THE "WRITTEN STONES" OF QUEBEC: HISTORY AND MITHOLOGY

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Being concerned with geology and geomorphology I have analysed the markings on rocks which some archaeologists have considered as man made and was able to verify that the "inscriptions" on certain stones found in Québec are the product of natural phenomena.

The news that the Phoenicians might have discovered Québec and America 2,500 years ago aroused a flurry of interest in 1975. The message was written on stones discovered in the Sherbrooke region and deciphered in 1974 by Professor Barry Fell of Harvard University, President of The Epigraphic Society in Massachussets, from a drawing supplied by archaeologist Thomas E. Lee, of Laval University. Professor Fell concluded that the inscriptions had been written in an early Lybian language, which had only been discovered that year. Certain documentary evidence existed that a Carthaginian navigator had set out to explore the Atlantic around 530 BC, during the reign of King Hiram of Tyr. Moreover, according to Thomas E. Lee, several Phoenician stones had been found along the shores of the Atlantic, including one in Mexico belonging to King Hiram.

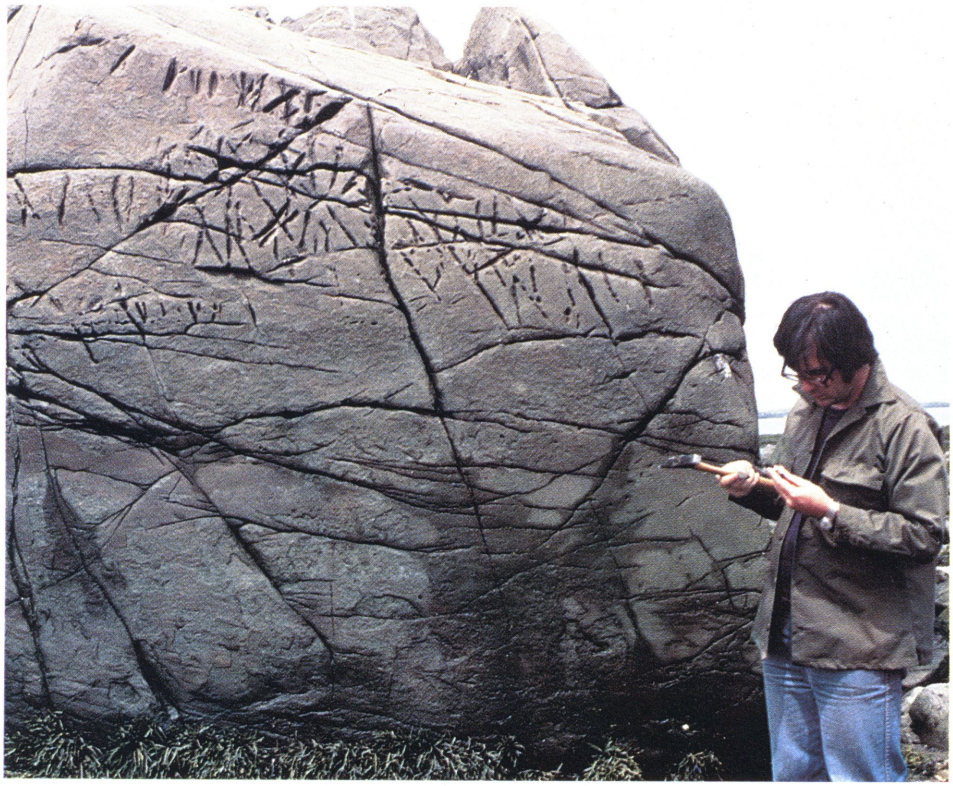
However, in 1976, the enthusiasms was dampened by Ignace J. Gelb, (of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute), who showed that the marks found on the stones were not written in the Lybian language.

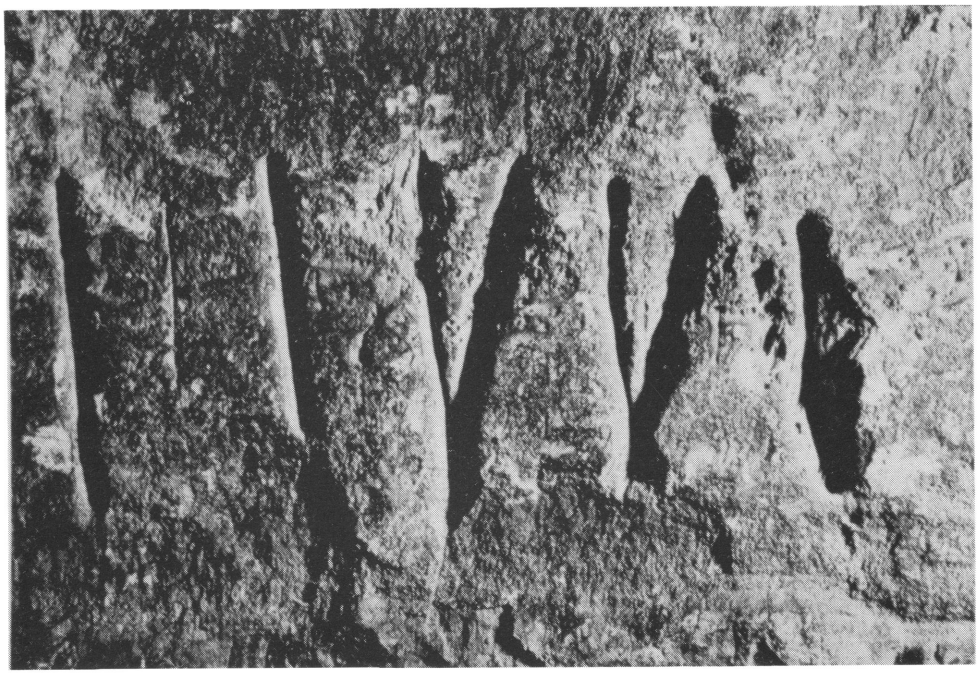
That same year, James P. Whittall II, editor of the Bulletin published by the Early Sites Research Society in Connecticut, made latex impressions of the "petroglyphs". Comparing this new data with what had been gathered previously, Barry Fell agreed that the marks had been formed naturally. At the height of this controversy, the Québec Department of Cultural Affairs asked for the assistance of the Univeristé de Sherbrooke.

While the issue may have been archaeology, the object of attention was rock and, as such, subject to geomorphological processes. Therefore, since advances knowledge in both the earth and human sciences was needed to resolve the controversy, a team effort seemed the logical approach.

The first analysis was carried out in 1976 of two stones which had been kept at the Sherbrooke seminary since before 1910. It is very probable that the Sherbrooke stones had been discovered at Bromptonville and turned over to the seminary museum by J.A. Laporte, parish priest at Bromptonville from 1891 until 1902 and at East Sherbrooke from 1903 until 1910.

The general shape, the parallelism between the accidents on both front sides and the conformity of the internal structure of the rocks indicate that these stones once formed a single stone approximately 75 cm. in leght and 50 to 70 cm. in width. Nothing points to the conclusion that this stone was broken





Figg. 36-37
General view and detail of Petit Mitis rock showing natural marks that have been interpreted as "inscriptions".

Fig. 38
Detail of the Sherbrooke Stone showing markings believed to have been made by man.

by the hand of man. The presence of another visible longitudinal fracture on the two front sides suggests that frost in the joints could have caused the breaking up of the rock.

The strata of this sedimentary siliceous rock are clearly in evidence and the "inscriptions" appear on two strata varying in width from 2.5 to 3.2 cm. and 5.7 to 7.0 cm. respectively. The surfaces of these strata are marked by numerous solution holes. In section, the "inscriptions" form a V which is more than one centimetre in depth. A few "inscriptions" are found on the side of the stone. The same pattern of features is often found on pebbles from rivers in the same geological province, for example, the Saint-Jean River in the Gaspé area. The analysis of a mirror image produced by placing acetates on both front sides of the stone proves beyond any doubt that the pattern of the "inscriptions" is an entirely natural phenomenon.

The Beauvoir stone was found behind the Beauvoir sanctuary by Reverend Father Beaudet between 1958 and 1966. It is a pink granitic erratic, 61 x 45 cm. in diameter from the regional stocks. On one of the sides of the stone, there is an alignment of "inscriptions" under 3 cm. in height and oriented in various directions. The natural origin of the "inscriptions" can be deduced from several observations: 1) this stone is fractured and the protrusions of several fractures have been broken off and overdeepened by weathering agents; 2) in other parts of the stone there are similar small straight-line segments, probably carved by the weathering of aligned plagioclases; 3) with-

in a radius of a few hundred metres, two other stones of the same type were found to have similar features; 4) the lines of the "inscritions" are sinous and marked by constrictions which any tool would have been able to elimanate.

The local and regional population has become aware of the controversy. Expert analysis of six stones submitted during recent years by the Québec Departement of Cultural Affaires and other agencies revealed that the inscriptions or phenomena on these stones are clearly of natural origin, as the following examples show.

The Saint-Edwidge stone, discovered in 1964, is a pegmatitic gneiss erratic with "inscriptions" on almost 90 cm. of a single bed. Small straightline segments less than 30 cm. lenght are characteristic of very slow cooling rocks with a macrocrystalline in which the minerals may be up to several centimetres in leght. This structure is known as 'graphic structure' because of its resemblance to writing!

Another stone, from Petit Mitis cove, was not officially reported until 1980, when it was brought to light by an amateur archaeologist. It is a sandstone hog's back, wedge between two more schistose zones, which explains the raised relief of the hog's back. The side which has the best "inscriptions" is the most affected by waves and is also the most jointed. Most of the "inscriptions" are found in the upper part of the rock, which is above the high water mark but exposed to the more corrosive spray.

There is no doubt of the natural origin of the "petroglyphs", and chemical weathering agents have made good use of the natural predisposition of the structure of this rock.

Certain phenomena involving the solution of limestone rock arouse the imagination of the uniformed, as is true in the case of networks of lapies such as the one at La Rédemption in Gaspésie. Imaginations were particularly fired when a similar network forming a radial pattern was discovered on the top of an erratic known as "La Patrie", located on a country road in Ditton Township near La Patrie and resembling a table 4 m. long and 2 to 3 m. wide. This limestone boulder soon became an ancient pagan altar and the lapies, furrows carved by the blood of human victims!

The fact that the markings are "ludi naturae" does not disprove the presence of the Phoenicians in North America, it simply indicates that these stones are not proof such a visit. However, it is now possible to cast doubt on certain "proof" based on the translation of "petroglyphs" that this continent was visited by the Egyptians, Celts, Iberians, Lybians, ...

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Résumé: Des analyses poussées démontrent que les inscriptions sur certaines pierres retrouvées au Québec sont dues à des phénomènes naturels et ne prouvent nullement que les Phéniciens s'y soient aventurés.

Resumen: Los analisis demuestran que las inscripciones descubiertas en Quebec son debidas a los fenomenos naturales y no prueban de ninguna manera que los fenicios hayan llegado hasta aqui.

Riassunto: Le analisi condotte su segni che appaiono su rocce nel Quebec, considerati da alcuni studiosi come "iscrizioni fenicie" dimostrano che di fatto sono giochi di natura e non opera dell'uomo.