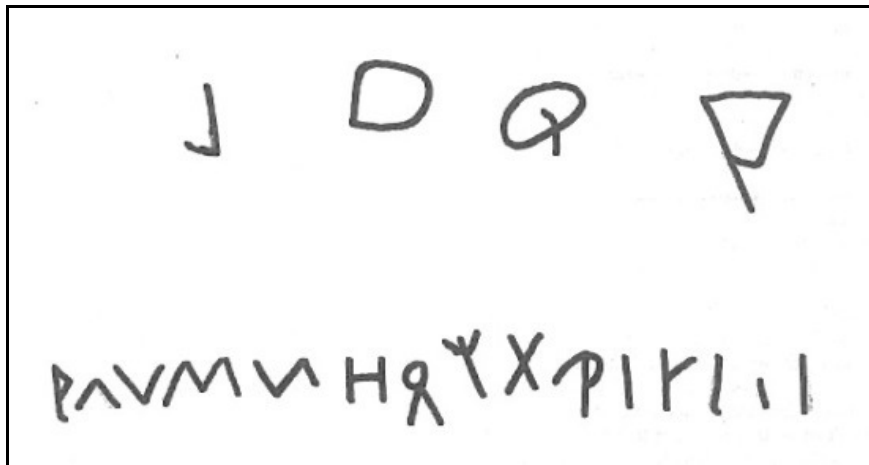


New Thoughts on an Old Rock
or
Confessions of an Ignorant Skeptic

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I was asked by Mary Sicchio if I would be able to pinch hit a public lecture about the Bourne Stone during Massachusetts Archaeology Month in October 2015. I had heard of the stone and had absentmindedly viewed it while I was co-directing the University of Massachusetts Boston archaeology field school at the Aptucxet Trading Post Museum in 1995, but I have to say that I had never really given it much thought. This was largely due to biases that were instilled in me during my undergraduate and graduate student years. I was taught, directly and indirectly, that there are numerous "mystery rocks" scattered across New England, stones with scratches and carving with mysterious origins. We were taught that these were inevitably interpreted by "amateur archaeologists" as being incontrovertible evidence of either Phoenician, Celt, Viking, or any one a myriad of other Old World cultures' ancient, undocumented, visits to our shores. We were taught that these stones almost always turn out to be forgeries at worst and misinterpreted natural scratches at best. We were taught that it is best to just ignore the scratched rocks, the wild interpretations, and the colorful characters that subscribed to these theories. As a result, while I felt that I was more open minded than many "professional archaeologists", I generally took this advice and stayed clear of any controversial rocks and the supposed quagmire of their interpretation. I never let my mind be open to the possibility that, while it is highly doubtful that these stones were inscribed by wayward Old World visitors, these stones may have worth and should be investigated with the same sort of scrutiny archaeologists have been trained to give any sort of cultural object. With this in mind, I accepted Mary's invitation to give a lecture on the Bourne Stone.

For anyone who has never seen and laid hands upon it, the best, objective description of the Bourne Stone is that it is an approximately 300 pound piece of pink (also called Falmouth) granite measuring about four feet long by 18" or so wide. One surface has been smoothed (probably through a combination of natural weathering and foot traffic), while the other face is rough, naturally textured stone. The smoothed side is covered with numerous petroglyphs (symbols and lines inscribed into stone). It was reportedly acquired in the 1930s by Percival Hall Lombard, the excavator of the Aptucxet Trading Post site and one of the founders of the BHS, from a "Miss Fisher", presumably of Bourne. The oral history that went along with the stone stated that it once served as the entry stone into the Christian Indian Meeting House at Great Herring Pond and that it was removed to the Andrew Jackson/ Katherine Parker Homesite (both Herring Pond Natives) after the meeting house ceased to be used. Below is the most common version of the inscriptions visible on the stone.



It is assumed that the markings were visible when the BHS acquired the stone, but they were not commented on until 1936 when Edmund B. Delabarre, a Brown University psychology professor, presented his theory on the markings in an article in *Old Time New England*, where stated that he believed that the stone had been carved by the Native people of the Herring Pond area. He interpreted the markings as showing Native “wigwams” (lower left corner), a white man and Indian shaking hands (the M shape 1/3 along of bottom row), a crescent moon, a cross, a peace pipe and that it could be interpreted as meaning "A white man journeyed seven days on a trail to make compact with the Indians beneath the light of a new moon".

The next researcher to attempt to crack the mystery of the stone was Professor Olaf Stranwold ,a graduate of Jonsberg Agricultural College in Norway and the University of North Dakota, who, in 1948, listed the "rune stone at Aptucxet Mission, Bourne, Mass" as a sacred stone inscribed with Norse Runes. In his mind "There can be no reasonable doubt about its authenticity, and your stone has great Historical value." He translated the supposed runes as "Jesus amply provides for us here and in heaven". The Viking connection has been one of the most popular and long standing interpretations of the marks on the stone. Superficially, they look like runes, which to my untrained eye, look like straight and angled lines. Some of the carvings on the Bourne Stone look like straight and angled lines, but the journey from similarity to absolute identification is a long and slippery road. Perhaps if we were in Norway or somewhere where we know for certain that Vikings lived, where we have extensive archaeological evidence in the form of burials and the refuse from their day to day lives, we could state with greater certainty that they are, in fact, runes. But we don't, and we can't. There have never been any, aside from one silver coin from a Native shell midden in Maine (a find that some have questioned the authenticity of as well), confirmed Viking finds south of L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland. Some may say what about this and what about that, but what I am talking about are finds with clear, strong, incontrovertible, unequivocal context as a Viking find.

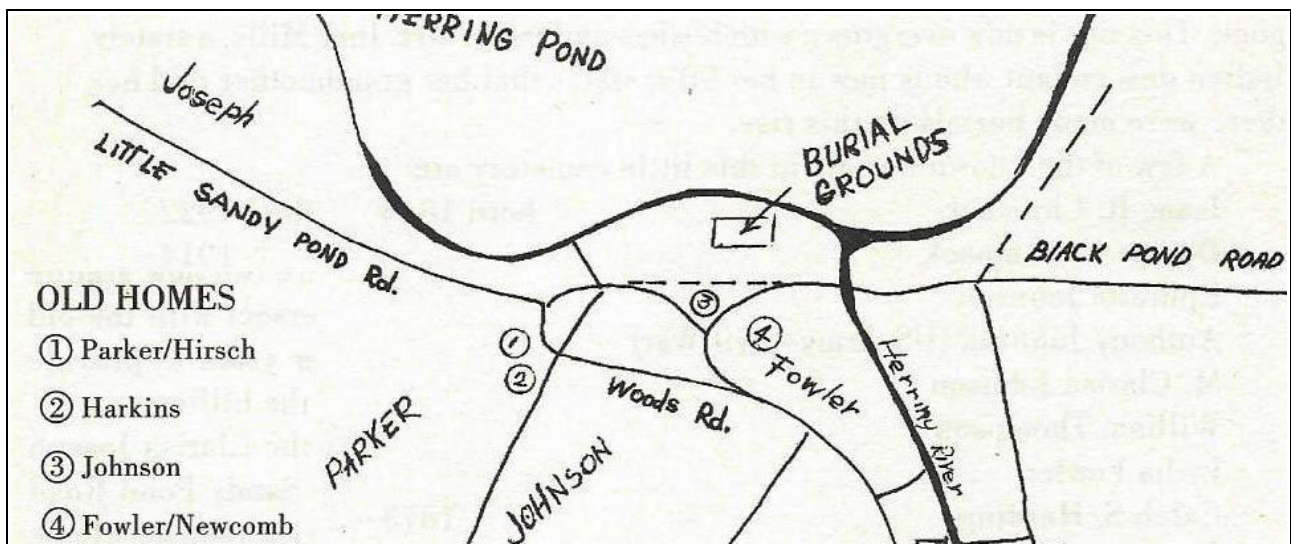
The same can be said about all of the other interpretations of the markings on the stone: Fells' 1975 translation of the stone as having been inscribed by Hanno the Navigator ca. 570 BC ("Proclamation of annexation. Do not deface. By this Hanno takes possession."); Mark McMenamin's 1990 Phoenician translation ("Stone marker that reveals three plus one observations by Q"); or Ian Kirby's 1993 identification of the inscription as being medieval runes. What all of these identifications lack is the all important context. Context, something very important to archaeologists, is something that everyone should be concerned with in their daily lives, especially in the Age of the Internet. Context places objects and ideas within a framework of facts and allows the “truth” of an interpretation, opinion, or great sounding Internet offer or claim to be evaluated. If we all worried more about context, there would be less instances of people falling for the Nigerian Prince scam or the claims that drinking motor oil can cure cancer! The importance of context goes hand in hand with the need for critical thinking (don't believe anything you hear, read, or see on the until you can verify the “facts” that are used to support the claim) and the application of Occam's Razor (aka. 'law of parsimony: Among competing hypotheses, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected).

Getting back to the claims regarding the Bourne Stone, I will state right now that I am no rune, Viking, Phoenician, or Carthaginian expert, but what I am is an archaeologist (not an expert archaeologist, just an archaeologist) and while my schooling did initially endow me with a bias that made me shy away from "mystery stones" early in my career, I have to say that these days, I enjoy pondering and investigating claims of "mysterious" objects and sites found within my New England backyard. When it comes to claims about objects like the Bourne Stone, I am open to any interpretation, but any interpretation needs to be backed up with facts that I can verify myself. If there were Old World visitors here in the ancient past, there should be Old World trash here as well. Show me the trash, the dwellings, the burials, all within tight, verified archaeological contexts, and

I will believe anything. Short of that, I can claim that the markings on any mystery stone were as likely to have been made by aliens as they were by Vikings, Phoenicians, or lost Cathaginians.

That being said, what is the context for the Bourne Stone. What are the facts? What can be verified about it? For this, I have to thank Mary Sicchio for her excellent detective work, accepting the challenge of verifying what we know about the Bourne Stone. The earliest history of the stone places it at the Native Meeting House at Herring Pond. Was there a meeting house at Herring Pond? Yes, there was and we have documentation about it straight from the man who paid for its construction. The infamous Judge Samuel Sewall recorded that he paid to have it built in 1688 and that he hired carpenter Edward Milton to do the work. Sewall recorded that he wanted it to be 24' long, 18' wide, and to have two galleries, presumably built on the interior along the longest sides. We know from the records as well, that the structure stood at the south end of Herring Pond where the Native burial ground is located today. We know from other records that Thomas Tupper Jr. was the preacher to the Native community and that in 1693 the congregation numbered 226 persons. These are all facts that can be verified through historic documentation. Sandwich historian R.A. Lovell reported that the building eventually became infested with black snakes and was moved to the east side of the pond. Whether or not this last piece of the history is entirely accurate, as it seems it would be far easier to remove the snakes versus moving the whole building, we don't know. The infestation of "black snakes" may have even been a euphemistic or allegorical relating of something else that happened or, if it was in fact infested with black snakes, maybe they were seen as a sign indicating to the community that something was spiritually wrong with the location.

The history after this stated that the stone was removed to the Andrew Jackson/ Katherine Parker Homesite. Where was this homesite? Was it on the other side of town? If so then the connection of the stone with the meeting house is more tenuous, as it would be less likely for people to move a stone like this a great distance just to use it as a doorstep or foundation stone. Thanks to Mary's research, we know that the Andrew Jackson/ Katherine Parker Homesite was across the street from the meeting house! The map shown below, presented in Don Jacob's book "Bournedale: The Forgotten Village", shows Parker (number 1) opposite the burial ground.



This is probably the best context we can have supporting the origin of the Bourne Stone as having come from the Native meeting house and then to the Jackson/Parker house. Mary further found that there was a person named Jackson living in the Parker household in 1900 and that the next owner of the property was the Fisher family.

From this context, the fact that we can state with a high degree of certainty that the stone was originally the doorstep of the Native meeting house at Herring Pond, how should we interpret it

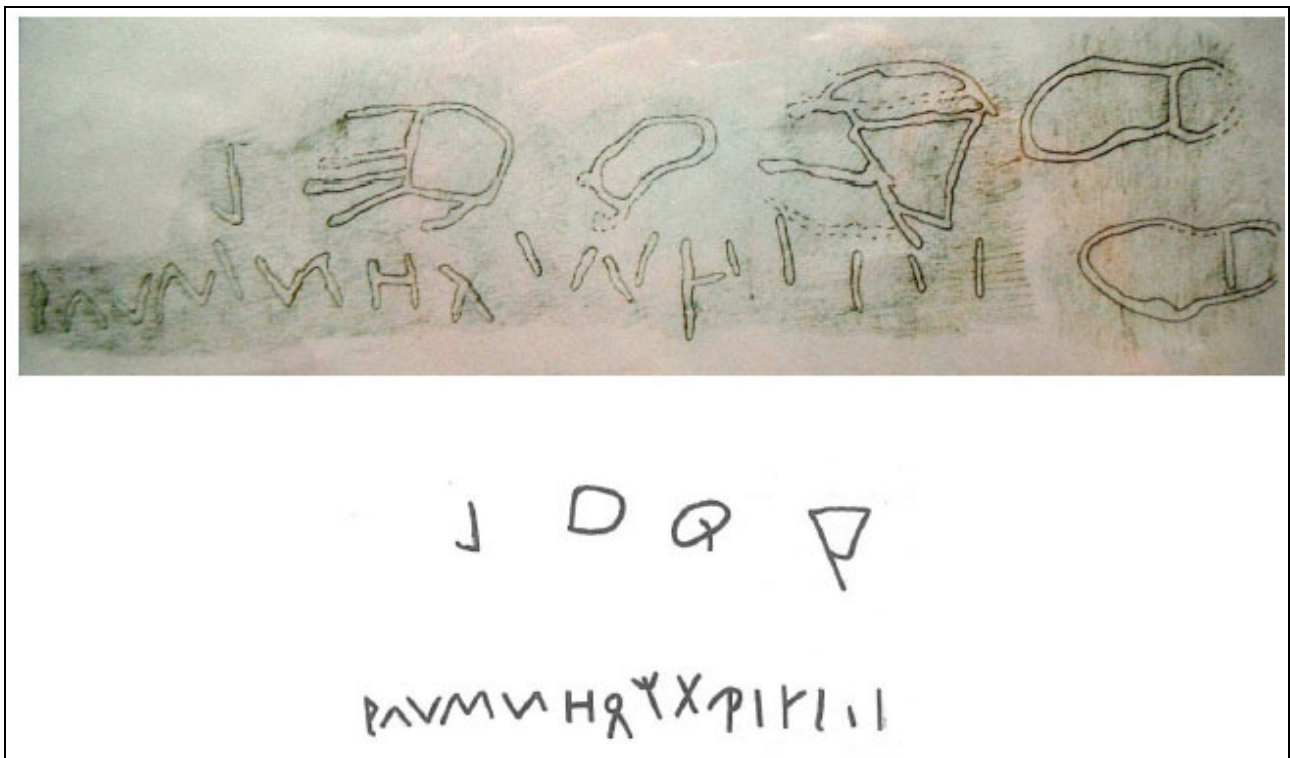
using Occam's Razor to generate a hypothesis that has the fewest assumptions. For this, we can go all the way back to Delabarre's 1936 interpretation that it was made by the local Native people, possibly in colonial times. The Native creation hypothesis has also been put forward by Carlson (1998), Linik (2002), Zimmerman (2004), Pieper (2007), and as late as 2014 by Williams. What do the carvings themselves reveal about how and who may have created them. It can be assumed that if they were chiseled out by any explorer from the Old World, that they would have used tools that they were familiar with, namely, iron chisels or punches. Looking at the marks themselves, they can be seen to be rough, wide, and shallow. The photo below shows a negative impression made using clay of one of the pecked lines (visible to the right of the clay).

What would marks made by stone versus metal tools look like? As it would happen, I had an unworked/ natural, fist-sized piece of pink "Falmouth" granite that I had found when excavating at the Benjamin Nye House in Sandwich. I also had an iron chisel, an iron punch, and numerous stones with which to make a suitable stone pick. I then proceeded to chisel, punch, and peck a series of lines on my piece of granite. I found that chiseling the stone was quite easy and resulted in a sharp, narrow line with a V-shaped profile. Using a slightly pointed punch was also fairly easy and left a sharp, narrow line with a more rounded profile. Using a piece of granite, a piece of quartz, a piece of quartzite, and a piece of rhyolite that I roughly knapped into suitable picks, produced a wide, shallow, and fairly rough looking line. Comparing the three lines to the marks on the Bourne Stone, I believe that the stone picks produced lines that are most similar to those found on the Bourne Stone. I also believe that at least some of the lines in the set of linear marks may have been made by metal tools. To me at least, this is good evidence that A) the stones were made by Native people and B) the marks were made either prehistorically or during the early Contact Period before the natives had acquired iron chisels, punches, or iron that could be worked into these types of tools. Is it definite proof? No, but it is compelling experimental evidence. From this, I made a hypothesis "The Bourne Stone was created by local Native people during the late prehistoric or Contact Period". What sort of evidence is there to support this hypothesis?

The area where the Bourne Stone was found was known historically to be the Native community of Herring Pond. Before being referred to by that name, it was called Manamet/ Manomet and essentially was the area between the Manomet (Monumnet) and Monoscutset (Scusset) rivers. The actual territory of the community of Manomet may have extended from Cape Cod Bay to Buzzards Bay, essentially the area where the Cape Cod Canal is today. The earliest historic record of this community was by the Pilgrims of Plymouth who, in July of 1621, reported that a boy from the Plymouth Colony had gotten lost in the woods and ended up at the Manomet village before being transported out to Eastham to await retrieval by his countrymen. In October of 1622, William Bradford traded for corn from the Manomet sachem Canacum after Tisquantum (Squanto) died further down Cape. The corn was left there in the sachem's safe keeping and in March of 1623, Myles Standish went to retrieve it. It was at this time that he learned of the confederacy of Natives on Cape Cod and Wessagussett (Weymouth) against Pilgrims and the settlers there. After Plymouth's rescue of the colonists at Wessagussett in 1623, the people of Manomet were reported to have fled to swamps to hide out of fear of retribution from Pilgrims for their support of the Natives at Wessagussett. As a result, many, including the sachem Canacum, died. From this brief investigation of the recorded history of Manomet, we can see that the people here were no strangers to the early colonists and it may be assumed that, due to their influence and location on Cape Cod, they may have also had earlier interactions with other European explorers in the 17th century.

What about the markings themselves? What can they tell us about who made them and why? One of the things that struck me when I visited the BHS in 2015 was an innocuous piece of paper that was amongst other papers associated with the Bourne Stone. On this paper was a representation of the markings on the stone that looked nothing like the one depicted by previous researchers. I initially

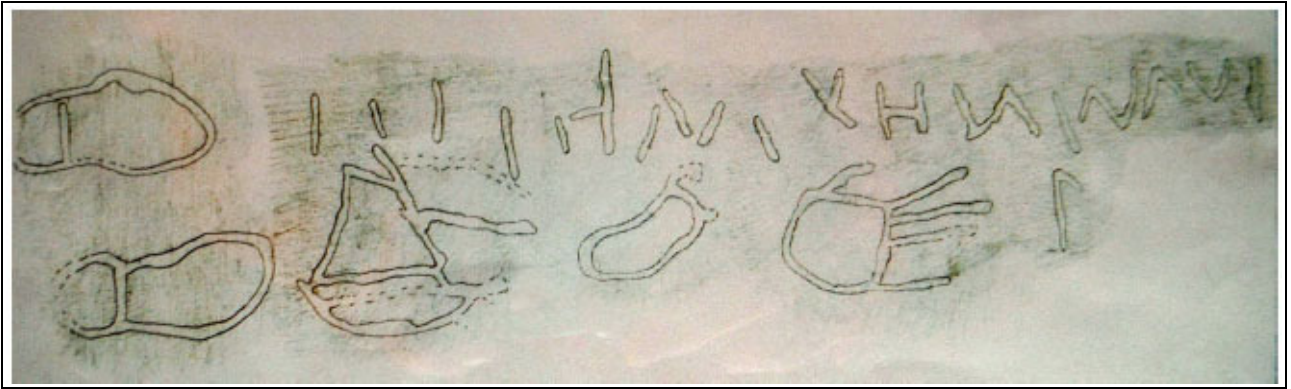
looked at it, thought it odd and maybe a fanciful interpretation of the markings, and dismissed it. A copy of this representation, as well as the traditional representation, is presented below.



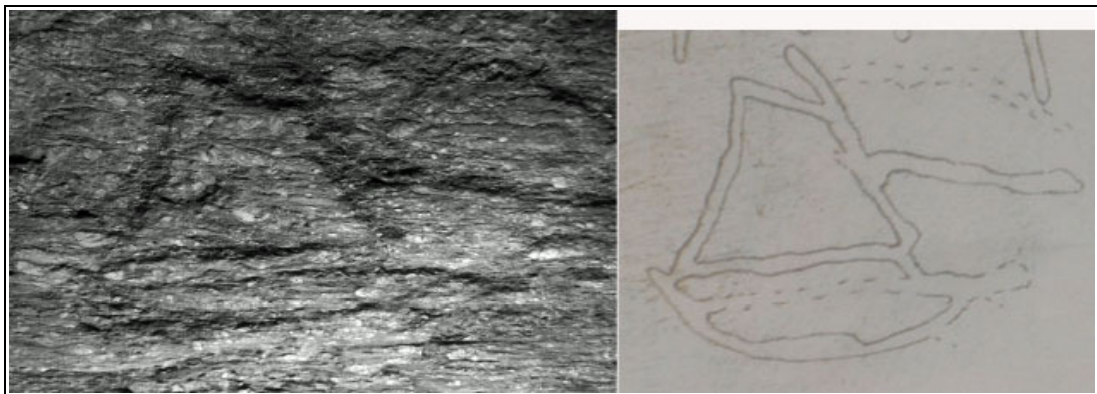
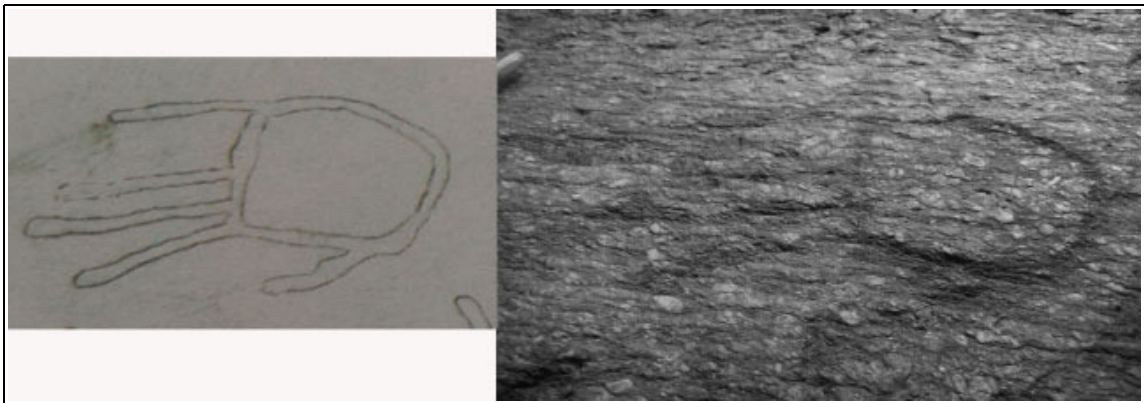
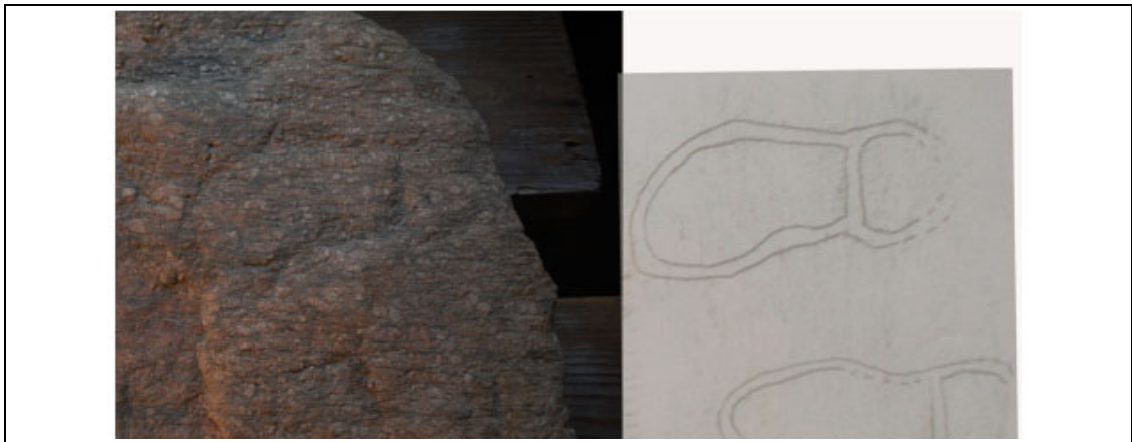
It wasn't until I began closely examining the Bourne Stone itself that the importance of this representation sunk in. As I looked at the stone, I noticed that there appeared to be more definite lines present than had been traditionally depicted. It was then that I had my eureka moment, that the other account was a scaled down representation of a rubbing that had been done of the stone. Producing a rubbing of the stone was one of the best ways that its details could really come to light, and someone had done it at some time in the past. None of the previous researchers had ever done this, they all appear to have worked from a simplified drawing of the marks, continually perpetuating the mistake or biases of the person who created that first sketch.

Unfortunately, the creator of this rubbing did not sign his or her name on the copy at the museum, so we have no way of knowing who the genius was who did the simple act of producing a rubbing of the marks on the stone. Some think it was a local high school teacher who has since passed away, most have no idea who it could have been. Nonetheless, what they did was create a less biased representation of what is on the stone. In light of this evidence, the previous interpretations should be seen to hold even less value, as none of them appear to have been working from this illustration, but from a faulty old version of the marks.

With this new information in hand, I now saw the markings on the stone in a whole new light, one that became even brighter when I happened to drop the copy of the drawing on the floor and it landed backwards from the way the stone is presented today and has been traditionally presented. The previous drawings of the marks on the stone have placed the larger petroglyphs on the top and the smaller, more numerous linear marks on the bottom. When that paper fell to the floor, it landed so that the smaller linear marks were on the top and the larger marks were on the bottom, and suddenly I was seeing things I have never heard represented on the stone before.



Still present were the series of linear marks that I think will forever defy ultimate identification, but now on the bottom were, what looked to me, like a pair of European boot or shoe prints, complete with heels, a European boat, and a bear paw or human hand, and these images were all clear on the stone, once you knew what to look for.



But what do they mean? That is something that I can not answer with any factual evidence. Petroglyphs are common among Native people in the Northeast and the motifs (feet, hands, lines) are common enough as well. My own opinion- not fact, or even an expert opinion mind you- is that they were at least partially created as a result of the Manomet's early encounters with Europeans, if the boots and boat are really what I see and not just the result of pareidolia (like seeing castles and dragons in the clouds). The fact that they all appear to have been made using the same types of stone tools, points to an early period for their creation. A few of the lines in the other set of petroglyphs may have been made with metal tools, and these could represent a later addition to the original stone. If my opinion may be taken even further, it is possible that the stone may have originally been located somewhere else in the Manomet village and was subsequently moved to the location of the meeting house in the 1680s. The stone may have been a sacred or at least a very important, memorial stone in the early historic community, and then when the meeting house was built, it was moved there to symbolize the conversion of the Natives from their perceived Pagan ways to proper Christians. In this scenario, the stone may have been ordered moved to the meeting house, perhaps by Thomas Tupper himself, in an effort to control the spiritual lives of the Natives of the community. Alternately, the stone could have been moved there purposefully by the Native people themselves as a gesture of incorporation of the old ways and beliefs with the new. It may have been that accepting the Christian religion did not necessarily mean that the old ways had to be completely abandoned, it may have been more of an adding this new religion to the belief system that was already present. The possible metal tool marks on the stone may represent the signatures of prominent Native people in the community who were responsible for moving the stone, leading the community, or assisting in the construction of the meeting house. The use of lines, Xs, and other geometric figures as signatures by Native people is well documented in the Plymouth Colony records, in other local petroglyphs, and even on Native gravestones from the period.

My concluding thoughts on the Bourne Stone are that it is potentially one of the most important late Prehistoric to Contact Period artifacts ever identified in New England. I state this opinion not because of any association with ancient Old World cultures, but because of its context and potential meaning to the local Native people who I believe created it. I have tried to show that the stone is important because it has context- we know where it came from and it has a strong pedigree- and it has stood up to my own professional archaeological scrutiny. I have not seen anything on the stone that leads me to believe that it is a fake or that it was created by anyone other than the Native people of the Manomet/ Herring Pond community. While my own interpretation of the meaning of the marks on the stone are open to scrutiny and reinterpretation, since we will never know the "real" reason why the petroglyphs were carved on it, the fact that much or most the markings appear to have been carved using stone tools (at least as far as my one hour worth of experimentation could determine) and the context of where it came from are solid.

Go down to the BHS, look at the stone yourself, see what you think. Try to keep an open mind and think of ways that your interpretation of the marks could be tested and how your theory can be supported with hard facts. That's what archaeology is all about, coming up with a good story about an artifact or site based on good, hard facts (and a good bit of imagination sometimes).