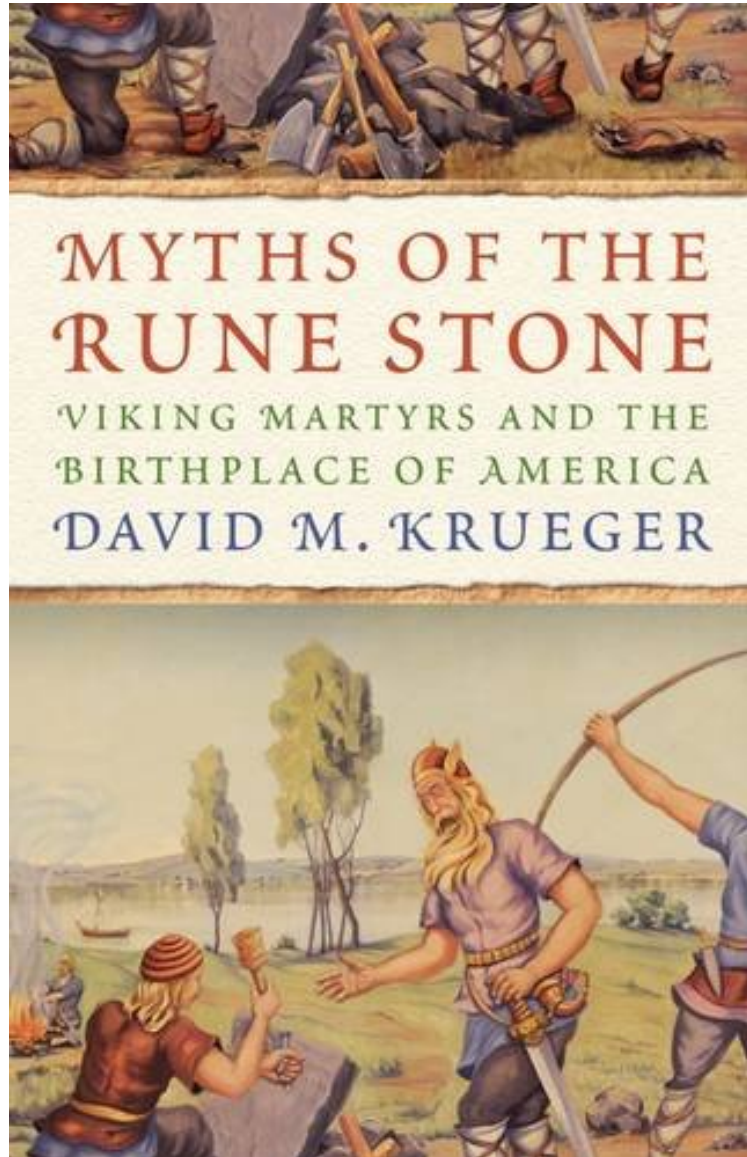


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# Myths of the Rune Stone: Viking Martyrs and the Birthplace of America

*David M. Krueger*

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**David M. Krueger : Myths of the Rune Stone: Viking Martyrs and the Birthplace of America** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Myths of the Rune Stone: Viking Martyrs and the Birthplace of America:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A surprising look at one of Minnesota's least known legends, but one that influenced the naming of the Minnesota Vikings. By Sandjumper This was well written, interesting, authoritative, and with a style of writing that feels like I was sitting with Krueger at the bar. I admit, being from the "birthplace of America," I had more than casual interest. I grew up with the legends and have heard the Rune Stone debated many times. However, Krueger turns over another stone, focusing on how this legend formed and flourished instead of focusing on the question of legitimacy. I really enjoyed this look at the Rune Stone and the evolution of the story. Most will be pleasantly surprised. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Myths old and new By Anson Cassel Mills A general reader (especially one outside Minnesota) might be excused if he thought this book was intended to present definitive evidence that the Kensington Rune Stone was a fake. Certainly the author like a century's worth of historians and runologists before him believes the rune stone to be a fake. But (this being scholarship after all) Krueger instead spends most of his time in this revised dissertation addressing the sorts of questions that elicit clucks and coos from the academy: in Krueger's words, how the Kensington Rune Stone emerged as sacred, civic totem that embodied the aspirations and anxieties of Minnesotans in the twentieth century. So, Krueger channels a good deal of angst about white hegemony, a crisis of masculinity, the glorification of Aryans, and the plight of displaced Scandinavian immigrants trying to find their place in the New World. Krueger further claims that proponents of the rune stone story transferred a horror of uncivilized native savages to the fear of other minorities and of godless communism. Personally, I read around these trendy professional myths and still learned a lot about the rune stone story itself. Most interesting to me was why the Catholic church lent its weight to the authenticity of the stone and how the stone's chief proponent, Hjalmar Holand, a hater of organized religion, was perfectly willing to generate support for the stone by framing it in a narrative of a Christian crusade. (128) (There is still an Our Lady of the Runestone Church on Runestone Drive in Kensington.) Krueger admits that town fathers had little difficulty appreciating the commercial opportunity being handed to them on a 200-pound slab of greywacke. I would also argue that the continuing popularity of the rune stone story had a lot to do with its (in the words of Chip and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*) stickiness. Like many urban legends of our own time, the Kensington Rune Stone story was simple, unexpected, and made a roaring good tale. Who could not be charmed by the possibility of seafaring Vikings deciding to slog it out overland from Hudson Bay to central Minnesota in 1362?

What do our myths say about us? Why do we choose to believe stories that have been disproven? David M. Krueger takes an in-depth look at a legend that held tremendous power in one corner of Minnesota, helping to define both a community's and a state's identity for decades. In 1898, a Swedish immigrant farmer claimed to have discovered a large rock with writing carved into its surface in a field near Kensington, Minnesota. The writing told a North American origin story, predating Christopher Columbus's exploration, in which Viking missionaries reached what is now Minnesota in 1362 only to be massacred by Indians. The tale's credibility was quickly challenged and ultimately undermined by experts, but the myth took hold. Faith in the authenticity of the Kensington Rune Stone was a crucial part of the local Nordic identity. Accepted and proclaimed as truth, the story of the Rune Stone recast Native Americans as villains. The community used the account as the basis for civic celebrations for years, and advocates for the stone continue to promote its validity despite the overwhelming evidence that it was a hoax. Krueger puts this stubborn conviction in context and shows how confidence in the legitimacy of the stone has deep implications for a wide variety of Minnesotans who embraced it, including Scandinavian immigrants, Catholics, small-town boosters, and those who desired to commemorate the white settlers who died in the Dakota War of 1862. Krueger demonstrates how the resilient belief in the Rune Stone is a form of civil religion, with aspects that defy logic but illustrate how communities characterize themselves. He reveals something unique about America's preoccupation with divine right and its troubled way of coming to terms with the history of the continent's first residents. By considering who is included, who is left out, and how heroes and villains are created in the stories we tell about the past, *Myths of the Rune Stone* offers an enlightening perspective on not just Minnesota but the United States as well.

"David M. Krueger's multi-faceted analysis of the cult of the Kensington Rune Stone adds to recent scholarship on collective memory and the invention of identity. I know of no other study that so effectively traces change over time in both audience and allure of a foundational myth that allows it to persist despite almost universal scientific rejection." Mary Lethert Wingerd, author of *North Country: The Making of Minnesota* "Myths of the Rune Stone moves far past the Rune Stone's legitimacy to explain how and why the stone fascinated and even obsessed such a wide swath of Minnesota's European-descended population. The heart of this book is the story it tells about the persistent renewal of the Rune Stone story across a century of doubt." Jon Butler, Yale University