

# Doorstep of Destiny

**Its origins have been shrouded in mystery, with legends linking it to Biblical heroes and ancient Egyptian royalty. Now, a new exhibition celebrating the Stone of Destiny has revealed it may originally have been a doorstep.**

The new theory comes after the Stone underwent scientific analysis prior to being moved from Edinburgh Castle to its new permanent home at Perth Museum, which opened last month.

Wear on the top of the historic artefact appears to have been caused by footsteps prior to its being used as the crowning stone of Scotland's monarchs at Scone, near Perth, in medieval times.

The first detailed account of the Stone being used in the crowning of a monarch was that of the young King Alexander III in 1249.

Analysis carried out in preparation for its transportation to Westminster Abbey for the Coronation of King Charles III last year determined that the Stone was quarried from the Scone area.

Together with the wear, this suggests it may originally have been used in a nearby church or possibly a Roman building.

One legend of the Stone's origin held that it was "Jacob's pillow", the stone on which the Biblical figure was shown by

angels a vision of a stairway to heaven.

The 152kg Stone was said to have been transported from ancient Egypt by Scota, the daughter of a pharaoh, to the Hill of Tara in Ireland and later taken to Scone by Kenneth MacAlpin, traditionally considered the first King of Alba.

Visitors to the new exhibition at Perth Museum are told: "As compelling as these and other myths are, recent scientific research shows the Stone was quarried near Scone and may originally have formed part of a step or threshold, perhaps from an earlier church at Scone or possibly a nearby Roman ruin."

According to Historic Environment Scotland (HES), the level of wear on the top surface identified as the result of the use of the Stone as a step must have been caused before England's King Edward I took it to England in 1296, and also predates its role in inauguration ceremonies.

Dr Nicki Scott, Senior Cultural Significance Advisor at HES, said: "While we know some inauguration rituals did involve the individual being inaugurated to step onto the stone, such as at Dunadd Hillfort, the level of wear on the Stone of Destiny doesn't support such use.

"Even several hundred years of such a ritual wouldn't create the level of wear we see. It's more likely that the stone had earlier served as a step, although we don't know the context for this."

Professor Dauvit Broun, Chair of Scottish History at the University of Glasgow, who contributed to the new interpretation at Perth Museum, said: "The evidence is quite compelling. It means that, at some point, the Stone was repurposed as an inaugural throne.

"The earliest detailed account of a royal inauguration that we have is Alexander III's in 1249, where the Stone is referred

to as covered by 'silk cloths woven in gold', which means that its rather bare and worn appearance would not have been visible."

Prof Broun added: "Once it became the inaugural throne it would be understandable if new legends were fashioned to 'explain' its association with the kingship as an ancient one – legends which, unfortunately, have obliterated whatever tales were told about its original significance before it became the inaugural Stone."

The Stone of Destiny – also known as the Stone of Scone – was used during the coronations of the Kings of Scotland until 1296 when it was seized from Scone in Perthshire by King Edward I of England.

Edward had the stone built into a new oak throne at Westminster, where it was used in the inaugurations of the monarchs of England and later of Great Britain.

It was officially returned to Scotland on St Andrew's Day in 1996 and was housed alongside the Honours of Scotland in the Crown Room in Edinburgh Castle, only leaving Scotland again for the coronation of King Charles in Westminster Abbey in May last year.

A "health check" carried out prior to the crowning allowed researchers to look at the object in greater detail than ever before.

Experts were able to verify that the stone was quarried near Scone, while cutting-edge digital technology including the first ever 3D scan of the historic object revealed surface details previously unseen.

These discoveries offered new clues to the history of the Stone, how it was quarried and then worked over time as well as evidence of wear and human interactions over the centuries.

Although still the property of the Crown, the Stone's return to Perth last month – as the centrepiece of the new Perth Museum – marked the end of a 728 year absence.

Recent analysis showed that the stone on display in Perth was quarried near Scone and appeared to prove that it was the same rectangular block of red sandstone seized from Scone Abbey by King Edward I in 1296.

However, for centuries, rumours have abounded that replicas of the Stone of Destiny were created at different times to fool various authorities.

According to one legend, the monks at Scone Abbey hid Scotland's precious inauguration stone as King Edward I approached, and that the king took a copy back to England.

Another tale suggests the real Stone of Destiny may actually be on display in a pub in Glasgow.

Signage displayed over the stone in The Arlington Bar in Glasgow's Woodlands district suggests that it is the one taken from Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1950, and that the stone that resurfaced on the altar of Arbroath Abbey, draped in a Scottish flag, in April 1951, may have been a fake.

According to this story, the four daring Glasgow University students Ian Hamilton, Gavin Vernon, Kay Matheson, and Alan Stuart who smuggled the stone over the Border, stopped at The Arlington for a pint, and placed the Stone on the bar.

The sign reads: "Within two weeks the game was up and the police were tipped off that the Stone could be found at 'The Arlington'.

"Under pressure the students decided to hand it back... Or did they? Stories abound across Scotland that the students handed a replica to the police and that the 'real' Stone is here in 'The Arlington Bar'."



Stone of Destiny also known as the Stone of Scone, and often referred to in England as The Coronation Stone. Oblong block of red sandstone that was used for centuries in the coronation of the monarchs of Scotland, and later the monarchs of England and the Kingdom of Great Britain.