EDINBURGH CASTLE RESEARCH

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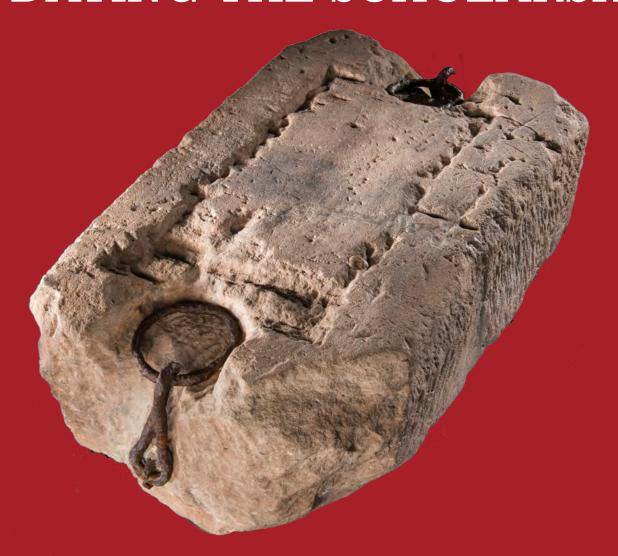
THE STONE OF DESTINY
UPDATING THE SCHOLARSHIP

THE STONE OF DESTINY: UPDATING THE SCHOLARSHIP

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After a sojourn of nearly 700 years in Westminster Abbey, the Stone of Scone was returned to Scotland in 1996. A conference devoted to this national treasure and symbol of Scottish nationhood in the following year gathered together much expert opinion which was duly published in 2003 as a monograph entitled The Stone of Destiny: Artefact & Icon, edited by Richard Welander, David J. Breeze and Thomas Owen Clancy (hereafter referred to as The Stone).

Scholarship should never be allowed to stand still, and it is inevitable that the years since 2003 have allowed time for more reflection on the Stone and its significance, and to now ask more questions about it. This report revises and updates the Stone of Scone scholarship laid out in the monograph and attempts to identify and address gaps in our understanding about it. It does so by posing and answering a series of questions. The author makes no apology for the fact that the information so provided is patchy, inconsistent and sometimes confusing. In a final section at the end he maps out his own preferred overall interpretation of the Stone and its significance.

Q. WHAT IS THE STONE OF SCONE?

A. The Stone of Scone is an artefact of ritual and symbolic importance. It was on this rock that kings of the Scots, up to and including John Balliol in 1292, were seated when made kings, and it later served the same function for coronations of monarchs of England and of the United Kingdom.

Q. WHAT DOES THE STONE LOOK LIKE?

A. The description that follows, and all other references to the Stone, assumes that it is being viewed as positioned in the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey. For views of all its faces, see The Stone: 12, 13, 15, 17, 18.

The stone is roughly rectangular in shape, about 0.67m × 0.442m × 0.265m, of pale, pinky grey sandstone, containing occasional clasts, some of them purple-grey pebbles of mudstone. It weighs 152.407kg. The dark patch on its upper surface is caused by a concentration of quartz-rich sandstone. It is clearly broken into two unequal pieces, now cemented together, with one end of the fracture line running vertically across the middle of its back, and the other end in the right-hand end. The upper surface has a crudely delineated rectangle outlined by an intermittent groove (of which more later). At both ends an iron staple has been set into the stone, through each of which is an iron link and a ring. The ends of the stone are channelled and recesses cut into the top surface in such a way that the links and rings can be tucked into them without projecting horizontally beyond the staples or vertically above the surface of the Stone.

Q. WHAT IS THE CORRECT NAME FOR THE STONE?

A. The Stone has had different names over the years. In these research notes we normally refer to it as the Stone of Scone, a name that first appears in the mid-14th-century Chronicle of Lanercost describing events in 1327 (Maxwell 1913: 260), but that is not the only correct name. Possibly the earliest mention of it is in an Irish poem, thought to date to the late 11th century, which mentions 'the most powerful eastern stone' (The Stone: 103–5).

It is often described as a marble chair or stone in Scottish sources, indeed, the 'fatal' chair or stone, translating the Latin fatalis ('of destiny') (e.g. Boethius 1575: Liber 7/17, 11/10, 13/59; Turnbull 1858: 21, 26, 32, 37). In English sources recording its early fate in English hands it is called (in Latin) a 'tribunal', meaning a dais, platform or seat of authority, or else a great stone on which kings of Scotland were crowned (Stevenson 1870, 2: 144; Luard 1890, 3: 101). Thus it also came to be known as the royal stone (of Scotland) and more recently as the coronation stone, reflecting its function in Westminster Abbey (Aitchison 2009: 12–13).

According to Hector Boece, writing in the early 16th century (Boethius 1575: Liber 10/54), it was believed by some that a popular rhyme was carved upon it by the 9th-century king, Kenneth mac Alpin:

Ni fallat fatum, Scoti quocunque locatum

Invenient lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem

Unless the Fates are faithless found,

And prophet's voice be vain,

Where'er this monument be found

There Scottish race shall reign.

This rhyme can be traced back to John of Fordun in the late 14th century (Skene 1872: 24). According to the Liber Extravagans, mostly dating 1292 x 1306, added to Bower's Scotichronicon, the prophecy, that the descendants of the mythical Simon Brecc (i.e. the Scots) would reign wherever the Stone was placed, was made by Simon's father, Milo, great king of the Spaniards, when he gifted him the Stone (Scotichronicon 9: 69). 'Stone of Destiny', an updated version of the fatal stone/ lapis fatalis, only seems to have been in general use since the mid-19th century (Aitchison 2009: 17–18).

Q. IS THE STONE NOW DISPLAYED IN EDINBURGH CASTLE THE GENUINE STONE OF SCONE?

A. In the writer's opinion there can be no reasonable doubt that this is the stone that Scottish kings up to, and including, King John (Balliol) were seated upon at Scone during their inauguration ceremonies, that it is the stone removed by the English and housed in a specially built chair in Westminster Abbey that was used for the coronation of English monarchs, and later rulers of England and Scotland.

It is important to make this statement here since in 1996 and at various other times in the past it appears that doubt has been expressed about its authenticity. There have been misgivings about its crude appearance and disbelief that our ancestors would let such an important icon go without putting up more of a fight; or was that because they knew our English enemies had been fobbed off with an inferior substitute? Then, when the Stone was stolen from Westminster Abbey in 1950 by nationalist students, surely it was part of their plan to have a replica returned to England?

Prior to the Stone's return to Scotland in 1996 it was not too difficult, in the writer's experience, to come across Scottish patriots who claimed that they knew that the 'real stone' was hidden in a secret location somewhere in Scotland, awaiting an independent Scotland before being unveiled to the public at large. Those who might wish to believe that might nevertheless think it remarkable that the return of an alleged impostor did not flush out the real thing.

There are two well-documented alternative stones. The first, not known to be accessible, is alleged in an unsigned letter to The Times newspaper on 1 January 1819 to have been found the previous November in an underground chamber discovered in Macbeth's castle (Dunsinane Fort in Perthshire). It was described as weighing about 500lb (226.796kg) and to be of the 'meteoric or semi-metallic kind'. Its identification was confirmed by an inscription on an accompanying bronze plate. A later version of this story suggests the stone was covered with hieroglyphics (Aitchison 2009: 68–73).

The second alternative stone is apparently now in the possession of a member of the Order of Scottish Knights Templar. It was made in 1929 by Robert Gray, a Glaswegian monumental sculptor. It has been alleged in the past, wrongly, that it was substituted for the real Stone when it was returned to Westminster Abbey in 1951 after it had been taken by a group of students (Aitchison 2009: 74–6).

Matters to do with the authenticity and real nature of the Stone occupy much of the text below. Let it suffice to make the following two points here:

1.   When the Stone was taken off by the English, many in Scotland supported them, including leading figures who would have visited Scone and participated in royal inauguration ceremonies. Surely they would not have stood by and said nothing if they saw that the English were being duped with a fake?

2.   The Stone, we know only since 1997, is clearly linked to the immediate vicinity of Scone by its geology. Even as recently as 1950, nobody planning to substitute the original with a copy would have known this to be the case, and a geological origin at Scone runs counter to the traditions associated with the Stone. It does not seem remotely likely that any party, at any time, intending to replace the Stone taken to Westminster Abbey, would have thought to or found it easy to source a new piece of rock from the Scone area.

Q. WHY DO MANY EXPERTS TALK ABOUT THE STONE BEING USED IN INAUGURATION CEREMONIES IN SCOTLAND RATHER THAN CORONATIONS?

A. A coronation literally involved a crown being ceremonially placed on the head of the king, but this act was apparently not part of the actual ceremony of king-making amongst the Scots in early times. Hence the ceremonies which marked the start of their reigns are described as inaugurations. In any case, coronation of kings in medieval Europe was seen as something that had to be sanctioned by the Pope, along with the ceremony of anointment. These actions were ones that were supervised by high-ranking clerics. They demonstrated that the kings in question really were of sovereign status, owing allegiance to no other earthly king. Kings Alexander II and III sought papally sanctioned coronation, including anointment, but this was only finally granted in 1329 (The Stone: 190; Bloch 1926). The well-informed English chronicler, Walter of Guisborough, described the ceremony undergone by John Balliol when he was made king in 1292 as a quasi-coronation (Rothwell 1957: 239). English determination that the Kings of Scots should not be seen to have the same status as themselves may have been influential in causing the papal curia to delay granting the Scottish wish (The Stone: 190). Thus, from the reign of David II onwards, Scottish monarchs are considered to have had coronation ceremonies. David II was crowned at Scone in 1331.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that earlier kings did wear crowns and were crowned with them at the time of their inaugurations. The fullest description of the inauguration of a Scottish king is that of Alexander III in 1249. It appears in Walter Bower's early-15th-century Scottish chronicle, the Scotichronicon. The king was led to the cross, which stood in the cemetery at the east end of the church (i.e. of Scone Abbey) by the bishops and earls, and there was installed on the royal seat. More detail follows, particularly on the recitation of the royal genealogy by an ancient Highlander. For present purposes, the interesting detail is that all this only happened after the solemn ceremony of the king's coronation, which had been done in accordance with the custom that had grown up in the kingdom from antiquity right up to that time (Scotichronicon 5: 293).

So the king had first been crowned, presumably in the church, and then had been inaugurated in a separate ceremony. Of course, care has to be taken in how to interpret this when the source is one that dates to the early 15th century. Separate coronation is not included in the earlier Gesta Annalia (Skene 1872: 289) on which Bower's text is largely based, but there is an account dating to the 1250s which states briefly that the young king was crowned by the bishop of St Andrews (Anderson 1990, 2: 562). It is possible that crowning by the leading bishop of Scotland was a new development in 1249, despite Bower's claim that it was in accordance with the custom that had grown up in the kingdom from antiquity. Bower's possibly garbled account also records how the bishop knighted the young Alexander III. This may retain a memory of a role fulfilled from earlier times by the bishop of girding the king with a sword (The Stone: 153). Gesta Annalia has it that once Alexander was enthroned the nobles, on bended knee, strewed their garments under his feet, before the Stone (Skene 1872: 290). This can be

understood to be copying the biblical account of how the Israelites did likewise at the inauguration of Jehu as their king (2 Kings 9: 12–13; The Stone: 192).

An interesting account on what days the king ought to wear a crown is included in the Scotichronicon under the reign of Alexander III, in a discourse on good governance. They are listed as the main feast days, and all those days on which he holds general courts and on which he makes knights (Scotichronicon 5: 311). Early representations of Scottish kings on seals and coins, and notably the images of David I and Malcolm IV on the charter of 1159 to Kelso Abbey, show them wearing a crown. The last Scottish king to be inaugurated on the Stone at Scone, John Balliol in 1292, had at least two. One is included amongst the royal treasures in Edinburgh Castle inventoried by the English in 1297, and he was found to have another, described as the royal crown of Scotland, of gold, when he was allowed to leave England for France in 1299 (Riley 1865: 391).

Robert Bruce, when he had himself made king in 1306, not surprisingly arranged the ceremony at Scone, even although the Stone was no longer there. He evidently wore a crown on that occasion – described in an English source as merely a coronet (Cal. Doc. Scot. 2: no. 1914), perhaps to deliberately disparage it. There is, however, a difference of opinion amongst recent authorities on Bruce's reign as to whether Bruce wore this to indicate his status or whether it was placed on his head as part of the ceremony, as in later ceremonies for Scottish monarchs (Duncan 1988: 127–9; Barrow 2005: 194–7).

Q. IS THE STONE OF SCONE UNIQUE?

A. No. It belongs to a group of other stones and monuments which were used elsewhere in Europe in inauguration ceremonies for kings and nobles. In some cases in Ireland and Scotland there were stones that the chosen one stood upon, often with footprints in which they put their own feet. A description of the inauguration of medieval Lords of the Isles, given in a late-17th-century clan history, is possibly typical:

I thought fit to annex the ceremony of proclaiming the Lord of the Isles. At this the Bishop of Argyle, the Bishop of the Isles, and seven priests, were sometimes present; but a Bishop was always present, with the chieftains of all the principal families, and a Ruler of the Isles. There was a square stone, seven or eight feet long, and the tract of a man's foot cut thereon, upon which he stood, denoting that he should walk in the footsteps and uprightness of his predecessors, and that he was installed by right in his possessions. He was clothed in a white habit, to shew his innocence and integrity of heart, that he would be a light to his people, and maintain the true religion. The white apparel did afterwards belong to the poet by right. Then he was to receive a white rod in his hand, intimating that he had power to rule, not with tyranny and partiality, but with discretion and sincerity. Then he received his forefathers' sword, or some other sword, signifying that his duty was to protect and defend them from the incursions of their enemies in peace or war, as the obligations and customs of his predecessors were. (Macphail 1914: 24)

This Finlaggan stone does not survive, but for lists of those known from Ireland and Scotland see FitzPatrick (2004: 235–41).

In other cases there was a stone or stone chair on which the chosen one sat. The more well-known ones include:

- Tulach Óg, Co. Tyrone, Northern Ireland, the stone chair for inaugurating the Ó Néills. It is shown in a drawing of 1602, about the time it was destroyed, as a large rectangular boulder incorporated in a chair with stone slab sides and back (The Stone: 111–14).

- Aachen Cathedral, Germany, the throne of the Holy Roman Emperors; made by AD 931 from slabs of plain re-used marble (The Stone: illus. 41).

- Zollfeld, Klagenfurt, Austria, the chair used in the installation ceremonies of the dukes of Carinthia. It is made from re-used Roman stonework (The Stone: 120, col. illus. 1.5).

A point worth noting is that none of the monuments cited above are well-crafted pieces of work or aesthetically pleasing. The reasons for this are not clear, for there is ample evidence of an ability to work and carve stone to a high level of competence in all the places and societies that cherished these monuments. There are high-status seats, unconnected with making kings or great lords, which demonstrate what was possible if there had been a desire to create something dignified or monumental. A particularly apt one to consider is the Frith Stool, a Northumbrian bishop's throne, possibly dating as early as the 7th century, at Hexham Abbey in Northumbria. It is carved out of a solid block of stone with sides and back, and incised decoration. It would have been known to many of the Scottish elite, lay and clerical. It is possible that with kingly inauguration seats tradition, and a desire to accentuate the antique, were factors that discouraged the creation of new monuments.

Q. WHAT DOES SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF THE STONE TELL US?

A. The return of the Stone to Scotland in 1996 provided the opportunity for its expert examination, work which is ongoing, thanks to the initiative of Historic Scotland/Historic Environment Scotland. The main conclusions are as follows:

Geology
The petrology of the Stone has now been firmly established, thanks to the analyses undertaken by staff of the British Geological Survey. This shows that it is from the Lower Old Red sandstone formations exposed in the Perth and Dundee areas. It is particularly similar to sandstone from Quarry Mill near Scone (The Stone: 39). It is probably made from a single bed of sandstone, the underside representing the original geological top of this feature (The Stone: 35).

Technical assessment
By technical assessment, we mean a study of how the Stone was worked by the masons who formed it. The conclusions are those of Peter Hill, a stone and historic buildings consultant who studied it when it was returned to Scotland in 1996, and who has recently reviewed new images made in 2016 (The Stone: 11–31; Hill 2016).

The underside of the stone is a natural bed with little sign of working. The rest of the stone was apparently roughed out with a punch, with particular care being given to the upper surface, perhaps with a chisel, making it relatively smooth and even with relatively good arris (sharp edges between two surfaces) with the front and back. By contrast, the two ends are very roughly cut, as are the recesses cut in the top for the iron rings and the grooves in the ends to house the links. In general, the way of working the block gives the impression that it was primarily the top that mattered and would be visible. That, and the lack of tool marks on the bottom, indicate that the Stone, as an artefact, has always been this way up.

Archaeology

Taking an archaeological approach, it is possible to deduce several episodes in the formation of the Stone as we see it now, some of which can be arranged in chronological order or even provided with a date. We will first of all review all the apparent human interventions on a face-by-face basis.

1.   Wear on the back edge of the top. Hill, in both his reports, has concluded that this wear is consistent with the use of the stone as a step. The rituals involved with inauguration ceremonies elsewhere involved the chosen one standing on a stone, but it is surely unlikely that, even if the Stone of Scone had been used in such a way over a period of several hundred years prior to 1249, it would show significant wear from royal feet. Use as a step would seem most likely to relate to a previous use unrelated to its function in inaugurating kings. So why choose a step, or threshold stone, for royal inauguration rituals? Might it have been a significant component in the early royal palace (presumably including a church) at Scone?

2.   Roughly cut lines marking out a rectangular area on the top. Hill has pointed out that more than one hand seems to have been involved, with a neat start to the cutting followed by much cruder work. He suggests that the intention was to create a recess and that work was given up because it was apparent that continuation would result in the stone breaking. Duncan (2002: 141) suggested that such a recess may have been to take a super-altar, presumably marked with consecration crosses and sealing holy relics beneath it, and further drew attention to the supposed crosses (no. 3) as evidence for an intention to use the Stone as an altar. Rodwell (2013: 121–4) considers that the recess was for a metal plate with an inscription. His analysis of the chair shows that it did not originally have a wooden seat over the top of the Stone, and that the present one is post-medieval, possibly as recent as 1727 (ibid.: 64).

3.   Crosses cut in the top adjacent to the front, here distinguished as A and B, following the labelling provided by Rodwell (2013: 121, fig. 155). Cross B is not dissimilar in the crude way it is worked from some of the roughed-out rectangular recess (no. 2) and may represent part of the same episode, perhaps a tentative start to a recess of a different size or shape. Cross A is made of two cuts, apparently executed by repeated slicing with the edge of a sharp blade. Rather than interpret this as a deliberate cross, these cuts should be seen as an example of a phenomenon studied by Conor Newman (2009). Other groups of similar cuts are to be found on a range of monuments in Ireland, Wales and Scotland dating from the 5th/6th century to the 12th century, including cross-slabs, high crosses,

bullaun stones, ogham stones, inauguration/assembly stones and occasionally churches. To Newman's list can be added from present-day Scotland the Pictish monuments known as Sueno's Stone, Moray, Kirriemuir no. 2, Angus and the Lethendy cross-slab, Perthshire (Hall 2015: 190–2). Newman (2009: 423–4) points out that they are to be found on monuments of religious significance, or ones that could be considered to mark boundaries or points of transition, for instance from layman to king.

4.   Two recesses in the top for housing the iron rings. It is clear that these were cut, very crudely, after the attempts (no. 2) to make a rectangular recess.

5.   A linear, gentle hollow running across the top between the two ring recesses (no. 4). This may be interpreted as the wear caused by having a bar slotted through the two rings for carrying it. Rodwell (2013: 110, 116), without the benefit of recent high-resolution imaging of the Stone, has denied that this feature exists, and in any case dismisses as implausible that the ironwork attachments had anything to do with transporting the Stone (but cf. his interpretation, ibid.: 116). Hill (2016: 8) is not keen on this interpretation, since he views this as an inefficient way of carrying the Stone. He further points out the difficulties involved in using a bar in this way if the intention was to raise it from, and lower it into, the present coronation chair. It is apparent to the present writer, however, that such a carrying arrangement may have had little to do with efficiency, but a lot more to do with display. This might have been to do with the ceremonial movement of the Stone between Scone Abbey church and the Moot Hill, or perhaps the parading of the Stone as the symbol of the subjection of Scotland on its way south to Westminster.

6.   Slots made in the two ends for housing the iron links. These were presumably cut, very crudely, in one operation along with the ring recesses (no. 4) on top. Hill's assessment that the edges of the slots show evidence of weathering is significant, since it implies that the Stone stood outside with its cut-down ends exposed, for some considerable length of time (The Stone: 18–19).

7.   Iron staples, one at each end, each with an iron link and a ring. The staples are anchored in place with lead in hollows cut out for them. Hill supposes that the staples were originally totally contained within the thickness of the Stone, but now project because the stone ends have been cut back. The staple ends have also been filed down to such an extent that the integrity of the holes containing the links is threatened. They would probably tear open if an attempt was made to drag the Stone by pulling on the links horizontally.

8.   Claw marks on the back of the Stone, to the right of the crack, overlying earlier tooling. These presumably relate to 'repair' work undertaken in 1951 when the two parts of the stone were joined together again after the stone was broken in two during its removal from the abbey by Scottish patriots.

9.   Hollows in the front – one of them, at the left-hand end, well developed, one in the middle less so, and an alleged third at the right-hand end hardly observable at all. These have been interpreted as prehistoric cup marks. The idea that these should be prehistoric is not inherently improbable. For instance, stones with cup marks at Balblair, Inverness-shire and Aberlemno (no. 1), Angus, have been carved much later with Pictish symbols (Hall 2015: 187). It is likely that those who

commissioned the Pictish carvings would have had some belief or awareness that they were re-using stones which had had some ritual function in the past. Peter Hill (2016: 3–4) continues to believe that cup marks cannot be ruled out as an explanation for them. These hollows were recently examined by Dr Alison Sheridan, an expert on the Neolithic. She felt that it was unlikely that they were prehistoric cup marks, and drew attention to the work of Hugo Lamdin-Whymark (2011) on cup marks on prehistoric monuments at Kilmartin in Argyll. His experimental work has demonstrated that they were produced by pecking with hammer-stones, and Dr Sheridan did not feel that the hollows on the Stone showed evidence of such working. Rodwell (2013: 174–5) dismisses the idea that these hollows are prehistoric, and suggests that they are the result of vandalism by tourists picking at the exposed parts of the Stone with penknives or the like. No other examples of this have been identified at Westminster Abbey, but a comparable example may be the 14th-century military effigy in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, identified as 'Strongbow'. Its basinet has a deep, cup-like hollow.

10.   Around the bottom edges of the Stone there is extensive damage, largish flakes of stone having become detached. This is the damage which Peter Hill supposed might be caused by the Stone being unceremoniously dumped on to a hard surface (The Stone: 14).

It is possible to place some of the human interventions detailed above in chronological order. First must be placed the cup marks (no. 9), but only if they are prehistoric. Otherwise they come last. The wear (no. 1) that identifies the Stone as a step must relate to use prior to it being pressed into ritual service, and it also strongly suggests that the Stone was from the beginning a regular, rectangular block, as now, albeit longer at both ends. There is a clear relationship between the outlining of a rectangular area on the top (no. 2) and the cutting of the recesses for the iron rings (no. 4). The latter cut through the former. It also seems reasonably clear that the staples for the links and rings were inserted prior to the Stone being reduced in length at both ends. This shortening of the stone and the cutting of the channels and recesses for the links and rings suggest a major change in use.

Interpretation

Some interpretations advanced in the past, such as that the Stone was part of a Roman altar or the lid of a cess-pit, are not considered here as there appears little merit in them in terms of evidence or likelihood. The key consideration in many ways is whether the Stone we have now is essentially the Stone that was taken to England by Edward I, or whether it has been altered significantly since then.

In his major recent study of both the coronation chair and the Stone, Warwick Rodwell has taken the view that the Stone has been altered significantly while in England. He identifies the rectangular cutting on the top (no. 2) as post-medieval in date, for a plaque, and the hollows in the front (no. 9) as medieval and later vandalism. More than that, he suggests that the present shape and size of the Stone is the result of it being cut to fit in the coronation chair. In other words, the design of the chair was predetermined, and only as much of the stone was necessary as would conveniently fit in it.

Rodwell also draws attention to events in the 1320s to explain the use of the links and rings attached to the Stone. It appears from one chronicle source (Geoffrey le Baker) that about 1328 the community of the abbey were so fearful that their Stone should be taken from them and returned to the Scots that they chained it to the floor under the royal throne next to the high altar (Rodwell 2013: 17; Thompson 1889: 40–1). Rodwell identifies a damaged area of the Cosmatesque paving to the south of St Edward's altar, exactly where he supposes the coronation chair would have been stationed, as potentially the location where the stone (in the chair) was chained to the floor. He also points to the evidence for other iron lifting rings being used in the abbey for lowering coffins in place, especially the coffin of King Henry III in 1290, to back up his interpretation that the ironwork was added to the Stone while at Westminster in the 1320s (Rodwell 2013: 40–1, 113–14).

If the present ironwork was used to chain the Stone to the floor in 1328, it does not necessarily follow that it was added then. It is not possible to date the metalwork on stylistic or technical grounds. It could be 14th-century. It could equally be very much earlier in date. It is worth pointing out that it is presently too short for the job required in 1328 (assuming the chair was always about the same height as now) – and why go to the elaborate lengths of retaining the metalwork in specially cut channels and recesses when the threat of the return of the Stone to Scotland was over? The one contribution to the ironwork made in England may have been the filing down of the staple ends. Richard Welander (pers. comm.), who was responsible for taking the Stone out of the chair in 1996, observes that it was a very tight fit. It may have been found necessary to make such a minor adjustment to fit the Stone in the chair.

It seems more reasonable to the author to suppose that the ironwork was already an integral part of the relic, that is the Stone, when it was first delivered to the abbey. It was then housed inside for the rest of its history. The weathering detected by Peter Hill on the cut-down ends of the Stone must, therefore date to a much earlier period in its history, before Alexander III's inauguration in 1249; so, too, the rectangular cutting on the top.

A possible interpretation to place on all this is a series of phases as follows:

1.   The Stone is quarried and shaped to serve as a step or threshold.

2.   The Stone is selected for use as a seat in inauguration ceremonies. It is probably positioned outside – hence the weathering – and iron fittings are attached to prevent it being moved illicitly. For reasons that remain obscure, but possibly to embed a saintly relic in the manner of an altar, attempts were started on forming something rectangular in, or on, its top – unless these markings relate to the Stone's previous architectural function. Similarly, the supposed slice marks made with a sharp blade (no. 3) might belong to this phase or even earlier.

3.   The Stone is cut down in length and the iron fittings are retained, perhaps to serve a different function.

4.   After a period of time long enough for the cut-down ends to display some signs of weathering, the Stone is housed inside Scone Abbey church, as appears to have been the case by 1292 (see below). While the ends were exposed to the elements, the surface and sides must have been protected in some way.

5.   While in Westminster Abbey, the Stone suffers vandalism, including the cup marks and breakage in 1950.

Q. WHAT DID OUR ANCESTORS BELIEVE ABOUT THE STONE OF SCONE?

A. The Scots, like other nations in the medieval period, developed legends about their origins and status. For the Scots, this came to be very important to counter English claims to overlordship of Scotland, often projected by means of their own origin myths. As developed by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century, these claimed that Brutus, descended from the Trojans who fled the Greek sack of Troy, took the whole of this island, then called Albion, and it was renamed Britain after him. He had three sons, the eldest, Locrinus, being given England, the second, Albanactus, Scotland, and the youngest, Camber, Wales. Evidence was adduced to demonstrate Scotland's ongoing subservience to the descendants of Locrinus, that is the kings of England (Thompson 1999: 20–3; Scotichronicon 6: 115; Mason 1991: 49–54).

As fully developed in the 14th century, the Scottish origin myths countered this story by claiming ancestry for their kings from a marriage between Gaythelos (the eponym of the Gaels), a son of the king of Athens, and Scota, a daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt, after whom the kingdom came to be named. In the pleadings made on behalf of the Scots by Baldred Bisset in 1300 before Pope Boniface VIII, in order to counter the fictions of the King of England, Scota, with a large force, is said to have landed in Ireland, taken on board some Irish, and then sailed to Scotland. She had with her the royal seat, which the present king of England had forcibly taken away. She conquered the Picts and took over their kingdom (Scotichronicon 6: 183).

Bisset crafted this story from earlier material. Other legends in circulation at the same time provided more detail on the history of the Stone in the context of a long process for the ancestors of the Scots from leaving the Mediterranean to settling in Scotland. Significant stages in this were long spells in Spain and then Ireland. The Stone was said to have been taken from Egypt by Gaythelos to Spain where he established a kingdom for himself and his people. Later, when descendants under the leadership of Simon Brecc colonised Ireland, the Stone went with them and was set up at Tara (Scotichronicon 1: 65, 67). A significant variant of this story has Simon Brecc pull the Stone/throne up with the anchors of his ship when sailing near the coast on his first approach to Ireland. This was interpreted as an omen that he would be king (Scotichronicon 1: 67).

Later, a certain Fergus son of Feradach, descended from the line of ancient kings (i.e. Gaythelos, Simon Brecc and so on) was inspired to go from Ireland to Scotland to support the Scots already there who were being oppressed by the Picts. He created a kingdom for himself in the west of what is now Scotland and was chosen as the first king of Scots there. He had brought with him the Stone/throne that Simon Brecc had taken to Ireland, and he was crowned on that (Scotichronicon 1: 85, 195, 197).

We are dependent on the early-16th-century history of Scotland by Hector Boece for providing information on the early history of the Stone in Scotland. It remained in Argyll, even though the Scots there were driven into exile by the Romans for a period of over 40 years. It was located at Eudonium or Evonium, the royal palace, identified as Dunstaffnage Castle near Oban (Boethius 1575: Scotorum Regni Descriptio 16; Liber 2/10, 6/8). When the Scots returned to Argyll in AD 422 under the leadership of a later King Fergus, he was seated upon the Stone (fatali marmore) (ibid.: 7/17).

A later king of Scots, Kenneth mac Alpin, destroyed the kingdom of the Picts and all its people (in the mid-9th century). He removed the Stone from Argyll and transported it to Gowrie, previously a district belonging to the Picts. He did this so as to make it a sacred symbol that Scottish rule was henceforth to be established there, and he set it up on a mound (tumulo, which could also be translated as tomb) at Scone since it was adjacent to there that the final victory over the Picts had been obtained. There those proclaimed as kings would sit and receive their royal insignia (ibid.: 10/54).

An alternative story, derived from the Bible, about the Stone's origin first surfaces in an English chronicle by William Rishanger (born 1249/50, died after 1312 – see ODNB s.v.) covering the reigns of Henry III and Edward I of England. In the context of John Balliol's 'coronation', the royal stone on which he was seated is described as the one on which Jacob rested his head when he went from Beersheba to Haran (Riley 1865: 135). This was on the occasion Jacob had a dream of a ladder reaching to Heaven with Angels descending and ascending on it to God, who promised Jacob that he would have very many descendants. When he awoke, Jacob set the stone up as a pillar (Genesis 28/10–22).

Thanks to the research of Binski (The Stone: 217–18) it has to be recognised that this alleged origin for the Stone is possibly a later interpolation into Rishanger's chronicle. The 16th-century English antiquary, John Leland (c.1503–52) picked up this tradition (Holinshed 1807, 1: 210), and by the end of that century there was a tablet on or beside the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey identifying the Stone as the one on which Jacob reposed when he had his dream (Rodwell 2013: 2). This was no doubt a preferable version of the Stone's origins for the English than one that focused on a prophecy that the Scots would reign wherever the Stone was placed. King Edward I, as conqueror of Scotland, could be seen as inheriting a biblical mandate.

As pointed out by Archie Duncan (The Stone: 147–8), the account given of the Stone of Scone by the English chronicler, Walter of Guisborough, writing about 1305, describes it as lapis pergrandis (a very large stone), very probably referencing the same term used in the Vulgate version of the Bible to describe the stone set up by the Prophet Joshua as a witness to the covenant made by God with the people of Israel at Schechem when they renounced false gods. The idea that the Stone had biblical origins might well originally have been developed by the canons of Scone. The fact that later Scottish chroniclers stuck with the Stone's associations with Gaythelos and Simon Brecc and ignored any biblical dimension may have been because of the English espousal of that cause and the potential political dangers of the old enemy developing biblical arguments for the subjection of Scotland.

Q. HOW EARLY CAN WE TRACE THE STONE OF SCONE IN AUTHENTIC RECORDS?

A. Strictly speaking, the earliest contemporary record of the Stone of Scone dates to 1297, when it is listed in an inventory of jewels belonging to the former king of Scotland (John Balliol), then in the possession of the English in Edinburgh Castle (Stevenson 1870, 2: 144). The very full account, however, of the inauguration of King Alexander III at Scone in 1249, given in later chronicle sources, especially the Scotichronicon (Scotichronicon 5: 291–7), is believed to be a generally authentic account, and it specifically mentions the Stone. The same chronicle sources also claim inauguration or coronation ceremonies at Scone for King Giric in AD 875 (Scotichronicon 2: 319; reigned 878–89, according to Woolf 2007: 117) and Donald son of Constantine in AD 896 (Scotichronicon 2: 327; reigned 889–900, according to Woolf 2007: 122), but these clearly cannot be regarded as authoritative, given that they are recording events several hundreds of years earlier which are uncorroborated in any other way. Much later accounts of the crowning of early kings on the Stone at Scone contained in the history by Hector Boece and derivative works do not bear consideration as historical sources.

The lack of mention of Scone in early texts concerning royal inaugurations is perhaps surprising. There does not seem to have been much doubt, however, that inauguration ceremonies from Alexander III backwards in time to the 9th century took place there.

There is an intriguing mention of 'the most powerful eastern stone' contained in an Irish poem linking the royal houses of Leinster and Scotland, believed to date to the late 11th century. This powerful stone is invoked by the mother of King Aedan mac Gabrain (actually a contemporary of St Columba) as a witness to the truth of what she is saying. If, as seems likely, this stone is the Stone of Scone, it does provide evidence for its existence, and importance as a ritual object, almost 200 years earlier than the inauguration of Alexander III (The Stone: 103–5).

Q. WHY SCONE?

A. Hector Boece claimed in his 16th-century history that the Stone had been taken by King Kenneth mac Alpin to Scone, the place of his main victory over the Picts. Scone appears in the 10th-century Latin Chronicle of the Kings of Alba as the place where in AD 906 King Constantine and Bishop Cellach 'swore to keep the laws and disciplines of the faith and the rights of the churches and of the gospels in the same manner as the Gaels'. This was done on the Hill of Faith near the royal monastery of Scone (The Stone: 102).

The presence, alone, of a royal monastery marks the place out as one of importance. The Hill of Faith is clearly the Moot Hill at Scone, the largest, in terms of diameter, assembly mound in Scotland (pers. comm., Oliver O'Grady). Mounds are associated with royal inauguration places in Ireland (FitzPatrick 2004: 92–7). The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba, therefore, hints strongly that Scone was an

important power centre in the kingdom of Alba by the beginning of the 10th century, one where there may already have been a tradition of inaugurating kings. Alex Woolf (2007: 103–4) suggests that the palace at Cinnbelathoir where King Donald, brother of Kenneth mac Alpin, died in AD 862 was at Scone.

Adomnán, in his history of St Columba, written about AD 700, has an angel sent by God to order the holy man to ordain Áedán son of Gabrán as king (in Argyll of the Corcu Réti), which he does on Iona by laying his hand on his head and blessing him (Sharpe 1995: 208–9). This is reckoned to be pseudo-history (Fraser 2009: 121), but nevertheless it is perhaps significant that, while the story, written by a churchman, demonstrates the importance of the secular authority submitting to a higher religious will, there is no mention of any secular ceremony involved in Áedán's elevation to kingship. It has been suggested that this ordination of Áedán is recalled by an inscription on the second version of the small seal of Alexander III known to have been used 1252 x 1257: ESTO PRUDENS UT SERPENS ET SIMPLEX SICUT COLUMBA, 'Be wary as a serpent and simple like a dove' (Columba = dove) (The Stone: 192).

Archie Duncan (2002: 130) has drawn attention to how Scone is called 'of the high shields' and 'of melodious shields' in a 12th-century Irish poem, Berchan's Prophecy, in relation to 9th- and 10th-century events, and suggests that these descriptions may relate to a time when kings were acclaimed at Scone by being raised on a shield. Slender though the value of the evidence contained in the Chronicle of the Kings of Alba, Adomnán's account and this poem is, it does suggest that any meaningful context for the Stone and royal inauguration ceremonies at Scone does not pre-date the 9th century at earliest. Duncan's suggestion that Scone replaced an earlier royal inauguration centre at Forteviot or Dunning in the late 9th century is pure speculation (Duncan 2002: 130).

The Augustinian house of Scone, founded by King Alexander I about 1120, had its church and conventual buildings erected adjacent to the Moot Hill. Its foundation charter does not survive, but one of 1163 x 1164 by King Malcolm IV states that it had been founded in the principal seat of our kingdom (Barrow 1960: no. 243). In the 14th century it was still believed that Scone was the site where anciently kings of the Picts and the Scots had the chief seat of government (Skene 1872: 218). Archie Duncan (2002: 83) has suggested that Alexander I intended his priory at Scone to be a Scottish equivalent of Westminster Abbey as a place for the coronation of kings, standing in relation to the burgh of Perth in the same way as Westminster was linked to London.

Q. IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE FOR HOW THE STONE OF SCONE WAS USED IN SCOTTISH INAUGURATION CEREMONIES?

A. The actual place for inaugurating kings is said, in the context of Alexander III's ceremony in 1249, to have been at the cross which stood in the cemetery at the east end of the abbey church of Scone (Scotichronicon 5: 293). The cross, which no longer survives, would probably have been a free-standing stone monument of earlier date than the abbey. Recent archaeological research shows the location of the abbey to have been to the east of Scone Palace and to the south and east of

the Moot Hill (www.openvirtualworlds.org/reconstructions/scone-abbey/). The cross would therefore have stood well to the east of the Moot Hill. It may well have been superseded by the surviving late-medieval market cross of Scone, previously sited at the entrance into Scone Palace grounds (https://canmore.org.uk/site/28194/scone-palace-market-cross).

If it were not for Bower's account of Alexander III's inauguration, the assumption would undoubtedly have been that royal inaugurations took place on the nearby Moot Hill, presumed also to have been where open-air assemblies took place. Compare, for instance, the open-air assemblies that still take place annually on the hill at Tynwald in the Isle of Man. Dauvit Broun suggests that various features involved in making Alexander III king were specifically devised for that occasion, not least the innovation of locating the enthronement by the cross rather than on the Moot Hill (The Stone: 192).

This author is inclined not to place too much reliance on Bower's understanding of the exact location of events in 1249, not least because they appear to be contradicted by the illustration of the inauguration ceremony of Alexander III in the Corpus Christi manuscript of the Scotichronicon (see further below). It can be interpreted as showing both the cross and the ceremony around the seated king as taking place on the Moot Hill. In an earlier part of the Scotichronicon, derived from John of Fordun (Scotichronicon 2: 415, 417; Skene 1872: 177), the royal seat, on which kings sat in royal attire when proclaiming judgments, laws and statutes, is specifically said to have been on the Moot Hill. The context is of more than passing interest since it is describing how King Malcolm (Malcolm II, Mael Coluim son of Cinaed, reigned 1005–34) gave away all the lands of his kingdom apart from the Moot Hill of Scone. This story is not backed up by any earlier sources.

Writing before Bower, about 1305, but about the later inauguration ceremony of King John in 1292, was the English chronicler, Walter of Guisborough. Guisborough deserves to be taken very seriously. He is considered a reliable source for late-13th-century events in the north of Britain, particularly those concerning Anglo-Scottish relations, and the Augustinian house at Guisborough of which he was a canon is known to have had strong links with the Bruce family (Taylor 2004). He wrote that the inauguration ceremony of King John in 1292 took place on the Stone, placed next to the high altar in the church of Scone Abbey. Archie Duncan has supposed that this location might have been an innovation to suit the high-ranking Englishmen who took part, not least Anthony Bek, the Bishop of Durham (The Stone: 147). Gesta Annalia (John of Fordun), it should be noted, in the context of the inauguration of Alexander III, says that the Stone, which was the royal throne, and was placed outside by the cross for the ceremony, 'is' kept reverently in the monastery (Skene 1872: 290). This appears to be a piece of text composed prior to the removal of the Stone in 1296 and backs up the idea that it was normally positioned by the high altar.

There is a certain amount of ambiguity in early descriptions of the Stone as a stone and also as a chair. Given that it is only about 0.265m in height, it would have to have been raised off the ground in order for it to be sat upon with any dignity. The earliest detailed description of it, which implies a chair, is also provided by Walter of Guisborough when describing the inauguration of King John:

lapis pergrandis … concavus quidem et ad modum rotundae cathedrae confectus

(a very large stone, somewhat concave, shaped in the manner of a round chair)

Since this description does not appear to apply to the stone as it survives today, Archie Duncan suggested that it might result from a mistaken version of an accurate account utilised by Guisborough. He focused his attention on the word rotundae (round), which might reasonably have appeared in the original source in abbreviated form as rõte, but intended there to mean robuste (of oak). So the original description would have been of a very large stone, somewhat concave, shaped in the manner of an oak chair. From this, Duncan concluded the Stone was enclosed in a wooden throne, perhaps from as early as the foundation of Scone Abbey about 1115, and that this wooden throne was kept inside the abbey church. The tradition of taking it outside for royal inauguration ceremonies may only have been broken in 1292 (The Stone: 147–8).

Although Duncan wished to dismiss Guisborough's use of the word rotundae as mistaken, it should be pointed out that there is another well-known inauguration stone, the Prince's Stone at Klagenfurt in Austria, which could aptly be described as 'a very large stone, somewhat concave, shaped in the manner of a round chair'. It is the reversed base of an Ionic column of Roman origin. The possibility that the Stone was substantially larger until its removal to Westminster has already been considered above, and dismissed. It is alternatively possible that Guisborough did not intend that the word rotundae should be understood to mean 'round' rather than perfect, complete or self-contained.

Whether or not Archie Duncan's reinterpretation of rotundae as robuste is valid, the idea that the Stone was housed in a wooden chair for at least some of its time is intriguing. It is certainly worth considering whether the idea behind the coronation chair at Westminster is in fact Scottish. The English chronicler William Rishanger wrote that the Stone was taken to Westminster and orders were given for it to be made into a chair for the priest celebrating Mass (Riley 1865: 163). If it was normally kept by the high altar in Scone Abbey, and was already incorporated in a stone or wooden chair, no doubt it would have been used during Mass by the officiating clergy of Scone Abbey.

To pursue this argument further – might it also be the case that the Westminster coronation chair is modelled on a Scottish original? This was not a possible antecedent considered by Paul Binski in 2003 (The Stone: 209–15) or by Warwick Rodwell in his 2013 monograph on the coronation chair. There are no other surviving wooden chairs of the 13th or early 14th century that can be meaningfully compared with the coronation chair, although the forms such pieces of furniture took is generally well understood through a study of contemporary representations (Eames 1977: 181–98). Binski draws attention to the representations of kings seated on thrones as modelled on royal seals. He points out that the earliest representation of a high-backed, tracery-detailed royal throne is on the 1257 seal of Richard, Earl of Cornwall, as king of the Romans. It is closely followed in 1259 by the throne on the seal of his brother, King Henry III of England, and also by the second great seal of Alexander III of Scotland (The Stone: 213–14 and col. illus. 1.6). The design of the seal of Alexander III is assumed to be derived

from that of Henry III, but the exact date when the matrix for it was made is not known. As, however, Binski points out, such representations on seals are just that, representations of an idea, not realistic images of actual furniture. It should also be said that the engravers who made the matrices for these seals had no understanding of perspective, and trying to reconstruct their thrones in three dimensions would be a challenging exercise.

Nevertheless, perhaps there is the germ of an idea to retain here, the representation of Alexander III seated in majesty on a complex, high-backed wooden throne, perhaps first at a time not too distant from his inauguration. If that is of relevance to how the Stone was housed in Scotland, then there are other early representations of thrones which appear much more accurate, and potentially relevant, than those on the royal seals. We are referring here to the chairs for the kings, queens and bishops amongst the hoard of walrus ivory gaming pieces of the late 12th and early 13th centuries buried in the Isle of Lewis. As the writer has written copiously elsewhere, these belong in the Scandinavian World of which Lewis was a significant part prior to Alexander III acquiring it through the Treaty of Perth in 1266 (e.g. Caldwell et al. 2011). That the thrones on these playing pieces are realistic representations of actual pieces of furniture is demonstrated by surviving examples of medieval wooden furniture, for example an early-13th-century box chair from Blakar farm in Guldbrandsdalen, Norway. If an image were required of what a wooden chair containing the Stone of Scone looked like, sited in Scone Abbey prior to 1296, a useful model would be one of the Lewis chessmen. A Scottish wood-carver of the 13th century would possibly have had a repertoire of designs not too different from those carved on the chess pieces.

If the Stone of Scone was set in a chair while in Scotland, we also have to consider the possibility that that chair was of stone, perhaps crudely put together of stone slabs, as seems to have been the case with the chair at Tulach Óg in Ireland on which the Ó Néills were inaugurated (The Stone: 106, illus. 34) and the coronation chair of the Dukes of Carinthia in Austria (ibid.: col. illus. 1.5). Archie Duncan (ibid.: 146–7) rejected the idea that there was a stone chair in favour of a wooden one, though, of course, there could have been both, one replacing the other. The case for a stone chair has not been helped by the description of it as marble, which Duncan dismissed as a rhetorical fancy.

Fordun, followed by Bower, described the throne of stone, given to Simon Brecc by his father, the king of the Scots in Spain, and taken by him to Ireland, as a marble chair, sculptured in very antique workmanship by a careful artist (Skene 1872: 23; Scotichronicon 1: 65). The idea of a marble stone, seat or chair then appears in the pages of Boece's history of Scotland, first published in 1527 (Boethius 1575: Liber 7/17, 10/68, 11/10, 11/14), even though it might be supposed that by that time there would be an awareness amongst leading Scots that the stone in Westminster Abbey hardly answered to that description. They may, however, have been aware that the throne used by English kings in Westminster Hall was a marble seat (Armstrong 1948: 59), and perhaps that introduced some element of confusion into their minds concerning the Scottish Stone.

On the one hand, it is not inappropriate to point out that the throne of the Holy Roman Emperors in Aachen Cathedral is made up of slabs of marble. Leading

Scots in the 13th century and earlier might well have been aware of this fact and deliberately have sought out marble to enclose their Stone, in order to dignify the status of their own kings. On the other hand, there is no good reason to assume that medieval chroniclers were using the term marble in a strictly petrological sense. Perhaps all that was meant was a distinctive, hard rock, well polished. It is clear from Donald Monro, writing about the monuments at Iona in 1549, and Martin Martin on the same subject at the very end of the 17th century, that they identified local chlorite schist as marble, when carved into monuments (Munro 1961: 62; Martin 1994: 287). Thus we might envisage a chair at Scone made of slabs of polished rock, containing the Stone of Scone as the actual seat.

Q. ARE THERE EARLY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE STONE OF SCONE IN USE?

A. Yes, there are two medieval representations of the inaugurations of Scottish kings at Scone, though in neither can the actual stone itself be seen. Both date to a time long after the Stone had been removed to England.

The great seals used by Scottish kings from Edgar (reigned 1097–1107) onwards have representations of them enthroned as law-givers. The poses and details of their seats often clearly relate to representations on English and French royal seals, and in any case these images need not be taken as representing their inaugurations. That leaves the following two images:

1.   The obverse of the seal of Scone Abbey. It shows a seated figure of a king surrounded by other figures (described and analysed further below). Archie Duncan dated its design to the 13th century (1975: 555–6). His views were followed by John Bannerman (1989) and were then developed further by Duncan in his contribution to The Stone (151), where he suggested that the matrix, on the basis of its style and lettering, could have been made in the mid-13th century. Geoffrey Barrow (1997: 117) preferred to date the seal later than that and identify the design as specifically showing the inauguration of John Balliol in 1292. The expert on seals, Walter de Gray Birch (1907, 2: 109), dated it to the 14th century. At issue here is whether the seal dates to a time when the use of the Stone in Scottish royal inauguration rites was still current.

The authoritative work on medieval Scottish seals (Stevenson and Wood 1940, 1: 200) only records versions of this seal on documents dating to the 1560s. Duncan (The Stone: 150) claimed it was in use in 1296 on the basis of a detached seal in the Westminster Chapter House Collection (Cal. Doc. Scot. 2: 543 no. 141), but there appears to be no sound basis to conclude that all the seals in this collection can be so dated. Indeed, this seal (SC 13/H32) is now catalogued by TNA as of 14th-century date. It should also be noted that an earlier seal of Scone Abbey was in use as late as 1291 (The Stone: 150).

Duncan's ascription of the seal to the 13th century, especially the mid-part of it, can also be questioned on stylistic grounds. The lettering on Scottish medieval seals is often conservative and there appears no solid grounds for dating that on the Scone seal any more precisely than to the 13th or 14th century. While the

image on it of a seated king – wearing a crown, holding a sceptre in his right hand and tugging on the cords of his mantle with his left hand – can be first seen in Scotland on the second great seal of King Alexander III, sometime prior to 1286, the closest comparison in the author's view is on the great seal of Robert II (reigned 1371–90) (Birch 1905: 153, no. 29). Of particular importance in making this comparison is the form of the crown. The author does not find convincing Duncan's arguments (The Stone: 150) that the Scone image of a king derives from that on the seal of minority of Alexander III.

Barrow's view that the Scone seal shows the inauguration of John Balliol rests largely on his view that the image of the king compares well with that on King John's great seal – a view contested by this writer – and the presence of the seal in the Chapter House collection hints that it may originally have been attached to a fealty of 1296. As noted above, this is by no means certain. A 14th-century date seems likely for this seal design, possibly mid-century. A good reason for not dating it even later is the presence in its design of a shield with arms supposed to be those of an Earl of Fife, of a form not likely to date later than the 1350s (McAndrew 2006: 38).

Duncan (1975: 555–6) interpreted the design as showing the inauguration of the young Alexander III. It is not clear, however, that the scene depicts a specific event, and this writer does not read the design as representing a boy of about eight rather than a beardless adult. The king in question is being vested in his robe by a bishop and cleric, probably the Bishop of St Andrews and Abbot of Scone. Behind the bishop is the Earl of Fife, and the Earl of Strathearn stands behind the abbot. These identifications are made on the basis of shields of arms in the space beneath, flanking the royal arms, and are supported by recent heraldic scholarship (McAndrew 2006: 38). In the space above, to the right of the king is a figure holding a small house-shaped shrine, and to his left another holding up a scroll, presumably containing the king's genealogy. The alleged house-shaped shrine can more reasonably be interpreted as an open gospel book from which the figure is reading – which is how Duncan reinterpreted it in 2003 (The Stone: 154). Another figure fills the space behind the scroll-holder and above the Earl of Strathearn. Bannerman (1989: 124) identified the figures with the book and the scroll as, respectively, the Bishop of Dunkeld – though not obviously wearing vestments – and the king's poet. Behind the latter is another figure who Bannerman (ibid.: 134) suggested might have a harp. This is not at all obvious.

For what it is worth, the king is shown seated on a chair or stool with a cushion or padded seat, extending slightly to either side. This chair may have a rectangular body, large enough to contain the Stone as we know it, supported on short legs. There are no signs of arm rests or a seat back, although if the engraver had imagined their existence he hardly had scope to represent them appearing from behind the relatively over-sized king.

2.   The painting of the inauguration of King Alexander III at Scone on Tuesday 13 July 1249, in the manuscript of Walter Bower's Scotichronicon in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (CC MS 171, fol. 206). The manuscript is believed to have been written about the mid-1440s under Bower's supervision and the painting was clearly planned when the text was laid out (Scotichronicon 9: 149, 172). The point of the illustration was to capture the moment when a venerable, aged Highlander

stepped forward to recite the genealogy of the boy king right back to Hiber, 'the first Scot', son of Gaythelos (Scotichronicon 5: 293, 295). It is competently executed, with remarkable detail like the decorative buttons on the Highlander's sleeves; but the colours have changed with the passage of time.

It shows Alexander with a large open crown, holding a sceptre in his left hand and wearing a long fur-lined and trimmed tunic with low-cut neck, open at the sides, underneath which he has a garment with long tight sleeves. He is seated on a hill, presumably the Moot Hill, with a cross, also on the hill in the background. As noted above, this apparent representation of the ceremony and the cross on the Moot Hill is contradicted by Bower's accompanying text which places both adjacent to each other well to the east of the Hill.

The seated king is flanked by two male figures, one holding a sheathed sword upright. This may be a reference to the dispute amongst the nobility immediately before the inauguration as to whether Alexander should be knighted (and by whom) – invested with the sword of knighthood – prior to being made king. The matter, according to Bower, was resolved by the bishop of St Andrews investing the king as a knight before proceeding with the rest of the ceremony (Scotichronicon 5: 291, 293). It should be noted, however, that both these male figures are shown in secular dress, probably representing the earls of Fife and Strathearn who the chronicler, John of Fordun, says led the king to his inauguration (Skene 1872: 289). The Highlander is described as attired after his own fashion, in a scarlet robe (pallio scarleto), represented by the artist as a plaid wrapped diagonally around his body. This is, in fact, the earliest surviving representation of such a garment in a Scottish context.

There is no sign in this painting of what the king is seated upon. It might be supposed, however, that if the artist had imagined a chair with sides and back there would be some signs of that in his design. Bower's text indicates that 'the royal seat of stone' (cathedram regalem lapideam) was bedecked with silk cloths embroidered with gold (Scotichronicon 5: 293). The figure behind the king's right shoulder is holding out the sword for the king to take in his right hand. The figure at the king's left shoulder is apparently in the process of draping a large mantle over the king's shoulders. It now appears as dark grey, but was probably originally painted to represent the 'royal purple' in which the text says he was clad (Scotichronicon 5: 295; cf. 9: 172).

Q. WHAT ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE STONE OF SCONE GOING TO WESTMINSTER ABBEY?

A. The information on the removal of the Stone from Scone and its arrival in Westminster Abbey is patchy, and to a certain extent contradictory.

In 1296, King Edward I of England won a crushing victory over the Scots at Dunbar, forced the abdication of their king John Balliol and the surrender of most Scots of any substance to his will. He embarked on a tour round the Scottish mainland, as far north as Elgin, heading back south from Kincardine to Perth on 4 August and then on to Lindores Abbey the following day (Tytler 1827: 279–80).

Edward evidently visited Scone Abbey on his way to Perth and viewed the Stone, which he had decided would make a fitting trophy of his conquest. He gave instructions for it to be removed (Rothwell 1957: 281; Riley 1865: 163). The Stone can then be traced in inventories of the English Royal Wardrobe as follows:

- 'a great stone, on which the kings of Scotland used to be crowned', listed amongst the jewels which belonged to the former king of Scotland remaining at the end of year 24 (1296–7) of King Edward I's reign, in Edinburgh Castle (Stevenson 1870, 2: 144). It is likely only to have arrived in Edinburgh Castle after the end of September 1296, since it does not appear in an inventory of jewels, and so on, made at that point (Bain 1884, 2: no. 840).

- 'a great stone, on which the kings of Scotland used to be crowned', listed amongst the jewels of the former king of Scotland still remaining at the end of year 31 (1303–4) from those inventoried in Edinburgh Castle in year 25 (Bain 1888, 4: 488).

In the meantime, on 27 March 1300, Adam, the king's goldsmith, had presented an account for payment of his expenses and those of Walter the king's painter, for making first a chair in bronze and then in wood to be placed over the Stone (Simpson and Galbraith 1986: no. 215).

We should also note here that the David Laing's (1872, 1: 168) edition of Wyntoun's Cronykil has the date 1310 in the margin adjacent to the text about the Stone being removed to London. This does not appear in other versions of the manuscript and need not be assumed to have any authority or reliability (Amours 1903, 2: 346–7).

There is no precise record of when the Stone was handed over to Westminster Abbey and placed in St Edward's Chapel. John Balliol's gold sceptre and crown, along with other royal Scottish treasures, were offered by King Edward to the shrine of St Edward in Westminster Abbey in 1297 (Stevenson 1870, 2: 142, 144). There is no note against the Stone in the Wardrobe account of that time to that effect, possibly because the king only intended to offer it once the chair to house it was complete. Nevertheless, a contemporary English chronicle says that the regalia of the kingdom of Scotland, the gold sceptre and crown and the seat (tribunal) were given by the king to St Edward on 18 June 1297 (Luard 1890, 3: 101). This may have been straight after the arrival of the Stone in London.

Finally, there should be noted here the ambiguous evidence of an inventory of 1307 that lists the gilded wooden chair which the king had ordered to be made, next to the shrine of St Edward. There is no specific mention of the Stone, but scored out in the entry is the statement that the chair had been made so that the kings of England and Scotland should sit on it on the day of their own coronation (Hunter 1856: 252; Rodwell 2013: 15).

Q. WHY DID KING EDWARD I GIVE THE STONE TO WESTMINSTER ABBEY?

A. It was probably Edward's intention, from deciding to take the Stone in 1296, that it should be a trophy, along with the Scottish regalia, a sign of his conquest of Scotland. Walter of Guisborough, writing perhaps before the precise destination of the Stone was known, says it was taken to London as a symbol of the conquest and surrender of Scotland (Rothwell 1957: 281). Writing a few years later, William Rishanger could say that it was taken to Westminster and orders were given for it to be made into a chair for the priest celebrating Mass (Riley 1865: 163).

That King Edward should have offered the Stone to the shrine of St Edward, his name saint and a predecessor on the throne of England, seems an obvious thing to have done. He would already have decided that that was where his own tomb would be. The real question here is whether he envisaged the Stone would have a ceremonial role in the future, more specifically in the coronations of English kings.

Already by 1297 Edward I had commissioned a throne of copper for the Stone. This was soon replaced in favour of a throne of wood, the present coronation chair, the account for the manufacture of which was submitted by Adam, the king's goldsmith, in 1300. The evidence for all this is given by Rodwell (2013: 35–43), who also suggests that the substitution of a wooden throne for a metal one may have been for reasons of weight. That would imply that the need to move the chair around was foreseen. That would not have been necessary if it were only envisaged as being used by officiating clergy, but would have been required if the Stone was already intended as the royal seat in future coronations. Coronations required much more space than was available in St Edward's Chapel. It is known that for coronations from at least 1399 onwards it was moved to the main crossing of the abbey church (Rodwell 2013: 115, 127).

There is surprisingly little information on medieval English coronations, and doubt has been expressed on whether the coronation chair and Stone of Scone featured in any of them prior to Henry IV's in 1399 (The Stone: 217; Rodwell 2013: 17). It does appear to the present writer that Edward I would have intended that it should have been so used, as apparently implied by the inventory of 1307 cited above (Hunter 1856: 252; Rodwell 2013: 15). Rodwell (2013: 18, fig. 22) is of the opinion that the Corpus Christi College painting of the coronation of Edward II in 1308 shows him seated on the coronation chair, although it is not an accurate rendering of its form or design. In 1308, however, Edward II would have had every reason to demonstrate that he was the king of Scotland as well as England. Coronation on the Stone would have been the obvious way to make that point.

Q. WHY WAS THE STONE NOT RETURNED TO SCOTLAND AS PART OF THE TREATY OF NORTHAMPTON IN 1328?

A. In peace negotiations with the English in the 1320s it is clear that the Scots wanted restitution of their muniments and treasures, including the Stone of Scone. When a treaty of peace was ratified at Northampton in July 1328 there was no

mention of the Stone, although Geoffrey Barrow believed it probable that there would have been an unofficial understanding that it should be returned (The Stone: 202–4). It is unlikely that the intransigence of the community of Westminster Abbey, expressed by chaining the Stone to the floor (Thompson 1889: 40–1), was a decisive factor. Perhaps the Scots did not dig in their heels in 1328 in the knowledge or hope that their proctors were making headway at the papal curia in securing recognition of Robert Bruce as king and gaining the right to coronation and unction (Duncan 2002: 142). With full papal recognition of the sovereign status of Scottish kings and few occasions in the rest of the medieval period when English administrations would have wished to make a special effort to please the Scots, the Stone, it seems, dropped from view as a possible negotiating counter. At the same time, the Scots could console themselves with the prophecy that they would reign wherever the Stone was placed.

Q. HOW WAS THE STONE USED IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY?

A. The Stone was set in a chair, commissioned by King Edward I, which was positioned next to the altar in St Edward's Chapel in Westminster Abbey (Rodwell 2013: 39–42). It was intended, on a day-to-day basis, to serve as a seat for the priest saying Mass at that altar. It is probable that from the very beginning the abbey clergy would have accepted the biblical identification of the Stone, more specifically as Jacob's Pillar, and as a result viewed it as sacred relic. They may have been less impressed with its credentials as the seat of Scottish kings. They could well have understood that the Stone had traditionally played its part in a ceremony that was secular in character, outside of the church of Scone Abbey.

Probably, however, from 1308 onwards, the chair with its Stone, known as St Edward's Chair throughout the 14th century (ibid.: 42), was used in the coronations of English kings. There were two parts to the proceedings involved in making English kings. Probably from as early as the 11th century they were enthroned in Westminster Hall before being taken to the abbey for unction and coronation (Armstrong 1948; Duncan 2002: 129). By 1308 the chair in question must have been the grandest in the abbey, and probably always intended by Edward I for use in the coronations of his successors. It is remarkable, however, that an essentially Scottish secular object was thus adopted for use in the religious part of the making of English kings. For the coronations of Henry IV in 1399 and Edward VI in 1547 the chair was moved to the crossing of the abbey church, as for the coronations of Mary and Elizabeth I (Rodwell 2013: 115, 127). It is probable that this was done at other times, too.

Q. DID THE STONE EVER LEAVE WESTMINSTER ABBEY BETWEEN THE REIGN OF EDWARD I AND ITS RETURN TO SCOTLAND IN 1996?

A. The most well-known episode concerning the Stone in modern times took place at Christmas in 1950 when a group of Scottish political activists managed to steal it and take it back to Scotland (Gerber 1997: 1–21; Rodwell 2013: 186–99). The chair,

undoubtedly along with the Stone, had, however, been taken from the abbey in 1657 for the installation of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector (Rodwell 2013: 130). This took place in Westminster Hall, and is an event deserving more study. On the one hand, there is much that should be teased out about the symbolism of this event, and, on the other hand, more consideration needs to be given as to whether some of the damage the Stone has suffered was down to – deliberately? – rough handling by an anti-monarchical administration that would have placed no value on its alleged biblical associations.

FINALLY – THE AUTHOR'S OVERVIEW

The following account is the writer's best effort to make sense of the data presented above, liberally filled out with speculation. No doubt it is not the last word on the subject. If it provides new avenues for future research it will at least have served some useful purpose.

There is probably no good reason to look for the real story of the Stone any earlier than the late 9th century, nor trace its origins to any other centre than Scone. The context for its genesis is the emergence of the kingdom of Alba, the kingdom of the Picts and the Scots, with a royal centre of considerable importance at Scone. The need for more elaborate ceremonies and procedures to affirm kingship may have been deemed necessary about that time, especially for Donald son of Constantine whose reign (889–900) seems to mark a new beginning, a regime change. Perhaps there had already been a tradition in Pictish times of kings being proclaimed at Scone by being raised on a shield, and the kings of Alba were seeking to update and elaborate that ceremony. This may not have been totally unrelated to the taking, not so many years earlier in 878, of the relics of St Columba to Ireland. Was the loss of them to kings and churchmen based in Alba behind the need for a new symbol of power?

The Stone selected for a role in revised inauguration rites was one hallowed by previous use, perhaps as a threshold or step in the palace or a church at Scone. It must always have been the intention that the Stone should be raised off the ground so that the chosen one could sit upon it with some dignity. For much or all of the time that would have been achieved by having it incorporated in a chair, possibly made of stone slabs, most probably sited on the Moot Hill. The ironwork on the Stone may originate either in some arrangement to give such a chair solidity and stability or else prevent the Stone being moved illicitly. Changes to the Stone, specifically its shortening and cutting of channels and recesses for the ironwork, would relate to changes or updates to the chair. The possible role of the ironwork attachments in facilitating ceremonial processions with the Stone, whether initially intended for that or not, may date back to an early period in its use as a throne.

At the time this Stone was selected for use in royal inaugurations there was probably a clear understanding of why it was appropriate. This very probably was nothing to do with stories of Scota, Simon Brecc and so on, or with Jacob dreaming in the desert. This original rationale has been lost, swamped by later politicking. We can only suggest that it was the Stone's qualities as a step or threshold, and relationship with great men, lay or religious, associated with Scone, which marked it out. If there was an awareness that the Stone was a step or

threshold, that would surely have been viewed as an apt metaphor for the transformation of a chosen one into a king. In that context, the supposed slice marks by a sword may well be significant in representing the divide from one state to the other.

Although kings of Scots prior to David II had not been granted papal permission for unction and coronation, there was probably always a significant church involvement in the royal inaugurations. This probably resulted in tension on some occasions between churchmen and the secular authority, and, indeed, the relationships between clerical and lay authorities vis-à-vis the Stone and its role is one of the key elements in its story, from beginning to end.

Inauguration ceremonies for kings were secular in origin, and a great deal of the symbolism was about leading the people in war and peace. Much of the point of an icon like the Stone of Scone was to demonstrate the new king's relationship with, and power over, his land, represented by the rock on which he sat. In the fully developed Scottish origin myths, the Stone represented continuity with a very long line of kings who had conquered Scotland for their people and then seen off numerous external threats. The Stone really was an object of destiny, a guarantee of the right of kings of Scots to reign wherever it was. Edward I and later English kings no doubt saw the potency of sitting on this Stone of Scotland in demonstrating their claim to overlordship of Scotland.

The Church, as in all times and places, reckoned it had a major role to play in Christianising events, in demonstrating the power of God, even over mortal kings. An early example of the Church extending its support to or interfering in king-making – depending on your viewpoint – is Adomnán's assertion of the important role given by God to Columba in ordaining Áedán as king. Possibly the rectangular markings on the surface of the Stone are best interpreted as an early would-be desire to have it sanctified by the inclusion of appropriate holy relics. By the time of Alexander III's inauguration in 1249 there is apparently a situation where there are two separate parts to the ceremony, one inside Scone Abbey church, the other at the Stone, positioned outside. Perhaps, however, as an innovation for that occasion, the Stone was placed next to a (Christian) cross, well away from its traditional emplacement on the Moot Hill. By 1292 the Stone was housed in the abbey church, and that is where the inauguration of John Balliol was held. Meanwhile, it is probable that the canons of Scone had re-identified the Stone as a biblical relic.

In terms of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities jostling for power and influence over the making of kings, it would appear that the Church was winning. No doubt it was helped by the understandable desire of Scottish kings to be crowned and anointed like other sovereigns, and the requirement that such privileges could only be granted by the Pope. Perhaps this led the young Alexander III's advisers to accept so many innovations in 1249, including the casting of garments, as at the inauguration of Jehu as king of Israel. If they did not have the authority they craved from the Pope, they could at least make their ceremony as holy as possible.

The Stone, housed inside the abbey by the late 13th century, and presumably incorporated in a chair by the high altar, must have been used during Mass by the officiating priest. It is an intriguing possibility that by the time the Stone was taken

by the English in 1296 it was in a wooden chair, one that might have been the model for the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey. Although it was probably always Edward I's intention that the Stone, incorporated in the chair he had made for it, should be used in future coronations of English kings, the community of Westminster Abbey saw the Stone as a sacred biblical relic, and the chair and stone essentially for their liturgical use. English coronations had also traditionally had a secular element, an enthronement in Westminster Hall prior to coronation and unction in the abbey. There was already by Edward I's time an appropriate throne in Westminster Hall, and, perhaps ironically, the symbol of the secular part of making Scottish kings ended up as the base for the (religious) coronation of English kings. In modern times English vandals have picked at the stone as a relic, while Scottish thieves sought it as a symbol of nationhood.

The Stone of Scone may have begun its existence as an actual threshold in an architectural context. In many ways it has remained a threshold ever since, marking the transition of an ordinary person to a monarch, and occupying the threshold of royal and ecclesiastical power, both in Scotland and England.

ABBREVIATIONS

HMSO Her Majesty's Stationery Office

TNA   The National Archives (Kew)

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