

# Brush Creek Tablet Decipherment

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Written in response to a request from Richard Thornton to help interpret early American inscriptions, such as the Brush Creek Tablet from Ohio.

## Translation of Brush Creek Tablet

"200 bags of food for 10 men now will suffice. Thus, we are not all defeated," he said.

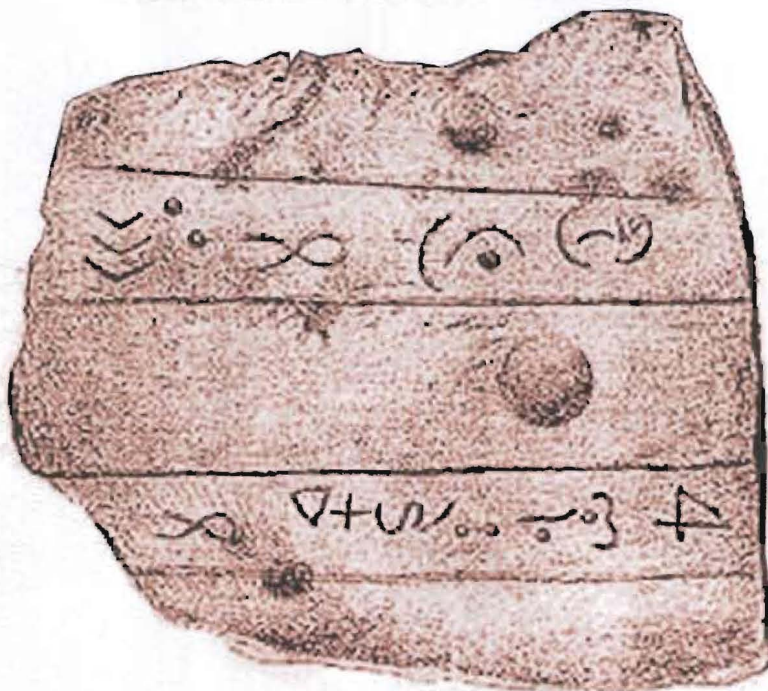
Our [home].

I, who am crippled, conjured up the hills: lovely 200, wretched 100, productive 100, mostly willows 10.

## Background

The now lost Brush Creek Tablet was found in 1880 beneath a 90-foot long, flat-topped mound in Brush Creek Township, Muskingum County, Ohio. It lay among the bones of giant male and female couples, who measured between 8 and 9 feet tall (Figure 1).

*Figure 1: The now lost Brush Creek Tablet.*



Brush Creek Township is a maze of hills near Zanesville, Ohio. It borders the navigable Muskingum River, 60 miles from the Ohio River. The Lorena Sternwheeler offers scenic cruises to tourists through a series of locks.

A document dated March 3, 1880, from Brush Creek Township in Muskingum County describes the excavation in 1870 of a mound on the farm of J.M. Baughman. The mound was flat on top, unlike the pyramidal Adena mounds. It measured 64 feet in width, 90 feet in length and 11 feet 3

inches in height. The structure was located on the summit of a hill, 152 feet above Brush Creek. It contained a stone altar. Buried within the mound were the bones of pairs of men and women. Their skeletons measured between eight and nine feet tall. At the bottom of the three-page account, six citizens signed an affidavit to verify the truth, correctness, and non-deviation from the facts.

### Consonant-vowel script of the Brush Creek Tablet

The script of the tablet is Old European, a consonant-vowel syllabary written in Finnish. It occurs on cave walls of mammoth hunters in France, Germany and Spain down to the eighteenth-century AD on bowls in Finland. Such a wide span of time does not help to date the inscription. However, the letter shapes exclude certain daughter scripts such as Minoan Linear A, Indus Valley, Linear Elamite, Val Camonica, Old Chinese, Archaic Cypriot, Phoenician, Etruscan, Iberian, Tartessian, Pictish, and Owner's Marks. The script could have come from any number of Bronze-Age nations in the Baltic, or even earlier from people like the Vinca.

Figure 2: Comparison between Brush Creek and Old European syllabaries.

	Brush Creek	Old Euro		Brush Creek	Old Euro
10	—	—	MI	∞	⋈
100	o	o	NI	(	(
Ä	\	\	PU	)	)
E	^	^	RA		
I	/	/	RÄ	—/	—/
KA			RE	≡	≡
LO	+	+	RI	⤿	⤿
LY	//	//	RU	▽	▽
MÄ	~	~	TU	}	}
ME	○	○			

### Estimate of the inscription date

Platform mound building in North America commenced around 2300 BC, at the same time that Archaic projectile points appeared. Located on alluvial plains, they were used to ride out seasonal floods by constructing a large communal building on top, not to bury people. Construction stopped abruptly in 1535 or 1536 BC, never to be renewed.

The next residents of Ohio, the Adena and Hopewell, built conical mounds, not platform mounds.

The mound's location on top of a hill suggests a much more recent date, after the Adena and Hopewell no longer occupied Ohio. The Mississippian mound builders built ceremonial platform mounds and interred their elite within these mounds between 800 and 1600 AD. Ceremonial



platform mounds can be traced to the Norte Chico civilization of Peru, which spanned 3000 BC to 1800 BC. If Mississippian mound builders constructed Brush Creek Mound, why so far from the Mississippi?

The tablet inscription describes the end of a journey, having barely escaped from a battle. "Thus, we are all not defeated", said the leader of the group, but the encounter crippled the scribe. Their 200 bags of food will be shared among 10 men. Such a surplus suggests that they arrived by boat. Somewhere on the Mississippi River they fought a losing battle, then paddled to safety up the Ohio and Muskingum Rivers. This would date the tablet to the last defense of the Mississippians. A good account of this war was recorded by the Lenape in *Walam Olum*.

### Walam Olum battle on the Mississippi
















The *Walam Olum* or Red Record is a carefully preserved written history of the Lenape, a mnemonic device on wooden sticks that augmented memorized verses. These verses were transcribed and translated by the greatest American botanist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Constantine Samuel Rafinesque, a genius, self-educated in Europe, who spoke dozens of languages and named 6700 plants in America. He proposed evolution thirty years before Darwin, who acknowledged his debt to Rafinesque. Since then, many lesser lights have described *Walam Olum* as a hoax, which is a typical ploy of someone who cannot read the writing.

I have deciphered the three verses of the first stick:

Lohian appi 'Salmon father-in-law'  
 Vapan appi 'Fishing-pole father-in-law'  
 Sauvan appi 'Ski-pole father in law'

The verse of the second stick says: "The men from the north, the east, the south". The Old European inscription follows this verse, but with more detail: "All of the hill border men, the east border men, the water border men."

Figure 3: Old European transcription of second stick of *Walam Olum*.

	<b>MÄ-KA-RA-MI</b> Mäen kai rajan miehet All of the hill border men				
	<b>I-RA-MI</b> idään rajan miehet the east border men				
	<b>E-RA-MI</b> e'en rajan miehet the water border men				

Therefore, the *Walam Olum* is real writing, attested in hundreds of inscriptions across Europe, identical to the Brush Creek Tablet script, written in the Finnish language. The verses translated by Rafinesque, an expert in Finnish, can be used with confidence.

*Walam Olum* describes a decades long battle against fortified cities on the Mississippi River by Lenapes migrating from west to east. The war started after an initial group of migrants crossed the Mississippi and were then slaughtered despite obtaining permission to cross. Under the leadership of four successive chiefs, Lenapes and their allies fought and defeated cities such as Cahokia at St. Louis, whose leaders fled south, then re-established themselves as the Natchez. The Lenapes continued their migration eastwards, through lands sparsely settled.

Not all of the defeated from Cahokia fled as far south as Natchez. The distance from St Louis south to Cairo at the mouth of the Ohio River is 150 miles. Many refugees would have paddled up the Ohio River and its tributaries, bordered by Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia. One route on the New River goes to North Carolina, another to Pennsylvania, another to Lake Erie. The Pennsylvania route connects with the Allegheny River, which then goes to the Atlantic seaboard.

Cahokia fell before diseases from Europe could have precipitated a decline. Its defenses were rebuilt four times between 1175 and 1275, which matches the Lenape description of continuous warfare that occupied the lives of four chieftains. The vast majority of radiocarbon dates end at 1275 BC, the final burning of Cahokia. After that, only a few widely-scattered dates exist.

Therefore, I estimate that Brush Creek Tablet was written in 1275 AD by clan members of the chiefs of Cahokia. At some later date, these chiefs and the tablet were buried by a large group of settlers who coalesced around these chiefs. That they all died simultaneously suggests renewed hostility with the Lenape or their allies.

### **Notes on Translation**

The use of lines to identify registers of writing is common with Egyptian hieroglyphics but not Old European. These lines may refer to lines of latitude or banks of a river, in which case, part of the design may be a map. The large filled-in circle (ME) might be the image of a round building, which says 'our xxx'.

The inscription reads left to right, top to bottom, in Old European syllabary. The rules for writing Finnish with Old European script are amply attested. Briefly: double letters compress into a single letter; the last consonant of a syllable is not written; internal letters D, H, J, T and V are not written; any resulting diphthongs compress into the first vowel.

Which way is up? a) The base of a triangle must be horizontal. The base is parallel with the divisor lines, which means the divisor lines are horizontal. b) Letter RE (3 chevrons) is always oriented so that the points of the chevrons point down. c) Letter RÄ (a toboggan) is always oriented so that the angled stroke points upward.

All letters except the last are either numbers or syllables; the last letter is a compound of two syllables and one number.

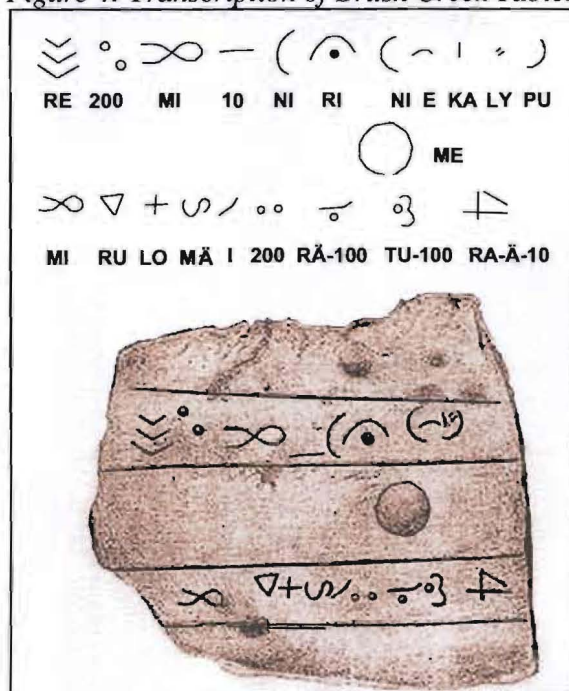
A single dot means 100, two dots mean 200.

A long horizontal stroke is either number 10 or letter MI. To avoid confusion, the scribe used a different letter for MI, a man with two legs lying down, where MI spells *mies* meaning 'man'. This convention is common among Indus Valley inscriptions, except that the man stands rather than lies down, and has a pointed head like a fish.

In a list of items, numbers follow the listed item.

## Translation

Figure 4: Transcription of Brush Creek Tablet.



### Brush Creek Script

- 1 RE 200 MI 10, NI RI. NI, E KA LY, PU.
- 2 ME [round house].
- 3 MI, RU, LO MÄ: I 200, RÄ 100, TU 100, RA Ä 10.

### Finnish decipherment

- 1 "Rehut 200 miehien 10, niin riittää. Niin, e kai lyödä," puhui.
- 2 Meian [kotia].
- 3 Mie, ruhjotaan, loin mä'ien: ihan 200, rähjän 100; tuottavan 100; raitain äjään 10.

### English translation of Finnish

- 1 "200 bags of food for 10 men, now will suffice. Thus, we are not all defeated," he said.
- 2 Our [home].
- 3 I, who am crippled, conjured up the hills: lovely 200, wretched 100, productive 100, mostly willows 10.

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