The Kensington Stone again

Were the Old Swedes in Minnesota in the 1300s? An expert says No!

By Henrik Williams

In the *Swedish American Genealogist* 2010:3–4, Dennis L. Johnson wrote a review of Scott F. Wolter's 2009 book on the Kensington Runestone, *The Hooked X: Key to the Secret History of North America*. Scott Wolter in his book claims to have found conclusive evidence that the Kensington Runestone (KRS) is genuine, meaning that it was really inscribed in 1362 as its runic text claims. The contents of *The Hooked X* also plays a major role in the recent History Channel "documentary" *Holy Grail in America* (available on YouTube). Are we to believe in this?

Mr. Johnson's attitude is: "The book as a whole *offers strong support* (my italics) for the authenticity of the Kensington stone, although many questions remain. [—] Many [...] connections seem a little far-reaching, others make sense at least to this lay reader."

As a non-lay reader I have found the exact opposite, and in my own review of the book (see **http://www.richardnielsen.org/Discussion.html**) I have gone into some detail why almost not a single crucial fact and no conclusions may be trusted in *The Hooked X*. For a full discussion, I refer the readers of this note to my review.

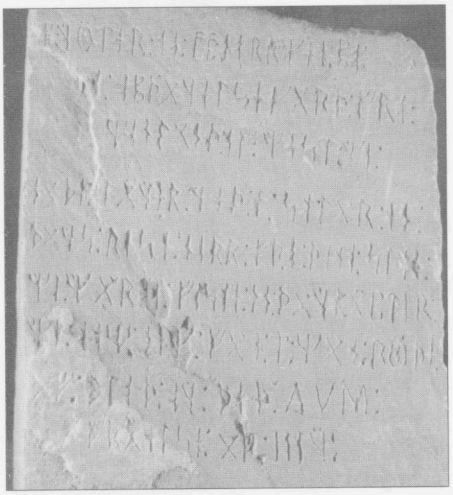
The problem with fantastic books is that the ideas they propound may *sound* alluring, but solving a scientific problem takes a scientific approach, if not necessarily a professional scientist. Scott Wolter is not a scientist and he refuses to adhere to scientific methods. His approach seems to be "Saying so makes it so," the opposite of what most people demand when asking to be convinced in their everyday lives.

You can read *The Hooked X* for fun if you wish (I personally find it badly written and worse argued) but do not for a moment let yourself be taken in by Wolter's wild claims.

The idea of the book is that the X with a small hook on the KRS and other objects with rune-like characters in the U.S. prove that Cistercian monks visited North America in the Middle Ages. This idea was originally proposed by Dr. Richard Nielsen, who has since abandoned it and disassociated himself completely from his former partner. Wolter himself imagines that the hooked X represents the Holy Grail, that is the child resulting from the supposed union of Christ and Mary Magdalene (a rip-off of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*). On the KRS, four letters are said to be to spell out 'grail', but this is pure fantasy and the word for *grail* does not even exist in Old East Scandinavian, the supposed language of the KRS text. Wolter also claims that there are hooked X:s found on the Swedish island of Gotland in the 14th century. "This was unknown to previous experts since they are traced to a newly discovered trove of runic inscriptions found on Gotland in the last decade," writes Mr. Johnson in his review. But there is no such new trove, nor is the hooked X found in any truly medieval or older runic inscriptions, anywhere.

Scott Wolter's main claim to fame is that he as a petrographic technician has developed a method to date inscriptions on stone through the degradation of certain minerals in the carved lines. This was first welcomed as an interesting proposal, but subsequent (serious) research has failed to confirm his results. Not a single geologist or petrographer has in a scientific context supported Wolter, although he repeatedly claims that to be the case (without providing any supporting documentation).

It is sad to see that Scott Wolter's cock-and-bull story has become so widespread, and accepted as factual by so many unsuspicious individuals. I would not want the readers of the *Swedish American Genealogist* to be among them.



The stone in question.

The author

Dr. Henrik Williams is Professor of Scandinavian Languages at Uppsala University in Sweden. He has been in that position since 2002. His specialty: Runology and Old Norse philology.
E-mail:
Henrik.Williams@nordiska.uu.se

News: There is an interesting follow-up in the *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* July/2011!