Foreword: Between May of 2002 and August 2003 the language of the KRS had been studied by Dr. Richard together with Prof. Henrik Williams of Uppsala University. The first result of these studies was the presentation of the description below during the exhibition on the Kensington Stone at the Historical Museum in Stockholm in the fall of 2003.

The Stockholm Historical Museum Exhibition on the Kensington Rune Stone

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By Prof. Henrik Williams and Dr. Richard Nielsen

Introduction

Was the Kensington Runestone carved in 1362 or during the latter part of the 1800s? Since the discovery of the stone in 1898 the debate of this question has raged wildly. Many amateur researchers and many Americans insisted that the inscription was from the middle Ages. Runologists and Scandinavian language researchers have asserted just as firmly that it is modern. But why has the question not been resolved? How can it take more than a hundred years to demonstrate whether a document is from the 1300s or from a half a millennium later? We will try to explain here where the complications lie.

The text on the Kensington Stone can be read on the display board. It is quite clear the both Norwegians and Swedes from the Gotlandic region are named. The inscription can have been carved in a mixed language regardless as to whether it is old or new. The Swede of today can struggle through the text with a certain amount of difficulty. But in order to determine whether it is 100 years old or 600 years old one has actually to be a specialist. In the 1300s we spoke Ancient Swedish in Sweden. In our neighboring countries they spoke Ancient Norwegian and Ancient Danish (and Ancient Gothic in Gotland). The languages lay much closer to each other than today and could be easily understood by all the Nordic people. It was particularly during the 1300s that many changes occurred in the Scandinavian languages. They are much easier to
understand than the older Ancient languages and the Viking Age runic inscriptions.

Many of the runes on the Kensington Stone differ from those of contemporary inscriptions (see exhibition). Nor is the language similar to that of other texts from the Scandinavia of the 1300s. It is for this reason that the scientists hesitate to recognize that that it is so old. But they think that the language fits into the 1800s. It has also been pointed out that some of the expressions would have been impossible in the Middle Ages, e.g. **opdagelsefarlp** which looks very much like the modern *opdagelsesfærd* ‘upptäcktsfärd’ in Danish and Norwegian. But the fact is that a number of the apparently modern expressions can be demonstrated to have been in existence back in the middle Ages. And **opdagelsefarlp** has now been assigned the meaning *uptäktsfärd*, which could mean ‘upptagelsefärd, resa for at odla upp nytt land’ [acquisition journey, journey to acquire new land’. Suddenly the critic has to start again from a new direction.

Almost every word, indeed every rune, on the Kensington Stone lends itself to discussion. But the dividing line in the debate is clear. Many phenomena in the inscription are unexpected. A basis for some of them is found in Middle Age texts, even if amongst rare citations. For other phenomena no old parallels are found, or at least no convincing example has yet come to light. But even texts whose authenticity is guaranteed show deviations.

The question is whether the number of deviations on the Kensington Stone is far too many. Can a speech text from the 1300s contain so many unique and unexpected characteristics?

We will give here a couple of specific examples of the sort of problem involved. The originators of the description are Richard Nielsen, engineer and energetic amateur researcher in Texas, and Henrik Williams, runological researcher and so it must be a different word. Together they have tried to give a balanced picture of the Kensington Stone’s mysteries.

**The Problem with har**

First amongst the words on the side of the Kensington Stone stand three runes, which are read as **XRX har** and which have been translated initially as “(We) have 10 men by the sea”. This word has long represented the strongest
argument against a 1300s origin for the inscription. In the language of the 
middle Ages one distinguished between the singular and plural forms of the 
verb. English-speaking people, amongst others, still do this today: they say she 
has but they have. In Ancient Swedish one expected \textit{(vi) havom}, which right down 
until the 1940s could be written \textit{(vi) hava} in formal contexts.

There are four other verbs in the inscription which are under the same question 
mark, namely \textit{vi hape}, \textit{vi var}, \textit{vi kom} and \textit{(vi) fan} instead of \textit{hafdom}, \textit{varom}, 
\textit{komom} and \textit{funnom}. The case seemed clear: the verb forms on the stone point 
clearly away from the 1300s and just as clearly towards the 1800s.

However, as Hjalmar Holand has already shown, there are examples of the fact 
that the verb can be written in the singular form as early as the 1300s, in spite of 
the fact that they obviously ought to be in the plural. A plausible explanation of 
this is that the singular form demonstrably first became common in the spoken 
language. A careless writer could commit a blunder and unintentionally include 
a form from the spoken language. Many such examples are found, and 
therefore the origin of the Kensington Stone in the 1300s should not be regarded 
as impossible as far as this point is concerned.

In spite of this important discovery there remain two other problems with the 
singular form. The first is that even though such forms pop up already in the 
Middle Ages there is not a single one of the 10,000s of documents where the 
singular form is used \textit{consistently}. It is always a case of exceptions. The other is 
that the singular form of \textit{havom} was never \textit{har} but \textit{haver}. No real example of \textit{har} 
is found before the year 1500 in spite of the fact that this is one of the most 
common words in the language. For a moment it looks as though the problem is 
solved.

But then a new interpretation stands the whole question on its head. It turns out that 
readers have been slipshod on this point. The word is not \textit{\$XR har} but \textit{\$XR h"ar}! So it 
must be a different word. We need a verb and Richard Nielsen suggests that the word is 
\textit{"ar} which in this case is preceded by a superfluous \textit{h}. The meaning then becomes “(Det) 
\textit{"ar} 10 man vid havet” [(There) are 10 men by the sea]. The addition of a spurious \textit{h} at the 
beginning of a word is something that occurs sporadically in the middle Ages, also in 
runic inscriptions. The deviation is unexpected but cannot be ruled out. Moreover it 
represents an elegant explanation of the words \textit{"oh} ‘\text{"o}’ and \textit{ahr} ‘\text{"ar}’.

In other words it is found that with the new reading and interpretation the word \textit{\$XR} 
cannot be used as unambiguous evidence against the Kensington Stone’s 1300s origin. 
But one must necessarily believe in the use of an unnecessary \textit{h} and in the fact that this
text is the only one from the Middle Ages that consistently employs single forms of verbs instead of the expected plural forms.

**The Problem with the Pentadic Numerals**

The fact that the Kensington Stone is precisely dated to 1362 gave rise to a sensation! There are indeed a few runic inscriptions with self-dating, but they express their dating more circuitously. On the church bell from Saleby in Västergötland for example it says: “When I was made, it was one thousand two hundred and twenty winters and eight from God’s birth”. Documents from the middle Ages on the other hand were dated with Roman numerals: e.g. MCCCLXII (1362).

But the unique thing with the Kensington Stone is not just that it uses numerals but partly that it uses a special kind of “runic numerals” and partly that it employs them in accordance with the modern position system. In the Middle Ages one took as many of the different number sorts as were necessary: M (1000) + CCC (3x100) + L (50) + X (10) + II (2x1). But today we state the number of thousands (1) + hundreds (3) + tens (6) + units (2). The same method is used on the Kensington Stone: 1362.

It is not surprising the researchers rejected the possibility that a runic inscription with this dating form could be genuine. And in any case who has ever heard of runic numerals? But on the other hand it turns out that the truth is more complicated than we perhaps would like. Runic numerals have demonstrably been found in the 1300s! They are also known from a 1600s work by Ole Worm who amongst other things deals with runic calendars.

The runic calendars were used amongst other things to keep track of the arrival of Easter, and they have nothing to do with real runic inscriptions. The numbers that are used on the runic calendars are “pentadic”, i.e. built up in groups of 5, whereas our numbers are built on the ten. In the pentadic system small cross-strokes are used for the numbers 1 (1) to 4 (4) and 6 (6) to 9 (9), while the numeral 5 is represented by a half circle (5) and the number ten by its own symbol (on the Kensington Stone this is 0). The system was the same but the symbol could vary somewhat in appearance.

Scandinavians in the America of the 1800s cannot be expected to have been aware of Ole Worm’s publication of the runic calendars. They cannot therefore have copied the runic symbols from them. This should constitute a strong argument for a Middle Age dating of the Kensington Stone. But now it turns out that pentadic runic numerals have also been published in a more accessible source. In the 1820s Nils Henrik Sjöborg published *Samlinger for Nordens fornälskare* [Collections for Scandinavian antiquarian enthusiasts, which had a wide circulation. It includes a tabulation of runic numerals! It has been taken from a pocket calendar from 1601 Even people in the 1860s therefore could have been familiar with the pentadic system from this book, even if the Kensington Stone 10 is not found with Sjöborg.
The most difficult thing is to explain why runic numerals are used in such recent times. One would have expected a Roman equivalent of 1362 and instead of $\Gamma \Gamma$ (22) one would have expected $\Phi \Phi \Gamma$. Use of a decimal system presupposes knowledge of Arabic numerals. There are few examples of the use of Arabic numerals in Scandinavia in the 1300s and even less frequent is the use of the position system, i.e. numbers like 22 and 1362. In order to regard the Kensington Stone as a product of the Middle Ages one must accept that on this point it is unique in two respects. It has to be accepted firstly that it is a genuine runic inscription that uses pentadic numbers, and secondly that it is the earliest Nordic document that expresses dates in accordance with the modern numeral position system. Richard Nielsen has suggested that knowledge of the use of pentadic numbers in calendars was imported from sources outside Scandinavia (see the exhibition), but Henrik Williams does not agree that the datings are comparable.

**Conclusion**

The latest research shows that at any rate the language of the Kensington Stone is generally consistent with both the 1300s and the 1800s. One cannot absolutely exclude either the one or the other century. Many expressions that appear deviant in a 1800s context can derive from local dialect usage, Swedish-Norwegian language combinations, and even outright errors, conscious or unconscious, on the part of the rune carver. But a 1300s origin involves a need for other special explanations of deviations from the norm. Each person must reach his own conclusion as to where the boundary of probability lies.

The only thing that is certain is that the Kensington Stone needs to be studied further before we can reach a certain result. Whether everyone can come to a united conclusion remains to be seen.