

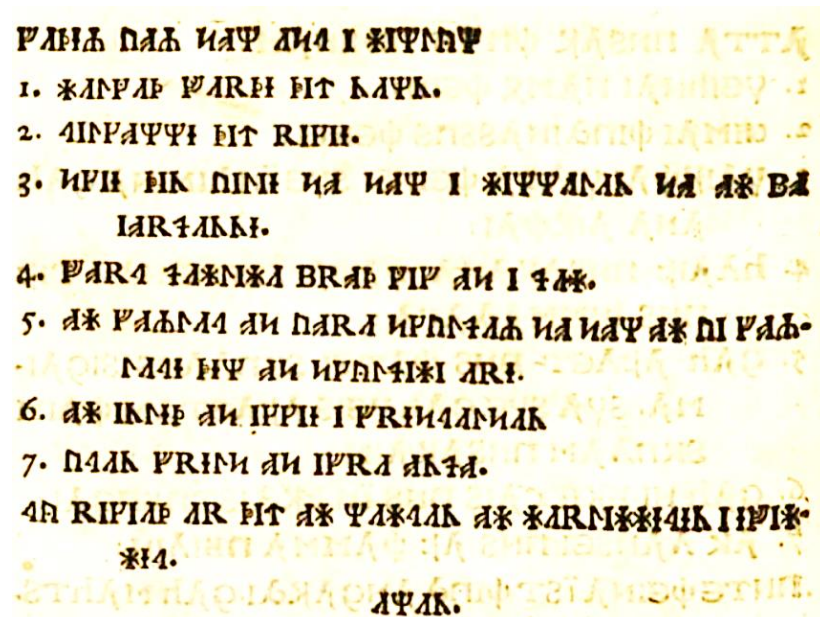
The Wawa bedrock runic inscription in Ontario, Canada

Report by Henrik Williams, Professor of Runology at Uppsala University, October 22, 2019,
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In 2019 I examined the runic inscription near Wawa, for about three hours on October 3rd under a tarpaulin (to create darkness) with a flashlight. Assisting were Ryan Primrose, Johanna Rowe, Loraine Jensen, Mike O'Connor, and David Gadzala. On October 4th I spent about half an hour in the dark before dawn at the site accompanied by Primrose and Gadzala, checking my reading on a few points against the probable source I had identified the night before and having a series of pictures taken. I would like to express my gratitude to the Ontario Centre for Archaeological Research and Education and its directors Ryan Primrose and David Gadzala, as well as to Wawa historian Johanna Rowe, for inviting me to do the examination and for arranging everything in connection with my visit in such an excellent manner.

The inscription consists of 15 lines and a total of 255 characters (counting the ligature rune #22 as one). The text covers app. 170 cm. (5'7") in height and 136 cm. (4'6") in width. Part of the surface of the bedrock into which the runes are carved is crumbling and there is a whitish powder in the bottom of the inscriptional grooves. These are unusually deep, although not carved very confidently and frequently hard to make out exactly. Only after identifying the pattern text was it possible for me to identify the shape of a number of runes. Only one, rune #128, was so damaged to make it impossible to ascertain. The result, however, is somewhat preliminary since I was unable to make an exact determination of some details which would take another, prolonged examination to establish. This does not materially affect the reading or the translation of its subsequent interpretation.

The runic version was later used in multilingual collections of the Lord's Prayer, most importantly a compilation of versions in different languages. One, *Oratio dominica polyglottos, polymorphos: nimirum, plus centum linguis, versionibus, aut characteribus reddita & expressa*, edited by Benjamin Motte, was published in [1730](#) and on p. 22 is found the following:



In [1733](#) this edition was expanded and republished as *Oratio Dominica polyglottos kai polymorphos nimirum Plus Centum Linguis, Versionibus aut Characteribus, reddita & expressa, Editio Novissima, Speciminibus variis quam priores auctor.* P. 9 has a copy of the earlier version.

Both the 18th century versions are ultimately derived from Bureus', but seem a mixture of his editions since they have † as in Bureus 1611 print instead of his 1624 and Wawa's † for e, but † as on Wawa instead of † for s in Bureus 1611.

The following is to be noted:

1. Bureus' version of the prayer is not the same as in the then current translation of the Bible from 1541. His word *himlum* 'heaven' for example, is *himmelen* in the 1541 translation.

2. The Wawa inscription must ultimately be derived from the Bureus' runic version as the form **rikie** is only found there.¹ This cannot be an independent transrunification.
3. None of the versions shown above is identical to the Wawa inscription, although a mixture of Bureus' various editions could get close. The carver must have had runological knowledge or utilized a version not yet identified because of the runic ligature † . It not used in any identified pattern and most probably the result of a correction in an otherwise orthographically accurate text.
4. All the possible patterns use so-called dotted runes, for example P and N . Due to the inferior carving technique used and/or the degradation of the inscriptional surface of the Wawa inscription, no dots could be observed.

Conclusions

The Wawa inscription is carved in Modern Swedish, probably by a native Swedish-speaker, and relies on a pattern first produced in 1611 but reprinted at least as late as 1733. The Wawa reproduction can presently not be dated closer as it could hypothetically be carved already in the 17th century but just as well more recently. Dating runic inscriptions in stone can be challenging, but based on my examination I would conclude that the one in Wawa is from the 1800s and thus possible the oldest yet found in North America (the Leif Eriksson monument in Boston with its runic inscriptions was erected in 1887). For obvious reasons the Wawa inscription cannot be older than 1611 but it may also possibly be as late as from the 20th century. Identifying the immediate pattern text will provide an earliest possible date for the inscription. In any case this is a most intriguing monument evidencing an impressive effort, fascinating contents and well worth protecting, as well as to be known publicly.

We presently know of less than 40 runic inscriptions on stone in North America, most of which are clearly made in recent times for public or private commemoration. Canada now has a total of eleven objects claimed to bear runes but only five in fact do so, and three of those constitute modern commemorative inscriptions: the [Gimli stone](#), the [L'Anse aux Meadow stone](#) (both in English), and the [Vanier Park stone](#) (in Modern Swedish). There is a (partial) copy of a Swedish runic carving at [Mahone Bay](#). The Wawa stone is Ontario's first with actual runes, the longest

¹ The form *rikie* 'kingdom' instead of *rike* is very rare but [attested](#) a few times in the second half of the 16th century and possibly native to Bureus.

documented runic inscription of any on the North American continent (the Kensington inscription in Minnesota is 223 characters long), and the only one in the world reproducing the Lord's Prayer. It is also unique in so far as we do not know when it was made or by whom.