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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

EDINBURGH CASTLE – STONE OF DESTINY (*AN LIA FÀIL*)

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Cover image: Stone of Destiny in the Great Hall at Edinburgh Castle before its journey south for the coronation of Charles III. ©Rob McDougall.

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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

EDINBURGH CASTLE: STONE OF DESTINY (*AN LIA FÀIL*)

Contents

1. SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

The Stone of Destiny (*An Lia Fàil* in Gaelic, also known as the Stone of Scone, hereafter referred to as the Stone) is one of the most precious and important icons of Scottish nationhood, an artefact of ritual and symbolic importance. It was on this rock that kings of the Scots,[1] up to and including John Balliol in 1292, were seated at Scone when made kings, and it later served the same function for coronations of monarchs of England and of the United Kingdom in Westminster Abbey. It is a rectangular piece of sandstone about 0.67m by 0.42m by 0.265m quarried in the locality of Scone. It has iron fittings at both ends and wear patterns, tooling and breaks bear witness to a long and complicated history.

The Stone was removed from Scotland by King Edward I of England soon after his subjection of the Scots in 1296. A contemporary English chronicler, Walter of Guisborough, wrote that Edward intended it to be a souvenir of his successful military campaign and a symbol of the subjection of the Scots. It was lodged in a chair built for the purpose, now known as the Coronation Chair, in the chapel of St Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey. In 1996 Queen Elizabeth II consented to the Stone being returned to Scotland, where it has been displayed in Edinburgh Castle ever since.

In Westminster Abbey the Stone had to compete with many other more visible, largely sculptural, riches for the attention of visitors. In Edinburgh Castle it is housed in the Crown Room with the Honours of Scotland. Despite the Stone being rather plain especially when compared to the Honours or maybe because of this juxtaposition, it became one of the 'must-see' attractions for all visitors to the castle.

In 2020 the Commissioners for the Safeguarding of the Regalia concluded that it should be the centrepiece in the new Perth Museum being developed in Perth City Hall (scheduled to open in 2024).

[1] Prior to the Stone's removal to England, all known ceremonies using it involved kings only.


Figure 1: General view of the Stone of Destiny. © Historic Environment Scotland.

1.2 Statement of Significance

The significance of the Stone is its role in the making of monarchs in Scotland and England. It is remarkable that that role has persisted at least from the 13th century at Scone until, most recently, the coronation of King Charles III on 6 May 2023 at Westminster Abbey. There have been different explanations of the origins and history of the Stone throughout its recorded history but there has never been any doubt about its symbolic importance as a national icon, sitting on which gave sovereigns prestige and authority. This is evident both in the medieval period, where references to the Stone are closely tied to discussions about the development and maintenance of Scotland as an independent kingdom, and in more recent times when the Stone has become a symbol of Scottish nationalism.

2. ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

2.1 Background

The Stone was a seat or throne at Scone in Scotland on which kings were placed during their inauguration ceremonies, certainly by 1292. The earliest mention of the Stone was made by the 15th-century Scottish chronicler, Walter Bower, who claimed that after the death of Macbeth in 1057 some of his family placed a kinsman, Lulach (*Lùlach mac Gille Chomghain*), nicknamed the Idiot, on 'the royal throne at Scone'.[2] No explanation is

[2] Watt 1995, vol 3, 21.

provided of the nature of this throne and an uncorroborated description like this, written some 400 years after the event it describes, has to be treated with a considerable degree of caution.

It is clear that the Stone as we know it today, on the basis of its recorded history, is the stone used in the inauguration ceremony of King John at Scone in 1292 and subsequently for English and U.K. monarchs. There is, however, no certainty that records of stones or thrones involved in such ceremonies at Scone in earlier times relate to this particular one. Indeed, there is evidence from Mora in Sweden, where several kings of Medieval Sweden were elected, that different stones were used for successive kings.[3]

Its role in making monarchs gave the Stone considerable symbolic significance in terms of the monarchy of an independent Scotland, which explains why King Edward I of England, when he believed he had conquered Scotland, had it removed to Westminster Abbey as a trophy of war.[4] There it was housed in a lavishly decorated, purpose-made chair, now known as the Coronation Chair, and being seated on that came to be an important part of the making of English monarchs, and later those of the United Kingdom. Thus the Stone played a prominent and significant part in the history of the separate kingdoms of Scotland and England and traditions grew up to explain that. The ceremonial role of the Stone continued after the union of the Crowns of Scotland and England in 1603 until the present day.

2.1.1 The Stone's physical appearance today

The Stone is described as it sits when positioned in the Coronation Chair, although, it should be noted, this is upside down in relation to its orientation when quarried. Terms like lefthand and righthand relate to the Stone as viewed from the front of the Chair.

The Stone is roughly rectangular in shape, about 0.67m x 0.442m x 0.265m, of pale, pinky grey sandstone, containing occasional clasts, some of them purple-grey pebbles of mudstone. It weighs 3 cwt (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 side and the other end in the left-hand end. The upper surface has a crudely delineated rectangle outlined by an intermittent groove. 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.

[3] Larsson 2010.
[4] Rothwell 1957, 281.

Figure 2: General view of the Stone of Destiny. © Historic Environment Scotland.

2.1.2 Names for the Stone

The Stone has been called different things over the years. It is popularly now known by many as the 'Stone of Destiny', translating the Latin *fatalis* ('of destiny') which occurs in some early Scottish sources. The name 'Stone of Scone' first appears in the mid-14th-century *Chronicle of Lanercost* describing events in 1327.[5] 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'.[6] 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 monarchs of Scotland were crowned. 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.[7]

[5] Maxwell 1913, 260.
[6] Clancy 2003, 103–05.
[7] Stevenson 1870, vol 2, 144; Luard 1890, vol 3, 101; Aitchison 2009, 12–13.

2.2 Evidential values

The Evidential value of the Stone is high. By comparing and contrasting the object with descriptions of the stone with historic descriptions we can better understand its place in history. And, as new scientific analyses have shown, it retains the ability to reveal new information to add to our understanding of the object. It thus provides an insight into medieval values given to the stone, as well as to aspects of craftwork (masonry, metalworking). The Stone also provides direct evidence as to the modifications it has undergone during its life. This may in future help provide evidence as to changes in use, but data is currently insufficient for this purpose.

2.2.1 Earliest descriptions of the Stone

There is a certain amount of ambiguity in early descriptions of the Stone as a stone and also 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. It is therefore likely that it was part of or included in a chair in its time in Scotland. That chair may have changed or been significantly modified over the years.

Some early Scottish writers who may never have seen the Stone themselves described it as a marble seat.[8] On the one hand, they may have been predisposed to believe that such an important object should have been manufactured from that type of stone. On the other hand, it need not be supposed that the marble they had in mind was a petrologically correct description in line with present day geological understanding. They may only have meant a hard, polished stone.

The Stone was described about 1305 by the English chronicler, Walter of Guisborough writing about the inauguration of King John in 1292. It was *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 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.[9] If rotundae is really the word intended by Guisborough he very probably used it in the sense of 'perfect', 'complete' or 'self-contained'. Nevertheless, the possibility that in 1292 the Stone was housed in a wooden chair should not lightly be dismissed.

According to the Scottish historian Hector Boece, writing in the early 16th century, it was believed by some that a popular rhyme was carved upon the Stone by the 9th-century king, Kenneth mac Alpin (*Coinneach mac Ailpein*):

> *Ni fallat fatum, Scoti quocunque locatum*
> *Invenient lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem*

[8] For example, Boethius 1575, *Liber* 7/17, 11/10, 13/59; Turnbull 1858, 21, 26, 32, 37.
[9] Duncan 2003, 147–48.

(Unless the Fates are faithless found,
And prophet's voice be vain,
Where'er this monument be found
There Scottish race shall reign)[10]

This rhyme can be traced back to the Scottish chronicler, John of Fordun, in the late 14th century, but there is no trace of it on the Stone today or corroborative evidence that it ever was.[11]

2.2.2 Expert analyses

Analyses of the Stone by experts, including geologists, a stone mason, archaeologists and conservators, since its return to Scotland in 1996, have resulted in a more detailed understanding of the processes and events that have shaped the way the Stone is today.

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.[12]

It is possible to deduce several episodes in the formation of the Stone as it is now, the more significant of which are listed here.

1. Wear on the back of the top, near the righthand end, is consistent with the use of the stone as a step.
2. Roughly cut lines marking out a rectangular area on the top, apparently the work of more than one hand, some relatively neat, some much cruder
3. Slice marks on the back of the top, near the lefthand end.
4. A linear, gentle hollow running across the top between the two ring recesses.
5. Two recesses in the top for housing the iron rings.
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 on top. The edges of these slots show evidence of weathering.
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. 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

[10] Boethius 1575, *Liber* 10/54.
[11] Skene 1872, 24.
[12] Much of this assessment is derived from two reports by Peter Hill, an experienced stone and historic buildings consultant. Hill 2003, 11–31; Hill 2016.

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, untidy, diagonal tooling.
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.
10. Around the bottom edges of the Stone there is extensive damage, largish flakes of stone having come detached. A scan of the Stone made by HES staff in 2023, prior to its use in the coronation of King Charles III, has revealed an inscription, 'XXXV', apparently the Roman numeral 35. This appears upside down where a flake has been detached at the bottom edge of the back of the Stone.

2.2.3 Interpretation

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. This is of importance for two reasons. First, if the Stone was substantially altered after its arrival in Westminster Abbey, so it could be fitted within the framework of the Coronation Chair (Figure 3), that might indicate a view on the sacredness of the Stone at that time and how it was to be used. Second, if the Stone in its present form is essentially how it was when removed by Edward I then that might advance understanding of its previous history and function in Scotland. The following interpretations will draw attention to signs of wear and deliberate alterations that result from processes and different episodes over very long periods of time.

Figure 3: Stone of Destiny in the Coronation Chair, Westminster Abbey. © Crown Copyright reproduced courtesy of Historic Scotland.

The wear on the top surface identified as the result of the use of the Stone as a step [episode 1 listed above] could surely only belong to a time prior to its removal to England. 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 had been used in such a way over a period of several hundred years prior to 1249 that it would show significant wear from royal feet. Use as a step would seem most likely to relate to a previous function unrelated to the Stone's role in inauguration ceremonies.

The crudely roughed out rectangular area on the top surface [episode 2] is generally considered to be a failed or incomplete attempt to create a recess. The attempt was abandoned, possibly because it was apparent that continuation would result in the Stone breaking. Suggestions for its proposed use include the insertion of a holy relic or super-altar. There is a clear relationship between the outlining of this rectangular area and the cutting of the recesses to house the iron rings at both ends of the Stone [episode 5]. The latter cut through the former. This is a significant observation because it has

been claimed that the rectangular outline was an aborted effort in post-medieval times to house a metal plaque providing information on the Stone.[13]

Slice marks on the back of the top, near the left-hand end of the Stone, have been identified as a crude cross [episode 3]. Whether or not a cross was intended, groups of cut marks 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.[14] It is likely that they relate to some ritual activity, perhaps in the case of the Stone, marking in monarch-making ceremonies the divide between a royal candidate's ordinary and regal status.

The hollow running across the centre top of the Stone [episode 4] may be interpreted as the wear caused by having a bar slotted through the rings at both ends for carrying the stone. A medieval, wooden bookchest preserved in Hereford Cathedral is fitted with a sturdy wooden pole, fixed through similar mounts to the Stone, for carrying it about. If the iron rings were added before the Stone moved to Westminster Abbey (which is still disputed by some authors) the hollow on the Stone's top surface could have resulted from very many short, ceremonial trips at Scone over a long period of time or else long journeys from Scone to Edinburgh and then on to Westminster.[15]

It has been suggested that the iron links and rings attached to the Stone [episode 7] are evidence for further alterations to the Stone while in England. The chronicler Geoffrey le Baker recorded that about 1328 the community of Westminster Abbey were so fearful that their Stone should be taken from them and returned to the Scots that they chained it to the floor.[16] That does not necessarily mean that the metalwork was only attached at that time. 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. It was discovered in 1996 when the Stone was removed from the Chair that it was a very tight fit. It may have been found necessary to make such a minor adjustment to house the Stone successfully when it was first installed in the Coronation Chair.

In assessing the date and original function of the Stone's metalwork it is important to note that the edges of the slots [episode 6] in the two ends for housing the iron links show evidence of weathering. This implies that the Stone stood outside with its cut down ends exposed for some considerable length of time prior to it being enclosed in a

[13] Rodwell 2013, 121–24.
[14] Newman 2009.
[15] If the rings were added after the Stone was removed to Westminster, the question of how this hollow was created remains. No other plausible explanation has been advanced as yet.
[16] Rodwell 2013, 17; Thompson 1889, 40–41. The Scots had petitioned for the return of the Stone in 1324 during peace negotiations at York. (Penman 2014, 253). Its return was allegedly agreed in later negotiations at Holyrood in March 1328. (Penman 2014, 288).

chair. It does not appear that this weathering could have happened after the Stone's removal to England.

The tooling on the back of the Stone may indicate that this face, at a time prior to its selection as a seat or throne, was a front face in some other structure. The overlying claw marks [episode 8] are believed to relate to repair work undertaken in 1951 by Robert Gray, a Glaswegian monumental sculptor, when the two parts of the stone were joined together again after it was broken in two during its removal from Westminster Abbey by Scottish nationalists.

The hollows in the front of the Stone [episode 9] 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[17] and **Aberlemno (no 1)**, Angus, have been carved much later with Pictish symbols. A more likely explanation is that these hollows are the result of vandalism by tourists picking at the exposed parts of the Stone with pen knives or the like after the Stone was housed in the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey.[18]

The damage around the bottom edges of the Stone [episode 10] may have been caused by it being unceremoniously dumped on to a hard surface. More research is required into the possible circumstances of when and how this happened and the significance of the 'XXXV'.

It is possible to suggest the following chronological scheme for these episodes and interventions, though there does remain some debate regarding the precise sequence:

- The Stone is quarried and shaped to serve as a step or threshold
- The Stone is selected for use as a seat in inauguration ceremonies. It is positioned outside – hence the weathering. While the ends were exposed to the elements the surface and sides must have been protected in some way. Iron fittings are attached, perhaps to prevent it being moved illicitly, and/or to facilitate it being suspended from a pole when being moved or processed. For reasons that remain obscure, but possibly to embed a saintly relic, attempts were started on forming a rectangular recess in the Stone's top surface. Slice marks made with a sharp blade might belong to this phase or be even earlier
- The Stone is cut down in length and the iron fittings are retained, perhaps to serve a different function
- 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

[17] Canmore ID 370663 - Balblair Wood (Cup and Ring marked stone) (canmore.org.uk) (accessed: 19 January 2024).
[18] Rodwell 2013, 174–75.

- While in Westminster Abbey the Stone suffers vandalism, including the 'cup' marks and breakage in 1950 during its removal from the Abbey. There may have been an inherent natural weakness in the Stone that lead to its break.[19]
- The Stone is repaired in Glasgow before being deposited on the site of the high altar at Arbroath Abbey on 11 April 1951.

2.3 Historical values

The Historical value of the Stone is high. It has clear and strong associations with the development and idea of Scotland as an independent kingdom. It is also closely associated with the Wars of Independence with England, a key period in Scottish history. It also has strong associations with English monarchs, being a key part of Coronation ceremonies after it was taken to Westminster by Edward I of England.

The Stone belongs to a group of stones and monuments which were used in Europe in inauguration ceremonies for monarchs and nobles. In some cases, the candidate stood on a stone, placing a foot in a footprint carved in the rock. There is a notable example of such a feature in the **fort at Dunadd** in Argyll, a centre of power for kings of Dál Riata,[20] and a tradition that there was another at Finlaggan in Islay for making new Lords of the Isles.[21]

[19] Photographs from the 1860s onwards suggest the presence of a crack. Rodwell 2013, 118.
[20] Lane and Campbell 2000, 247–49, 251.
[21] Macphail 1914, 24.

Figure 4: Dunadd Hillfort, Kilmartin Glen, with footprint in the foreground. © Historic Environment Scotland.

In other well documented cases the chosen one was seated in a chair or throne made up of pieces and slabs of stone. Well-known examples 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.[22]
- Aachen Cathedral, Germany, the throne of the Holy Roman Emperors; made by 931 AD from slabs of plain reused marble.[23]
- Zollfeld, Klagenfurt, Austria, the chair used in the installation ceremonies of the Dukes of Carinthia. It is made from reused Roman stonework.[24]

These comparisons support the idea that the Stone, for at least some of its time in Scotland prior to 1296, may have been incorporated in a throne.

Recent expert opinion on the Stone has stressed that it was used in inauguration ceremonies in Scotland rather than coronations, even though the new monarchs may have been sat on it already wearing crowns. In medieval Europe, coronations were seen as something which had to be sanctioned by the Pope, along with the ceremony of

[22] FitzPatrick 2003, 111–14.
[23] Welander et al 2003, illus 41.
[24] Welander et al 2003, 120; colour illus 1.5.

anointment. These actions were ones which were supervised by high-ranking clerics. They demonstrated that the monarchs in question really were of sovereign status, owing allegiance to no other earthly monarch. The Scots, and of course the English, were fully aware that without papal approval Scottish monarchs could be deemed as lacking authority and status compared to others. Hence Kings Alexander II and III sought papally sanctioned coronations, including anointment, but this was only finally granted in 1329.[25] Thus it was only from the reign of David II onwards that Scottish monarchs are considered to have had coronation ceremonies, which is after the Stone had already gone to England. David II was crowned at Scone in 1331.

2.3.1 Legendary origins

A royal seat or throne of stone, assumed to be the Stone, is frequently mentioned in legends about the origins of the Scots and their monarchs. This illustrates the perceived central role the Stone played and its symbolic importance for the nation and Scotland's status as an independent kingdom. While some of these place the origins of the Stone to different countries, it is important to note that the rock from which the Stone was carved could only have been sourced in Scotland (see 2.6.1 below).

The main story, as fully developed in the 14th century, traced the ancestry of Scottish monarchs to a marriage between Gaythelos (the eponym of the Gaels), a son of the king of Athens, and Scota, a daughter of the Pharoah 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, 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 (that means the Stone). She conquered the Picts and took over their kingdom.[26]

Bisset crafted this story from earlier material in order to counter the fictions of the English that a certain 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 on-going subservience to the descendants of Locrinus, that is the kings of England.[27]

Other legends in circulation at an early date 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.[28] There is evidently confusion here with the Lia Fáil, famous for its role in making Irish kings.[29] A significant variant of this story has Simon

[25] Broun 2003, 190; Bloch 1926.
[26] Watt 1991, vol 6, 183.
[27] Thompson 1999, 20–23; Watt 1991, vol 6, 115; Mason 1991, 49–54.
[28] Watt 1993, vol 1, 65, 67.
[29] Clancy 2003, 91–94; Rodwell 2013, 27.

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.[30]

Later, a certain Fergus son of Feradach, descended from the line of ancient kings (that means Gaythelos, Simon Brecc, etc) 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.[31]

We are dependent on the early 16th-century history of Scotland by Hector Boece for providing information on the legendary early history of the Stone in Scotland. It allegedly 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, a royal palace identified as **Dunstaffnage Castle** near Oban. When the Scots returned to Argyll in 422 AD under the leadership of a later King Fergus he was seated upon the Stone.[32]

A later King of Scots, Kenneth I MacAlpin (*Coinneach mac Ailpein*) 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 a 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.[33]

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) 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. This was on the occasion Jacob had a dream of a ladder reaching to Heaven with Angels ascending and descending 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.[34]

This Biblical legend for the origin for the Stone, which may have originated in Scotland, may have been eagerly accepted by the religious community of Westminster Abbey when they first acquired the Stone. Politically, it was obviously preferable to other stories, including the prophecy that the Scots would reign wherever the Stone was placed. It might even be used to show that English kings were inheriting a Biblical mandate. Thus, there should be no surprise that later Scottish chroniclers stuck with the Stone's associations with Gaythelos and Simon Brecc and ignored any Biblical dimension.

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[30] Watt 1993, vol 1, 67.
[31] Watt 1993, vol 1, 85, 195, 197.
[32] Boethius 1575, *Scotorum Regni Descriptio* 16, *Liber* 2/10, 6/8, 7/17.
[33] Boethius 1575, 10/54.
[34] Riley 1865, 135; *Genesis* 28/10–22.

2.3.2 The early history of the Stone in Scotland

Strictly speaking, the earliest contemporary record of the Stone 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.[35]

There are no accounts of Scottish king-making at Scone which can be considered to be derived at first hand from eye-witnesses prior to the description of the inauguration of King John in 1292. A 15th-century chronicle (Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon*) claims that King Giric (*Griogair mac Dhunghail*) was made king at Scone in 875 AD and also Donald II (*Dòmhnall mac Chòiseim*), in 896 AD, but these clearly cannot be regarded as authoritative reports given that they are recording events several hundreds of years earlier which are uncorroborated in any other way. The same applies to Bower's account of how, after the death of Macbeth (*MacBheatha mac Fhionnlaigh*) in 1057, some of his family placed a kinsman, Lulach (*Lùlach mac Gille Chomghain*), nicknamed the Idiot, on the royal throne at Scone.[36] Much later stories of the crowning of early kings on the Stone at Scone contained in the 16th-century history by Hector Boece and derivative works are considered to be myths. However, the attention given to the Stone by medieval writers indicates that even in the medieval period the Stone was closely allied with the idea of an independent Scottish kingdom of considerable longevity.

The very full account, however, of the inauguration of King Alexander III at Scone in 1249, derived from later chronicle sources, especially the *Scotichronicon*, is believed to be trustworthy. This ceremony was in two separate parts. First, there was a crowning ceremony, presumably in the church, in which the king was knighted by the Bishop of St Andrews. He was then led by the bishops and earls to the cross in the cemetery at the east end of the church, and there was installed on the royal seat which was normally kept reverently in the monastery. The nobles, on bended knee, strewed their garments under his feet. An aged Highlander, presumably the royal poet, stepped forward and recited the king's genealogy all the way back to the first Scot, here identified as Hiber the son of Gaythelos.[37]

Inauguration ceremonies will have changed and developed over the years, and it is probable that there were innovations in 1249, some of them stemming from the fact that the new king was then a child. By 1292, when John Balliol was made king, the ceremony took place on the Stone, placed next to the high altar in the church of Scone Abbey.[38]

While the lack of clear evidence for the Stone's early history can be frustrating, it enabled chroniclers to ascribe different values to the object, according to their own needs and objectives. The mysteries surrounding the Stone's origin, use and its dramatic relocation add to its own mysticism and legendary status, it was transformed from an object to a symbol. Arguably this continues to the present day.

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[35] Stevenson 1870, vol 2, 144.
[36] Watt 1989, vol 2, 319, 327; Watt 1995, vol 3, 21.
[37] Watt 1990, vol 5, 293, 295.
[38] Rothwell 1957, 239.

2.3.3 The Stone in England

Perhaps counterintuitively for an artefact that is so connected to Scottish history, there is more detailed information about the use of the Stone during its time in England than for its use in Scotland. The Stone, King Edward's trophy from his conquest of Scotland, was handed over to Westminster Abbey and placed in St Edward's Chapel along with John Balliol's gold sceptre and crown and other royal Scottish treasures. The removal of these treasures, along with the Scottish archive, was intended to mark the subjugation of Scotland under English rule and the removal of its status as an independent nation. The removal took place in 1297, although there may have been a delay of two or three years in the case of the Stone while first a copper chair was planned to hold it and then the oak gilded chair, referred to in 14th-century documents as St Edward's Chair but now known as the Coronation Chair (Figure 3), was made.[39] 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 the Coronation Chair was primarily intended as a seat for clergy when saying Mass in St Edward's Chapel or whether Edward I envisaged the Stone would have a ceremonial role in the future, more specifically in the coronations of English kings. Coronations required much more space than was available in the chapel. It is known that for coronations from at least 1399 onwards the Coronation Chair was moved to the main crossing of the abbey church.[40]

There is surprisingly little information on medieval English coronations, and doubt has been expressed on whether the Coronation Chair and the Stone featured in any of them prior to King Henry IV's in 1399. In 1308, however, King Edward II would have had every reason to want 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, through incorporating elements of the Scottish ceremony and by so publicly utilising what was effectively a war trophy.[41]

There were two parts to the proceedings involved in making English monarchs. Probably from as early as the 11th century they were enthroned in Westminster Hall before being taken to the abbey for unction and coronation.[42] For the coronations of Henry IV in 1399 and Edward VI in 1547 the chair was moved to the crossing of the abbey church. This also happened for the coronations of Mary and Elizabeth I. It is probable that this was done at other times too. The chair, undoubtedly along with the Stone, was taken from the abbey in 1657 for the installation of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector. This took place in Westminster Hall.[43] The Stone continues to have a major ritual role as the seat of new sovereigns of the United Kingdom during their coronation ceremonies in Westminster Abbey.

[39] Stevenson 1870, vol 2, 142, 144; Simpson and Galbraith 1986, no 215.
[40] Rodwell 2013, 115, 127.
[41] Rodwell 2013, 18, 42.
[42] Armstrong 1948; Duncan 2002, 129.
[43] Rodwell 2013, 115, 127, 130.

2.3.4 Recent History

Prior to its return to Scotland in 1996 the Stone was probably viewed in modern times by the majority of visitors to Westminster Abbey as one of the many symbols and icons there of Britain's imperial past, representing regal traditions extending back to medieval times. This symbolic status could, therefore, make it a focus for those who questioned or wanted to change the political *status quo* of the British State, like the suffragettes who attempted to blow up the Coronation Chair in 1914,[44] and those Scots who sought independence for Scotland.

From the late 19th century there was growing interest amongst Scots in the Scottish history and traditions of the Stone. In 1924 a Labour MP, David Kirkwood, initiated a parliamentary bill to have the Stone returned to Scotland but it failed to make it beyond its first reading.[45] When the Stone was removed by Scottish students in 1950 they claimed that it was the most ancient symbol of Scottish nationality, that it had been removed from Scotland by force and then retained in England by King Edward III of England in breach of a pledge to return it to Scotland where it properly belonged.[46] The stone was deposited at Arbroath Abbey, chosen for its connection to the Declaration of Arbroath.

[44] Rodwell 2013, 179–82.
[45] Rodwell 2013, 183.
[46] Hamilton 2008, 145.

Figure 5: Custodian of Arbroath Abbey with the Stone of Destiny. © Newsquest (Herald & Times).

This 1950 deed attracted worldwide attention to the Stone. Opinions in the Press ranged from regarding it as a student prank, an act of sacrilege, a theft, to righting a wrong against the Scottish nation. None of these views, apparently, were confined to one side of the Anglo-Scottish Border or the other. The SNP First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond, wrote in 2008 in his Foreword to Ian Hamilton's book on the *Stone of Destiny* that there was a direct line between the taking of the Stone in 1950 and the SNP entering Scotland's Government for the first time in 2007.[47] The removal was the subject of a 2008 film *Stone of Destiny*.

In 1976 another attempt was made to remove the Stone from Westminster Abbey by a young English-born Scotsman, David Stewart. He claimed he wanted to draw attention to the question of ownership of the Stone, essentially whether it was English or Scottish. His attempt failed, but as with those who took the Stone in 1950, he was not charged with theft.[48]

In July 1996, the Prime Minister, John Major, announced to the House of Commons that Her Majesty the Queen had graciously consented to the Stone being returned to

[47] Hamilton 2008, p vii.
[48] Gerber 1997, 155–59.

Scotland, on condition that it be taken to Westminster Abbey to play its traditional role in the coronation ceremonies of future sovereigns of the United Kingdom. Later in 1996 the Stone was placed in Edinburgh Castle, on public exhibition in the Crown Room beside the ancient Honours of Scotland. The response by many Scots to this coming-home appears to have been relatively muted.[49] Some reports implied that the return was little more than a political stunt, designed to ward off rising nationalist sentiment in Scotland.[50]

2.4 Design and artistic values

Any aesthetic appeal the Stone may have had may have been rather limited throughout its long history, although it is reasonable to suppose that those who could view it or have access to it would have appreciated the importance of its setting and perhaps a certain majesty given its role in monarch-making, whether at Scone or Westminster. References to it in medieval literature in relation to both history and historical myths do represent a cultural response to the idea of the Stone, if not the Stone itself.

A characteristic that unites stones and thrones used in monarch-making from the Early Medieval Period, including the Stone and even the throne of the Holy Roman Emperors in Aachen Cathedral, is that they do not seem to be works of art in the traditional sense, even though there is considerable evidence that the societies or states with which they are associated had traditions of monumental sculpture. This is certainly the case with the kingdoms of the Scots, Picts and Alba in the Early Medieval Period and in contrast to those, the Stone is rather plain. Perhaps the potency of the Stone stemmed from its plainness. In ways that we cannot now understand that lack of artistic design and aesthetic appeal may have been a link with its perceived associations and appropriateness for monarch-making. It is possible that with inauguration seats both tradition and a desire to accentuate the antique, were factors that discouraged the creation of new monuments. Perhaps also their ruggedness was understood to be more representative of the lands that the incumbents were to rule over. Additionally, the simple design could have symbolised the pragmatism and humility expected from monarchs and the potential lack of comfort of stone, could have acted as a reminder that reigning was not a comfortable or frivolous duty.

2.4.1 Artistic representations

There are no clear, unambiguous representations of the Stone in art prior to the 19th century. Great seals used by Scottish monarchs from Edgar (reigned 1097-1107) onwards have representations of them enthroned as lawgivers but 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 only 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 after the Stone had been removed to England.

[49] Ascherson 2002, 11–12, 19–20.
[50] For example, From the Guardian archive, 4 July 1996: Stone of Scone going home after 700 years (theguardian.com) (accessed: 16 January 2024).

Figure 6: 19th century sulphur cast made from the seal impression of Scone Abbey near Perth in Perthshire. © National Museums Scotland.

1. The obverse of the seal of Scone Abbey. Various claims have been made as to its date and what exactly is represented on it. It is normally assumed to show the inauguration ceremony for a king of Scots, either Alexander III in 1249 or John Balliol in 1292. The king is crowned and holding a sceptre. He is seated and in the process of being vested in a robe by a bishop or abbot and another cleric. There are other figures around, and below three shields of arms, apparently those of the earls of Fife and Strathearn flanking the royal arms. A detailed analysis by Caldwell makes a convincing case that the seal dates no earlier than the mid-14th century, long after the Stone had been removed from Scone.[51]

[51] Caldwell 2018.

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, fo 206).[52] 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. 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. 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. Alexander is depicted as crowned and holding a sceptre. He is seated on the Moot Hill with a monumental cross in the background. The king is flanked by two male figures, one holding a sheathed sword upright. There is no sign in this painting of what the king is seated upon.

Rodwell 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 and the Stone does not appear in it.[53]

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

2.5.1 Scone

The Stone initially belonged in a landscape of power and ritual at Scone. Scone is situated in Gowrie, one of the original provinces of the kingdom of Alba, an area with much good arable land. Cropmarks in the vicinity suggest an exceptional concentration of prehistoric monuments, the presence of which may have been known and of some relevance in early historic times.[54] In the 14th century it was still believed that Scone was the site where anciently monarchs of the Picts and the Scots had their chief seat of government. According to the 10th-century *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* King Donald I (*Dòmhnall mac Solein*), died at the palace at Cinnbelathoir. It can be identified as Scone.[55]

The Moot Hill at Scone is the largest assembly mound in Scotland in terms of diameter. The 10th-century *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* is clearly referring to it when it describes how King Constantine II (*Còiseam mac Aoidh*) and Bishop Cellach (*Easbaig Ceallach*) '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', at the Hill of Faith near the royal 'city' of Scone in 906.[56] Open air assemblies would have taken place on it as well as inauguration ceremonies for new kings. The illustration of the 1249 inauguration of King Alexander III in the early15th-century Corpus Christi manuscript of the *Scotichronicon* apparently shows this ceremony in this location with a

[52] Watt 1998, vol 9, 149, 172. Illustrated on p 173. Available to view online via Parker Library on the Web: f. 205r: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 171B: Scotichronicon (Volume 2) (exhibits.stanford.edu) (accessed: 19 January 2024).
[53] Rodwell 2013, 18, fig 22.
[54] Driscoll 2004, 84.
[55] Woolf 2007, 103–4.
[56] Clancy 2003, 102.

monumental cross in the background. The accompanying text, however, describes the inauguration as taking place next to the cross in the cemetery at the east end of the church. The cross, which no longer survives, would probably have been a free-standing stone monument, perhaps of Pictish origin.

The Augustinian house of Scone, founded as a priory by King Alexander I about 1120, may have replaced or succeeded an earlier monastery. It was upgraded to an abbey about 1163 or 1164. A charter of that time by King Malcolm IV states that it had been founded in the principal seat of our kingdom.[57] It has been 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.[58] Prior to the Reformation Scone Abbey was a religious house of considerable wealth.

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.[59] It is not known how accessible the Stone was to public gaze in the years prior to 1296. Possibly it could be viewed, probably incorporated in some sort of throne, some of the time, on the Moot Hill. At other times it may have been housed in the choir of the abbey church and perhaps not considered as an object of veneration or public interest.

2.5.2 Westminster Abbey

The present Westminster Abbey church was erected, 1245-69, by King Henry III of England in honour of Edward the Confessor (St Edward), the last Anglo-Saxon king of England, who died in 1066. His chapel is behind the abbey's high altar and is dominated by his shrine, which drew great numbers of pilgrims over the years. Several other kings are buried here, including Edward I. The Stone of Scone, lodged in its purpose-built gilded oak chair by 1300, was placed near the altar in this chapel.

Once housed in the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey the Stone may have been largely invisible for much of its time there except to the well-informed and curious. The activities of vandals, pecking hollows in its front suggests a desire for souvenir fragments that may even date back to medieval times. The main focus of attention in St Edward's Chapel then would have been that saint's shrine and to a lesser extent the Coronation Chair and royal tombs.

2.5.3 Edinburgh Castle

Since 1996 the Stone has resided in the Crown Room at Edinburgh Castle, alongside the Scottish Crown Jewels and other royal regalia. The Crown Room is a purpose-built secure repository, created within the Palace during the refurbishments of 1615-17.[60] The display is simple but being in a glass case the Stone is more accessible than during

[57] Barrow 1960, no 243.
[58] Duncan 2002, 83.
[59] For more information and a 360° tour of how the Scone Abbey may have looked visit: Open Virtual Worlds – Scone Abbey 1390 (openvirtualworlds.org) (accessed: 16 January 2024).
[60] For further information on the Crown Room, see separate statement for Edinburgh Castle Palace. For further information on the Crown Jewels, see separate statement on the Honours of Scotland. Both available to download from HES website: Edinburgh Castle Statements of Significance (historicenvironment.scot) (accessed: 22 January 2024).

its time in Westminster. The display forms a key part of the visitor experience at the Castle. The direct association with a Scottish royal site and regalia likely has a bearing on how the Stone is viewed and understood by visitors.

2.6 Natural heritage values

The petrology of the Stone has now been firmly established thanks to the analyses undertaken by staff of the British Geological Survey in 1998. 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. It is probably made from a single bed of sandstone, the underside representing the original geological top of this feature.[61] Recent work by HES's Heritage Science Team is seeking to enhance our understanding of the Stone's geology.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

There has not been a formal study of the contemporary values of the Stone to local communities or communities of interest so far. There is currently a research project underway at the University of Stirling to look at some of the issues, but results were not available at the time of writing.[62] The following observations are intuited from HES staff experience of the Stone and from online sources.

As the Stone is currently part of the Edinburgh Castle experience, it is often mentioned in visitors' review of their Castle visit. A lot of visitors list the Stone as one of the highlights of their visit, quite a few even declaring it to be the biggest highlight for them. Some express feelings of awe, while some express that they felt underwhelmed. What seems to fascinate visitors the most about the Stone is its unusual story, which sets it apart from the Crown Jewels.[63] Its simple design which is increased by its direct comparison to the Crown Jewels which are displayed in the same case, seems to amuse visitors and increases their interest because such a simple looking stone carries such importance.[64] There are often long queues out to the palace courtyard to see the Crown Room and a lot of reviewers mention this, too. This confirms that visitors to the Castle see a visit to the Crown Room as a 'must-do' experience when visiting.[65]

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[61] Phillips et al 2003, 35, 39.
[62] Research is being conducted by Prof Sally Foster of the University of Stirling. For more information visit the project's website: Authenticity's child: Current meanings and future destinies for the Stone of Scone (thestone.stir.ac.uk) (accessed: 22 January 2024).
[63] 'The Crown Jewels were beautiful, but the Stone of Destiny, and the story that goes along with it, was amazing to see.' Tripadvisor review by DCLdreamer 29 September 2019: Edinburgh Castle: Reviews (tripadvisor.co.uk) (accessed: 12 September 2023).
[64] 'The crown and scepter were cool, the stone was…A rock…Kinda hilariously meh for how important it is!', Tripadvisor review by Grace H., 11 May 2022: Edinburgh Castle: Reviews (tripadvisor.co.uk) (accessed: 12 September 2023).
[65] All information in this paragraph is taken from reviews that mention the Stone left by visitors to Edinburgh Castle on Tripadvisor. Edinburgh Castle: Reviews (tripadvisor.co.uk) (accessed: 12 September 2023).

Figure 7: The Honours of Scotland, including Crown, Sceptre and Sword, along with the Stone of Destiny, in a glass display in the Crown Room at Edinburgh Castle. © Historic Environment Scotland.

After the passing of the late Queen Elizabeth II in 2022, public interest in the Stone increased again with the expectation of the coronation of her successor King Charles III and the role it would play in the ceremony. On the one hand, the ongoing role of the Stone in the making of monarchs of the United Kingdom has been confirmed by the coronation of King Charles III in Westminster Abbey on 6 May 2023. On the other hand, the interest in the Stone's Scottish origins has been reignited by this event, generating debate regarding the Stone's movement.[66] This had previously been recognised by the Stone's return to Scotland in 1996 and plans for its exhibition in Perth from 2024.[67] That interest takes several forms, which are often opposing, in both Scotland and England and further afield, and is held by diverse groups including academics, nationalists, and generally those who are interested in history. [68] For many it is not just a simple artefact but one imbued with considerable values reflecting its perceived status as a national icon.

[66] The Stone's return to Westminster for the coronation of Charles III sparked opposition from some, with figures such as Alex Salmond calling for it to be kept in Scotland (STV News, 4th May 2023, 'Salmond: Stone of Destiny should not be used in King's coronation' (news.stv.tv)) (accessed 29 August 2023).
[67] Some of the issues connected to the Stone's return in 1996, particularly those connected to its status as a symbol of Scottish independence, are expressed during Parliamentary debates at the time. These can be accessed via UK Parliament Hansard (hansard.parliament.uk) (accessed: 29 August 2023).
[68] See for example BBC News, 17 March 2023, 'My dad wouldn't want Stone of Destiny at Coronation' (bbc.co.uk) (accessed: 16 January 2024).

The artist George Wyllie captured this debate in 1996 in his artwork 'Stone of Destiny' which was inspired by the Stone and its return to Scotland. He used concrete to produce a limited edition of rectangular stone blocks with the inscription 'Destiny' which feature an aluminium handle to create the look of a suitcase. These portable stones were 'to allow for all the possible claimants to the real stone to have one'.[69] By creating the look of a suitcase, the artwork playfully creates the impression that the Stone seems constantly in transit or always prepared to be moved, alluding to all the different moves the Stone has experienced throughout its existence. By creating multiple versions, George Wyllie also acknowledged that different community groups had and still have an interest in the Stone and feel strongly about its movement and use.[70]

In 2020 the Commissioners for the Safeguarding of the Regalia recommended to HM the Queen that the Stone should be exhibited, except when required for coronation ceremonies in Westminster Abbey, in new displays designed and conceived by Perth and Kinross Council/Culture Perth and Kinross, in the refurbished Perth City Hall. When this exhibition opens in 2024 it is anticipated that the Scottish background of the Stone will be explored as well as its later English and British history.

3. MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

There are several major gaps in our understanding of the Stone, many of which will never be filled because of the loss or non-existence of early records. It is possible, however, that more data will be extracted from the Stone itself as new, more sophisticated, scientific techniques are developed. Four other projects which might produce worthwhile results are

1. An archaeological study of the possible history of the Stone prior to its selection for inauguration ceremonies.
2. A review of historical references to the Stone in England and its perceived importance.
3. Scientific analysis of the lead holding the ironwork in place, with a view to identifying its source.
4. Understanding of contemporary authenticity and social value.

4. ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

- **Arbroath Abbey**, Angus. The Stone was left at the west door of the abbey on 11 April 1951 by those who had kept it since its removal from Westminster Abbey the previous Christmas Day. HES site, open to the public

[69] Art UK: Stone of Destiny by George Ralston Wyllie (artuk.org)
[70] See also the blog by S. Foster, April 2023, *The Stone of Destiny – a moving story* (thestone.stir.ac.uk) (accessed: 13 September 2023).

- **Dunstaffnage Castle**, Argyll. Scottish origin myths claim that the Stone, prior to being removed to Scone in the mid-9th century by King Kenneth mac Alpin (*Coinneach mac Ailpein*), was located at Eudonium or Evonium. This was identified by 16th-century historians as **Dunstaffnage Castle**. HES site, open to the public
- **Edinburgh Castle**. The Stone was taken here by the English in 1296 prior to it going to Westminster, probably the following year. It was returned for display in the castle's Crown Room from 30 November 1996. HES site, open to the public
- Scone Palace. The palace is the early 19th-century home of the Earls of Mansfield. There are now no obvious traces above ground of the medieval abbey where the Stone was kept prior to 1296. The Moot Hill where many of the inauguration ceremonies for early Scottish monarchs took place is in the palace grounds and has a replica of the Stone. Palace and grounds are open to the public in the summer months
- Westminster Abbey. The Stone was housed here in the Coronation Chair from 1300 to 1996. The Stone will be returned for use in future coronation ceremonies. The abbey is open most days for worship and visits

5. KEYWORDS

Stone of Destiny; Stone of Scone; sandstone; iron rings; Coronation Chair; Edinburgh Castle; Edward I; inauguration; crowning; Scone; Westminster Abbey

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Further resources:

Object Number: EDIN060
Collection: Properties in Care Collections

Collections entry: The Stone of Destiny: 13th century, medieval, Edinburgh Castle (Properties in Care collections) (historicenvironment.scot)

Further information on the current research project by the University of Stirling relating to the Stone: Authenticity's child: Current meanings and future destinies for the Stone of Scone (thestone.stir.ac.uk)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE

- **862**: According to the 10th-century *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* King Donald I (*Dòmhnall mac Solein*), died at the palace at Cinnbelathoir which can be identified as Scone
- **906**: The *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* recorded that King Constantine II (*Còiseam mac Aoidh*) and Bishop Cellach (*Easbaig Ceallach*) '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', at the Hill of Faith [the Moot Hill] near the royal 'city' of Scone

- **11th century**: 'The most powerful eastern stone' – the Stone of Scone? – was mentioned in an Irish poem, *The Birth of Áedán mac Gabráin*
- **c 1120**: A priory of Augustinian Canons founded at Scone by King Alexander I
- **1163 or 1164**: King Malcolm IV recorded the promotion of Scone, in the principal seat of his realm, to the status of an abbey
- **1249**: King Alexander III inaugurated as king of Scots at Scone. The Stone is said in a later source to have been positioned outside
- **1292**: John Balliol became the last king of Scots to be enthroned on the Stone at Scone. The occasion was described by Walter of Guisborough in about 1305. The Stone was placed next to the high altar in Scone Abbey
- **1296**: King Edward I of England conquered Scotland and forced King John to abdicate. The Stone was removed from Scone Abbey.
- **1296–97**: The Stone was listed amongst the jewels in **Edinburgh Castle** which belonged to the former king of Scotland. The castle was then in English hands.
- **1297**: Adam, the king's goldsmith, commissioned by Edward I to make a copper throne for the Stone, to be placed next to the high altar in the shrine of St Edward in Westminster Abbey.
- **1300**: The Coronation chair was made by Master Walter, the king's painter, replacing the one of copper previously commissioned.
- **1306**: Robert I (the Bruce) crowned king at Scone despite the removal of the Stone. His successors as kings of Scots – David II, Edward Balliol, Robert II, Robert III and James I – were also crowned at Scone.
- **1308**: King Edward II of England is believed to have been seated on the Coronation Chair when he was made king.
- **1324**: In negotiations between the Scots and Edward II at York the demand by the former for the return of the Stone was rejected.
- **1328**: The Treaty of Edinburgh (17 March), ratified at Northampton (4 May), by which the English acknowledged the independence of Scotland. There was no mention of the Stone although King Edward III of England served a writ on the abbot and convent of Westminster on 1 July requiring them to give it up for return to Scotland. An English chronicler, Geoffrey le Baker, claimed that the community of the abbey were so fearful that the Stone should be taken from them that they chained it to the floor.
- **1329**: Pope John XXII acceded to King Robert's petition that Scottish monarchs should have papally sanctioned coronations, thus removing any doubt about their sovereign status.

- **1399**: Coronation of King Henry IV. This was the earliest occasion on which an English monarch was specifically recorded as having sat on the Coronation Chair.
- **1437**: Coronation of King James II of Scotland at Holyrood Abbey. The only king of Scots after that to be crowned at Scone was Charles II in 1651.
- **1559**: The Abbey of Scone was attacked and burned to the ground by Reformers.
- **1581**: The lands of Scone Abbey were erected into a temporal lordship for Lord Ruthven. They have since remained in private hands, presently those of the Earl of Mansfield.
- **1603, 25 July**: King James VI of Scotland was crowned King James I of England in Westminster Abbey.
- **1651, 1 January**: King Charles II was crowned King of Scots on the Moot Hill at Scone.
- **1818, 8 July**: George III was appointed the Commissioners of the Regalia in Scotland to oversee the Honours of Scotland (later amended in 1996 to include the Stone).
- **1914**: Suffragettes exploded a bomb at the Coronation Chair, apparently doing little damage to the Stone. The Chair and Stone were removed to the greater safety of the crypt under the chapterhouse for the duration of the First World War.
- **1924**: Failed attempt in Parliament to have an Act for the return of the Stone to Scotland.
- **1939–45**: During the Second World War the Stone was hidden in a burial vault under the Islip Chapel in Westminster Abbey to prevent it falling into Nazi hands. The Coronation Chair was transferred to a crypt in Gloucester Cathedral.
- **1950, 25 December**: The Stone was removed from Westminster Abbey by four Scottish students. It was secretly taken to Scotland but in the following April left at Arbroath Abbey. It was then returned to Westminster Abbey.
- **1953**: The coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, seated in the Coronation Chair, was the first coronation ceremony to be televised and widely viewed.
- **1976**: Failed attempt to remove the Stone from Westminster Abbey by David Stewart. As a protection against future fraud (doubt having been cast on the authenticity of the stone returned from Scotland in 1951), the Westminster authorities secretly embedded half a slip of paper in the Stone, retaining the other half in a file in the Abbey's archives.
- **1996**: The Stone was returned for exhibition in Scotland, from 30 November (St Andrews Day) in the Crown Room in **Edinburgh Castle**.
- **1996, 12 November**: Royal Warrant signed which added the Stone to the items presided over by the Commissioners of the Regalia (first appointed in 1818 to oversee the honours). The Warrant charged them and their successors (or any

two of them) to make arrangements for the Stone to be returned to Westminster for any future inauguration of monarchs.

- **2020**: Decision was made that the Stone should be the centrepiece of the new Perth Museum.
- **2023, 28 April**: A ceremonial procession from the Castle's Great Hall marked the temporary departure of the Stone from Scotland. The procession was led by the Lord Lyon King of Arms – the monarch's representative in Scotland – and attended by the First Minister Humza Yousaf, in his capacity as the Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland, one of the Commissioners for the Safeguarding of the Regalia.
- **2023, 6 May**: The coronation of King Charles III, seated in the Coronation Chair with the Stone fitted underneath in Westminster Abbey. The ceremony was again televised and widely watched.
- **2023, 16 May**: The Stone was back on display at Edinburgh Castle after the coronation.
- **2023, 5 July**: A National Service of Thanksgiving took place in St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh to present King Charles III and Queen Camilla with the Honours of Scotland. The Stone was displayed in St Giles Cathedral on a bespoke designed plinth during the ceremony.

APPENDIX 2: SUBSTITUES, FAKES AND COPIES

Since the 19th century doubts have often been expressed about the authenticity of the Stone. A persistent line of reasoning has been that the Scots in 1297 would not have stood by and allowed their conqueror to remove such an important symbol of their nationhood. The Stone as we know it must, therefore, be a substitute that fooled Edward I. There are two obvious flaws to this argument. First, there is no evidence that the 'real' stone was ever produced to confound the English and authenticate later coronation ceremonies of Scottish monarchs at Scone. Second, there were several leading Scottish supporters of the English in 1297, including some who had attended John Balliol's inauguration in 1292, who knew what the Stone looked like. It seems unlikely that not one of them would have registered doubts about the Stone which ended up at Westminster if it were a fake.

An alternative to the Stone as we know it today was reported in an unsigned letter to *The Times* newspaper on 1 January 1819. It was said 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 500 lb (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 that the stone was

covered with hieroglyphics. No information is available as to what happened to this stone or indeed, whether it even existed.[71]

Another alleged alternative stone has been described as the Stone of Skye by Pat Gerber in a recent book on the *Stone of Destiny*. It is claimed to be hidden in a cave in Skye, but no evidence has been produced of its existence. In any case, the material provided by Gerber clearly shows considerable confusion with a tradition concerning a now lost stone said to have been used in inauguration ceremonies for medieval Lords of the Isles at Finlaggan in Islay.[72]

Claims have also been made that the Stone returned to Westminster Abbey in 1951 was a copy of the one removed in 1950. This can easily be refuted on the basis of the Stone's geology (who would have known that it should be rock local to Scone?), long term wear patterns on the Stone, comparison with earlier photographs and the complete satisfaction of the authorities at the abbey that no substitution had been made.

It is known that full scale replicas of the Coronation Chair, including the Stone, have been made since the late 19th century, as well as copies of the Stone alone. One of these was the work of Robert Gray, a Glaswegian monumental sculptor, in 1929. Gray was tasked in 1951 with repairing the Stone removed from Westminster.[73] There are presently replica stones of Scone displayed on the Moot Hill at Scone, at the **Arbroath Abbey** Visitor Centre and in the Arlington Pub, Woodlands Road, Glasgow.

[71] Aithchison 2009, 68–73.
[72] Gerber 1997, 118–28: Rodwell 2013, 204–5.
[73] Rodwell 2013, 183, 194–95.

Figure 8: 3D replica of the Stone created to allow rehearsals for placing the Stone in the Coronation Chair. © Historic Environment Scotland.

In preparation for the coronation in May 2023, the HES Digital Documentation and Innovation team created 3D models of both the Stone and the Coronation Chair.[74] This was done through a technique called structured light scanning. This quickly captures accurate 3D geometric data by projecting a pattern onto an object's surface, which is recorded by cameras within the scanner. The distortion of the pattern allows specialist software to create a 3D model of the object.

In addition, photogrammetric data was captured, where hundreds of overlapping high resolution photographs were taken around the object. Software then analysed these photographs to work out their relative position. These aligned photographs were then used to create an accurate photorealistic model for both the Stone and the Coronation Chair.

These 3D models were used to create 1:1 scale replicas of the objects through 3D printing, to allow rehearsals for placing the Stone in the Coronation Chair to ensure it was done safely. The 3D printing process used a filament made from recycled plastic.

Additionally, the digital imaging work revealed new details on the surfaces of the stone. It has improved visibility of geological features such as cross-bedding. It has also

[74] The model can be accessed on Sketchfab: 3D model of Stone of Destiny (sketchfab.com) (accessed: 12/09/2023).

allowed us to more clearly see tooling marks from the working of the stone and areas of wear, as well as details of the 1951 repair and several crude inscriptions.[75]

[75] HES article: Research shines new light on the Stone of Destiny (historicenvrionment.scot) (accessed: 19 January 2024).