

THE HEAVENER ENIGMA: A RUNE STONE

By Leslie A. McRill

INTRODUCTION

The meaning of the rune characters on the large rock standing on Poteau Mountain, near Heavener in LeFlore County, has interested Mr. Leslie McRill. His attention was called to data collected in the Editorial Office, on these ancient runes. The result of his study of these and other source materials led to his contribution here presented, "The Heavener Enigma: A Rune Stone," in this issue of *The Chronicles*.

The attention of the Editor was called in 1953, to the "queer carvings" on a huge stone on the side of a mountain near Heavener, by Mrs. Gloria Farley. The inscription had fascinated her since girlhood, and she has carried on research for many years to unlock the mystery of the stone. Finally the Editor visited the rune stone in the wilderness with Mrs. Farley and friends. Another visit with Mr. and Mrs. John Frizzell, Miss Lucyl Shirk, and President George Shirk of the Historical Society resulted in Mr. Shirk's report on the "Heavener Rune Stone" published in *The Chronicles*, Autumn, 1959 (pp. 363-368).

After the publication of this report, interest in the identification of the carved letters spread far and wide. A number of interpretations of the runes were written in to the Editor. The visit of Mr. Frederick J. Pohl to Heavener had established the carvings as real rune letters. This and other investigations led to the possible work of a stone-carver several centuries ago.

In 1963, Mr. Oscar Monrad of Oklahoma City brought in to the Editorial office, an unusual study on early runes in Europe. His distant cousin, Mr. Kaj Monrad, an archivist in the National Museum at Copenhagen, Denmark, had read the report on the Heavener stone in *The Chronicles*, sent him by his American cousin. Mr. Kaj Monrad sent in copious notes in fine manuscript, on the runes based on his study of materials in the Copenhagen Museum. He also sent photographs, one on the golden horns which King Frederick VII ordered made in 1855, replicas of the ancient golden horns found in 1639 and 1734. Both of these had been stolen from the Royal Museum in 1802 and melted. These horns have early rune inscriptions that are important in the study of runes going back to the invention of these characters.

The name of Poteau as that of the well-known stream in eastern Oklahoma, which rises in the mountain also named Poteau, dates back to the early occupancy of the French in Okla-



[Xc] Monrad, Copenhagen

THE GOLDEN HORNS

Replicas ordered made in 1855, by King Frederick now in the National Museum of Copenhagen, Denmark. The original Golden Horns were found in 1639 and 1734.

horns, on the Arkansas. It is a fact in history that the earliest French expeditions to Oklahoma erected carved posts to mark the sites of their first visits and councils with the Indians of this region.

The word *potEAU* in French means "post." How does it happen that this particular river, a branch of the Arkansas, was given the name of *Poteau* or "Post?" French occupancy, a known fact in this region of Oklahoma in the early 1700's along with data from Mr. Merrill's study of Bossu's *Traces*, furnishes a possible explanation of the "Heavener Rune Stone." Furthermore, when the first expeditions sponsored by the French came up the Arkansas, they met the Quapaw Indians, who have a tradition about these visitors. They demanded that the Quapaws take them in their boats for exploration up the Arkansas.

The first French expeditions under John Law's scheme for colonization of the Mississippi Valley, came into the region of the Arkansas about 1718-20. A large part of these first colonists were Germans led by a Swedish Captain. The huge stone with its runes is on the side of an outlying ridge of the Poteau Mountain, facing and overlooking the valley that continues on up the Poteau River to the Arkansas. Could it be that the huge "post" was carved by Germans in a party under the direction of their

learned Swedish Captain, describing the Valley below and marking their visit to the mountain? This valley contains the mounds of an ancient people that dwelt here and long since disappeared. The most famous of these mounds, which is known as the Spiro Mound, in recent years has yielded its treasures for archaeology and history. Mr. McHill here traces his search on the subject of the runes and their meaning carved on the stone.

—The Editor

It is a far cry from the Oklahoma of our day and that long ago time when some unknown traveler cut an inscription on the stone which has recently become known as the "Heavener Rune-stone."

A large rock, 12 feet high, 10 feet wide, and 2 feet thick in the Poteau Mountains, about 2 miles from Heavener, Oklahoma, bears on its face some ancient runes. Who left them there, when, and why, remain an historical mystery. The Oklahoma Historical Society and some local citizens of Heavener have been intrigued by the stone and its message and have called the attention of archeologists to it.¹

Some have visited the site; to others, copies of the inscription have been sent. As far away as Denmark translations have come. It is pretty well established that the runes on this rock are authentic. Some of these same characters are to be found on the most ancient monuments in the Scandinavian countries made many hundreds of years ago.

It is interesting to know that two very old rune monuments called the "Two Golden Horns" bear similar rune characters. Writing about the Golden Horns, Archivist Kaj Monrad of Copenhagen, Denmark, says:²

"The one nethermost, July 20, 1629, and the uppermost, April 21, 1734, both in the diadem of Lesig [?] and both were stolen May 4, 1802, from the Royal Museum and melted. These are fotos [sic] of the copies which King Frederick VII let make

¹ George H. Shirk, "Report of the Heavener Rune Stone," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, p. 163.

² From the compilation of material, collected and translated by Mr. Kaj Monrad, from the National Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark, in Oklahoma Historical Society, Editorial Office.

about 1855 from old drawings. The little horn has at the brim a rune inscription as thus:"

⌘⌘1997:9488N:Y99118N:Y1T59X99M1H>M

From the study of this matter made by Mr. Monrad we establish the authenticity of the Heavener runes as belonging to the "elder" class of runes.

Mr. Frederick Pohl, an authority on the travels of the Norsemen in America previous to Columbus, visited the Heavener site some time ago, and is of the opinion that the letters were made by Norsemen of that time.³ It has been established that the Norsemen reached the interior of America as far as the vicinity of the Great Lakes, but there is no established recognition of their presence as far south as Oklahoma. From the different authorities here in the United States and from opinions of scholars abroad, the eight characters on the stone are shown here, with a translation:

X 1 2 9 M D F 7

Gnomedal—"Sun Valley," or "Monument," or "Boundary."
"Dal" is translated "Valley" or "Dals."

The rock at Heavener stands north and south facing the west. It is overlooking a gulch down which very old marks seem to indicate a once-used trail to the northwest. Throughout the valley are scattered evidences of the Mound Builders as far as the Arkansas River.

Some authorities have said that in that far-away time there was a beautiful park of great pine trees stretching down from this mountain to the valley below, making it a desirable location for settlement. So "Sun Valley" was the name given by some poetic traveler or mayhap settler. And then, passing on, he left the site, which became a wild, isolated place, the home of the snake and the wild beasts. No longer is there a beautiful pine forest, thanks to the woodsman's axe, but instead second growth brush and nature's effort to retrieve her once beautiful handiwork now cover the spot.

Quoting further from Mr. Kaj Monrad and his study of the Heavener runes, we read: "*Gnomedal*," two words in one to be "Earth Spirits' Dale." The word 'gnom' is an elemental earth spirit, a subterranean goblin, a mountain spirit. If the inscription is in Danish it is correctly written. 'Gnom' is the word itself, and the 'e' is a suffix as sort of a genitive (possessive) combined with another word; 'dal' is dale or valley in English."

Quoting further from Mr. Monrad:

"Then it seems the inscription was cut in the 16th, 17th or

18th century by a not wholly unlearned man with good knowledge of the eldest runes, as the interest for antiquity had a flowering in the last two mentioned centuries here in Scandinavia, and yet it cannot be said from what country the carver was. Perhaps he was a man from Sweden since the rune for 'n' is cut differently than a Dane would have cut it. The English word *dale* is both Danish and Swedish, the same word 'dal.'

"The rune for 'n' is cut as 7 and not X."

—Kaj Monrad

Mr. Monrad enclosed in his notes the origin of the word "gnome," as coming from the Latin word "Gnomus" and cites it as having been used by Paracelsus first, and found in his book *Liber de nymphis, sylphis, pygmaei et salamandris et de cockeris spiritibus* (ed. 1589-1591. Opera 9, 45): "*Gnomi habitant in chao montano.*" Mr. Monrad states: "It is known that gnomes were also guardians of hidden treasures, the skilled little grey men with the great beards."

Other translations by Mr. Monrad suggest that the name "Gnomus" means "earth-dweller." This is significant since it ties in with the presence of the Mound Builders in this region—history long past—of what is now Oklahoma.

It is interesting to note that pertinent to the suggestion that the inscription dates from the 17th or 18th century, we find in Dr. Paul Piper's "*Survey of Early German Literature*, entitled, *Die Älteste Deutsche Litteratur bis um das Jahr 1050*, in his discussion of the early runes as the beginnings of the German language that "there was a feverish revival in unearthing rune-monuments in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. . . Thus Finn Magnussen wrote a whole book about a rune-writing or inscription which turned out to be natural splits in the rock, and the Helnerdorfer rune-stone became recognized as nothing more than an entire modern game with German letters."⁴

Besides the Norsemen theory there is another which has never been advanced: Captain Jean Bossu of the French Marines was sent to New Orleans in 1751 with his military company and set out from there to assume command of a Duchy or Grant in the Illinois country.⁵ He describes the trip and calls attention to two German villages up river from New Orleans. These colonists had been still earlier up the Mississippi on the Arkansas River. He says: "These two villages, peopled with Germans, are the remainder of a grant made in 1720 to Mr. John Law (Mr. Law of the 'Mississippi Bubble' fame). The colony was to con-

⁴Dr. Frederick J. Fohl, recognized student and authority on the Vikings in America. Author of *Atlantic Crossings before Columbus* (Morton & Company, Inc., New York, 1901).

sial of Germans and Provençals to the number of 1500; the ground for it four leagues square, and near a wild nation called the Akansas; the colony was erected as a Duchy . . . but Mr. Law failed and the India Company took possession of the goods."

Now it has been suggested that since the French were establishing "duchies" or "grants" out of New Orleans that this monument at Heavener may well have been a marker for such a grant. Dr. Muriel Wright of the Oklahoma Historical Society has called attention to this possibility. Notice how our Danish researcher says that perhaps he was a man from Sweden since the rune for "n" is written as a Swede would write it.

Now a strange coincidence presents itself at this juncture of our study. Captain Bossu makes it very pertinent. He says that the two German villages were under the supervision of a *Swedish Captain*. And in his report he says that this captain was "Mr. Arntabourg, who was at the Battle of Poltava with Charles XII. This old officer is the head of a numerous family established in Louisiana."⁴

Could this rune-stone at Heavener be a marker or monument to such a Duchy as the French were establishing up and down the Arkansas? History is silent.

APPENDIX

A historical relic in the form of an old print is in the Editorial Office of the Oklahoma Historical Society, bearing the date 1720. This is an advertising poster of a single sheet, with an engraving for illustration on one side showing American Indian figures—man, woman and a child—against a background of an Indian village. The caption below the engraving is in the Dutch language, the English translation reading "King and Queen of the Mississippi." The other side of the poster is also in the Dutch language, advertising two plays, "The Great Scene" and "Konst-Places." Both plays are satirical in form, based on the plan to colonize the Mississippi Valley, promoted by John Law, Financial Minister of France (1717-1720). The advertisement sets forth the wild speculation on the continent of Europe, accompanying this great scheme to retrieve the fortunes of France. It may be recalled here that John Law's scheme for colonization of the Mississippi Valley is referred to in American history as the "Mississippi Bubble." The expression "Bubble and Windnegotiation" appears in the text on the poster, which is translated from the Dutch as follows:⁵

⁴ Dr. Paul Piper, *Die Älteste Deutsche Literatur bis um das Jahr 1050*, (Stuttgart, 1884).

⁵ Bontin, Captain of the French Marines, *Travels Through that Part of North America Formerly Called Louisiana*, translated by J. E. Forester, Vol. I, (London, 1771).

⁶ 1764.

The Great

SCENE

The Foolishness

Depicting the rise, progress and decline of the Campaign
Bubble and Windnegotiation, in France, England and
the Netherlands, committed in the

Year MDCCLXX

Showing the Collection of all the
CONDITIONS AND PROJECTS

Of the established Company of Insurance, Navigation, Commerce, etc.
in the Netherlands, as they were put into practice, as they were
rejected through the State in several Provinces.
along with

KONST-PLACES,

Comedies and Poems

Presented by different amateurs, to mock this abominable
and miserly Trade, through which in this Year, different families and
persons from High and Low station were ruined, and by which were
depraved and the organized Negotiations were obstructed, in France,
England, as well as in the Netherlands.

*As long as the Greedy Person
Is provided with money and goods,
He catches the Victim at his will,
For the Greedy and Unscrupulous are always led by them.*

Printed as proof for the Descendants, in that
fateful Year, for many Silly and Wise, 1720.

² The translation of this poster from Dutch into English was done by Miss Sandra ("Sandy") Sidner of Oklahoma City, who spent the year 1963-64 in the Netherlands as an International Christian Youth Exchange student. She attended a Dutch high school, lived with a Dutch family and learned the Dutch language. Sandra graduated from Putnam City High School in 1966, and is a student at Oklahoma State University.—Ed.

HET GROOTE
TAFEREEL
DER DWAASHEID.

Vertoont: de optocht, vooygang en ontjering der Adts,
Babel en Winklegalle, in Vranryk, Engeland, en
de Nederlanden, geplegt in den
JAAR MDCCXX.

Zyck en Verzamling van alle de

CONDITIEN EN PROJECTEN

Van de opperge Ouyveringen van allehande, Koniglyke, Coninclyke, de
te Nederland, en wel de in gelyck een plecht, als de doen de
Hi Staat van onger Provincien 1720 verweyde:

als mede

KONST-PLAATEN,
COMEDIEN EN GEDIGTEN.

Daer verheide Liefhebbers verplegen, en verhooyngs doen verhooylyke en her
dreylyke Handel, waar doen in de jaar, verheide Farcies en Perfoonen van
Hooft en Lage Raad 1720 gescreven, en in haar medelien verlaeren, en de
opgeve Nijveren getrouwe, en in Vranryk, Engeland en Nederland.

*De lang den Grooten Medde
In vanden een gelyc in gelyc,
Krygt den Redderige en den vrede,
Want hem de Grooten en Grooten dygt vrede.*



Gedrukt en uitgehooyngs van de Nakomelingen, in 1
noodlonen jaar, vooe vooe Zaan en Wyse 1720.

(M. H. Wright Collection)

POSTER IN THE DUTCH LANGUAGE
With the date 1720