part again of the Lord's Prayer:

Pater Noster. Ave Maria.

Et ne nos inducas in temptacionem. Sed libera nos a malo

Our Father. Hail Mary.

And lead us not into temptation. but deliver us from evil.

(Collins: 1969, p. 15)

However, stronger evidence can be found in the Anna Brades Bonnebog that this convention was known in Scandinavia and, in fact, very commonly used in prayers to Mary. One prayer found in the book reads Kyrieleison Christeleyson Kyrieleyson Pater Noster Ave Maria et ne nos. (Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy, Our Father, Hail Mary and [lead] us not...) (Nielsen: 1949, p. 159). This useage is nearly identical to that found in the Bridgettine Breviary and is similar to that of the Kensington Stone.

AVM: FRÄELSE: AF: ILLY: Finally found in a Contemporary Source?

One of the challenges to those arguing for the authenticity of the Kensington Stone has been to demonstrate that the phrase AVM fraelse af illy can be found substantially in sources far pre-dating the reputed forgery. The evidence marshaled by Holand by ancient songs

is interesting but has not been decisively convincing to those who are skeptical of the Stone. We have found, however, two prayers in the Karen Ludwiggdatters Tidebog (circa 1500) that display the additional words following the AVM in similar liturgical contexts.

One prayer opens with the words, "O Maria sødste Ihesu Christi Moder..." (O Mary, sweetest Mother of Jesus Christ...) and includes a line "bedh then same thin vaelignet søn ath han for the same thin drøwelse giffue mik allae myne synders for ladilsæ och frælsæ mik aff alt unt" (pray the same your blessed son that he for the same your sorrow may give me absolution for all my sins and save me from all evil) The prayer ends with the words Amen Pater Noster Ave Maria. (Nielsen: 1945, pp. 277-278).

This imprecation demonstrates the same concept "deliver from evil" in a Marian prayer. Further, the prayer contains the same optative form of fraelse as that found on the Kensington Stone.

In addition to the phrase appearing as an optative with Jesus as the intended agent of "freeing from evil" the Karen Ludwiggdatters Tidebog also shows the imperative, with Mary as the intended agent, with this verb. "Heel fruae Sancta Maria...fræls mik aff alt vnt och bedh for myne synder. Amen" (Hail Lady Holy Mary... free me from all evil and pray for my sins. Amen) (Nielsen: 1945, p. 291).

This is the first direct linkage identified between the Hail Mary and some form of the words fraelse af illy in a text roughly contemporary to the reputed carving of the Kensington Rune Stone in the 14th century. In our opinion the similarities in form and function between the first of these prayers and the phrase on the Kensington Stone are startling. This shows that the addition to the Hail Mary of a

request that Mary intercede for some favor is a genuine Medieval feature. A 19th century forger, either Catholic or Protestant, could not have known just how authentic such an addition was to the Ave Maria in a pre-reformation Scandinavian context. None of the sources that show its use were published until this century.

CONCLUSION

Our work with the phrase AV`M: fräelse: af: illy: proves that it is a Medieval creation. The conventions used for abbreviation and the inclusion of this particular ending to the Ave Maria are solidly in line with the usage and flavor of the 14th century from which the Stone Inscription claims to come. This new evidence deserves a direct refutation from anyone who still believes that the Kensington Stone is not genuine.

Hall and Nielsen have demonstrated that the forger must have had a detailed knowledge of an Archaic Norse which was not even available at the time of the supposed forgery. Our study adds to that, the need for the forger to have known Latin Paleography and quite obscure pre-Reformation Scandinavian liturgical practices. The carver, if a forger, must have been quite a Renaissance man. We feel it is time to admit that he was more likely a Medieval man.

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