"We wanted a parliament but they gave us a stone"

The Coronation Stone of the Scots as a Memory Box in the Twentieth Century

JÖRG ROGGE

In this article a memory box is presented, in which and to which different meanings were contained and attached in the course of seven centuries.[1] This memory box is the coronation stone of Scottish kings, nowadays on display in Edinburgh Castle, the external form of which has remained for the most part unchanged. The roughly 150 kg heavy, 67 cm long, 42 cm wide and 28 cm high sandstone block was used in the Middle Ages at the inauguration of Scottish kings.[2] In the course of history, however, it was removed from its original functional context and transferred to other cultural and political contexts. In this connection, both diachronic and also synchronic transfers of the coronation stone and the concepts of political order in the island of Britain stored in it were carried out. At present it is still an important memory box filled with political concepts, and it was and is a starting point for research into the relationship between the Scots and the English over the past 700 years. It is remarkable that this stone was used by nationally emotional Scots and also by the Government in London as symbol in important debates in the twentieth century. Historical recollections are transported by the Scots and the English with the stone that one may certainly call a container of memory. Here I

1 My thanks go to John Deasy for translating the German text into English as well as to the editors for finishing the final formatting.

2 The description of the stone is in AITCHISON, 2000, p. 39 and HILL, 2003, p. 11.

concentrate on the question which memories the Scottish Nationalists and Unionists have projected at the stone or *read into* it; memories which they have at times made into the guideline for their political action.[3] My focus thus lays on the certain opening moments of this memory box in different contexts. I am especially interested in the meanings attached to it in the twentieth century. However, before analysing those meanings in more detail, I shall briefly discuss the earlier phases of the box.

From Scone to Westminster Abbey in 1296

It is undisputed that Edward I, after having defeated the Scottish troops and deposing King John Balliol in 1296, had a stone, upon which new Scottish kings were initiated into their office, transported from Scone near Perth to London.[4] Together with the Scottish regalia (sceptre and crown), the king donated the throne stone to St. Edward the Confessor, whose tomb is still in Westminster Abbey today. In 1300 or 1301, the stone was incorporated into the English kings' so-called coronation chair in Westminster Abbey. With this transfer, King Edward I placed the stone in a new political-cultural context. The stone was now no longer seen as the memory box for the political independence and self-governance of the kingdom of Scotland, but it showed that Scotland had now lost its independence.[5] The memory box Stone of Scone now had different meanings, or better two strands of meaning, attached to it. Every English king seated on the coronation chair was at the same time also made king over Scotland.[6]

For centuries, the stone remained in Westminster Abbey in London, even though King Edward's successors did not succeed in establishing permanent English sovereignty over Scotland. Rather, in 1328, in the Peace of Northampton, King Edward III recognised the Scottish independence gained

3 One can argue with NORA, 1990, p. 13, that the recollection or memory adheres to something concrete, whether it is a space, a gesture, a picture or – as in our case – an object.

4 For the political and military disputes see BARROW, 2005, here particularly pp. 95-97.

5 AITCHISON, 2000, p. 117: "The chair celebrated Edward's triumph over the Scots".

6 AITCHISON, 2000, pp. 119-120 with written and pictorial documentary evidence for coronations since 1308 (Edward II).

by Robert Bruce.[7] In the course of these negotiations, the return of the stone to Scotland was also discussed. The English government was prepared to give the stone back. However, this will was not included in the treaty, but Edward III instructed the chapter of Westminster to hand over the stone. However, the Abbot of Westminster refused to return the trophy donated to St. Edward the Confessor. He was supported by parts of the London populace who did not want to hand over the stone on any account.[8] Therefore, the stone remained in Westminster Abbey and in the coronation chair on which James VI and I was crowned King of England and Scotland (Union of Crowns) in 1603 as the successor to Queen Elizabeth I. In March 1707, the Scottish parliament accepted the Act of Union with England. From then on there was a joint parliament in London; 45 Scottish members sat in the House of Commons. It was to take until 1999 before a Scottish parliament convened once again.

From Westminster Abbey to Arbroath and back in 1950/51

In the twentieth century and, in particular after the Second World War, the coronation stone became an important memory box in the Scottish Covenant Movement's struggle for Scottish self-administration or the restoration of a separate parliament and separate government in Scotland (*Home Rule*).[9] The activists were of the opinion that they had to remind their compatriots of their Scottish identity as well as of the political independence as a kingdom in order to thus motivate them to fight for their own parliament in the present. Between 1947 and 1950, some two million people signed a petition drafted by the movement for political self-government.[10] At this time, the fighters for a separate Scottish national assembly as a place for political self-determination *discovered* the stone as a memory box of their old freedom and independence. The representatives of Scottish freedom and the national idea adopted a special interpretation of Anglo-Scottish history linked to the stone in London and propagated this. A link was created between the refusal of the government in London to allow Home Rule and keeping the Scottish coronation stone in

7 BROWN, 2004, p. 229; ROGGE, 2012, pp. 101-116.
8 BARROW, 2003a, p. 204; AITCHISON, 2000, pp. 132-33.
9 HARVIE, 1998, pp. 169-173; LEVITT, 1998, pp. 33-58.
10 On this also the article Bis die Engländer froh sind, 1950.

Westminster Abbey. The stone became the symbol of the continuous suppression of Scottish endeavours for more independence by established politics. If one could free the stone from its English captivity, then that would be a beacon signal for all Scots to participate in the struggle for political independence. So thought at least Ian Hamilton who, together with two further students, Gavin Vernon and Alan Stewart and the teacher Kay Matheson, wanted to bring the stone back to Scotland.

> The stone had been taken away from Scotland to show that we had lost our liberty. Recovering it could be a pointer to our regaining it. A promise had been made by the Treaty of Northampton of 1328 that it would be returned, and that promise had never been kept. Why should fulfilment of that promise not be wrung from them by spiriting the stone away at dead of night? […] An empty chair speaks out louder than a full house. Much louder than a full house if that house is a House of Westminster Parliament. It might just speak loud enough to awaken the people of Scotland.[11]

With the abduction of the stone the group wanted to arouse their Scottish compatriots, the majority of whom seemed to have come to terms with their subordinate position in the realm at the end of the 1940s. With their action they wanted to demonstrate that Scots can achieve great things and were precisely not second-class Englishmen. Hamilton, at least, was motivated by the high-handed manner of British governments as well as the general public, whose representatives he even accused and accuses of racism.[12] He was of the opinion that Scotland would be better off without administration by a government in London. But to achieve this goal, the Scots' fighting spirit had to be aroused. According to Hamilton, shame dominated the emotional state of nationally-moved Scots in the years around 1950.

> The shame was that we were not English. We had lost our sense of community. English customs, English pronunciations, English table manners were the mark of success. You were nothing if you did not speak proper […]. People even tried to think as the English did, and if there is one thing a people cannot do, it

11 HAMILTON, 2008, p. 13.

12 "There is more racial abuse towards us in the English papers than we would ever think of using toward England", so Ian Hamilton in his blog, HAMILTON, 2012.

> is to use the thought processes of another people. Most Scots thought of themselves as a sort of second-class English.[13]

In addition he deplored that the Scots had lost their singularity; they ignored their undoubtedly extant capabilities. The cultivation of a nation's soul was a matter for the people, but the Scots had no longer taken care of their nation's soul – with grave consequences for the Scots' conception of themselves and their identity, because: "When we give away our soul, we have nothing left to give".[14]

Hamilton and his comrades-in-arms wanted to set an example against this. With an action, such as fetching back the stone, which was difficult but also spectacular and symbolic, they could shoot the English right in the heart; an old injustice would be rectified and the Scots aroused for the struggle for independence and political self-determination. In 1950, he and his comrades-in-arms considered themselves as "a representative group of our own generation. We belong to a generation that saw the need for change and who set about making it."[15]

With the liberation – as Hamilton put it –of the stone from Westminster Abbey, he wanted above all to remind his compatriots of their forefathers' struggle for independence and their own government.[16] Therefore he prefaced the first edition of his report on the abduction of the stone published in 1952 with a section "For the English" in which he declared that he did not harbour any hatred against the English. Rather, he deplored the attitude of those Scots who would compare themselves with the English and then assess their being Scottish as better as or worse than being English. What was important was rather that the English and Scots should recognise that they are different nations. In addition he warned that if the problem of Scottish home rule was not resolved, Scotland could become a second Ireland.[17]

In summer 1950, Hamilton reconnoitred the location of the stone in Westminster Abbey and thought about how it could be removed from the chair and taken out of the church unnoticed. He planned the transport to Scotland

13 HAMILTON, 2008, p. 8.
14 HAMILTON, 2008, p. 10.
15 IBID., p. 211.
16 In an interview in The Daily Telegraph (14.12.2008), Hamilton stressed that he and his comrades-in-arms had not committed any theft in 1950: "It was a liberation. A returning of a venerable relic to its rightful ownership", CRAIG, 2008.
17 HAMILTON, 1952.

and thought out a diversionary tactic in order to make pursuit more difficult for the English police. For this purpose, he and his comrades-in-arms used two cars. On 24 December 1950, the group succeeded in forcing their way into the church and extracting the stone from the chair with the help of a chisel. However, in the process it fell to the ground and broke into two parts. That made it easier to transport the stone, which Hamilton first hid in a wood near Rochester for some days, because strict checks were conducted at the Anglo-Scottish border after the theft had been discovered. Only on 31 December did Hamilton and his helpers succeed in bringing the larger part of the stone to Scotland. Hamilton reported full of pride that they had brought back the symbol of Scottish freedom and, for the first time after over 600 years, were able to expose it to Scottish air again.[18]

The reactions to the act in England were foreseeable. The deed was immediately blamed on Scottish Nationalists.[19] The Home Secretary called the burglars thieves and impudent vandals. For the Dean of Westminster the purloining of the stone was not, of course, liberation. He considered the deed to be not just a theft, but a sacrilege, because the stone had been in the possession of the abbey for almost 700 years. On the other hand, many people in Scotland were pleased about the act, because they thought the stone should come home and because the English police were not in a position to find the stone's hiding place. However, the majority of Scottish politicians proved to be less enthusiastic, criticised the action and appealed to the culprits to return the stone.[20] All in all, most Scots were probably satisfied with the blessings of the British Welfare State which were making themselves noticeable in Scotland, too, in the 1950s. The Labour Party did not have a separate government or administration for Scotland on its political agenda, the Conservatives were achieving great approval on the other side of the border and the Scottish National Party (founded in 1928) achieved just one to two percent of the votes in elections.[21]

The abduction of the stone did not trigger a political change, but the activists did achieve one of their objectives. Scotland's constitutional position was discussed by a broad section of the public. The spectacular action surrounding the disappearance of the stone from London was also taken up by

18 HAMILTON, 2008, p. 194.
19 No trace of missing Stone of Destiny – already over the border?, 1950.
20 AITCHISON, 2000, p. 141.
21 DEVINE, 2012, pp. 565-568.

satirical review performers who made their own suppositions about the whereabouts of the stone. Because there had been complaints about the poor quality of coal, the rumour was also going round that the stone had been taken over by the Coal Board. Finally the BBC received the order to show consideration for the mood in Buckingham Palace and refrain from all jokes about the stone.[22]

The question arose for the students and their supporters what should happen next with the stone. At some time the authorities would find its hiding place and the members of the group around Hamilton would presumably be arrested and convicted. If the stone were to be shown publicly, it would quickly be seized by the police and brought back to Westminster. One idea was therefore to link the return of the stone with the demand that it might remain in Scotland. Finally it was decided to lay the stone, the two parts of which had been put together again, in front of the altar of Arbroath Abbey at Easter 1951. This abbey was closely associated with the struggle for Scottish independence because of the renowned *Declaration of Arbroath* of 1320.[23] The stone was handed over to the police by James Wishart, the custodian of the abbey. Wishart stated that he had not recognised the persons who had brought the stone into the abbey. He emphasised, however, that he was pleased that the stone had come to this historic site. [24] The stone was then taken back to London under guard and once again installed in the coronation chair in February 1952.[25] In June 1953, Elizabeth II sat on this chair during her coronation.

From Westminster Abbey to Edinburgh in 1996

In the years following Hamilton's deed, many Scots were aware of the significance of the stone as a memory box for Scotland's political independence; however, support for the Scottish Nationalists remained low, interest in self-government was slight. From the 1980s on, Scottish nationalism once again gradually developed political force. Owing to the oil finds off the Scottish coast, some Scottish politicians saw a possibility of making Scotland

22 Diebesgut in Ihrer Kirche, 1951.
23 Confer for more on the declaration BARROW, 2003b.
24 Return of the Stone, 1951.
25 MUNRO, 2003, p. 232.

financially more independent from England and thus have an economic basis for the demand of more political independence. In the awareness of this economic potential, the question of Scottish self-government was again discussed intensively.[26] The demand for devolution, coupled with a constitutional reform, was the core of the political programme of the Scottish National Party whose chairman, Alex Salmond, demanded the return of the stone to Scotland in 1995. Salmond knew that the removal of the stone by Edward I 700 years before would be recalled in 1996 and did not want to miss the opportunity to bring the stone and its significance for Scotland back into national awareness again. The Government in London did not react to this demand and it was not likely that the stone would ever return to Scotland.

Therefore, the surprise was great when on 3 July 1996 the Prime Minister, John Major, announced in the House of Commons that the coronation stone, also called the Stone of Destiny, the oldest symbol of the Scottish kingdom, was to return to Scotland. Admittedly, only the transfer of locality was linked with this, because the stone was to remain in the possession of the Crown and be used at future coronations of rulers of the United Kingdom. But because the stone had a special place in the hearts of the Scots, Major continued, 700 years after its transfer to London by Edward I, it was to return to its historic homeland again and be kept in safe custody in an appropriate manner.[27] In the course of the ensuing debate, the prime minister emphasised that the stone was a sign of the unity of the United Kingdom. An attitude that was also shared by Conservative MPs. Tim Renton observed that the return of the stone should be regarded as a sign of unity and not one of discord in the United Kingdom. The Scottish Conservative MP, Bill Walker, supported this opinion a few days later. The stone was, on the one hand, a symbol of the independent Scottish nation, he said, but on the other hand it was also a sign of the Union between England and Scotland. And finally he explained: "It is part of the cement that holds the Union together. Returning the stone strengthens the Union".[28] The Minister of State for Scotland, James Douglas-Hamilton, emphasised that since the Union of the Crowns in 1603 the stone had been part of the common history of Scotland and England.[29]

26 DEVINE, 2012, pp. 591-617.
27 The announcement by Major is also printed in MUNRO, 2003, the announcement verbatim, pp. 232f. For the ensuing debate in the House of Commons on 3 July 1996 see: House of Commons Debate Stone of Destiny 03.07.1996.
28 House of Commons Debate Stone of Destiny 16.07.1996, Column 1053.
29 House of Commons Debate Stone of Destiny 16.07.1996, Column 1056.

Scottish Labour Party MPs, in particular, saw this differently. Tony Blair, the Chairman of the Labour Party, saw in the return of the coronation stone a sign of the acknowledgement of Scotland's special position within the United Kingdom, because Scotland was a nation different from England, with its own traditions, own history and culture. For the Government in London, the stone was a memory box of the unity in difference existing since 1603, whereas Scottish MPs have interpreted the stone rather as a memory box of the self-rule and independence existing in former times. In 1996, more separate responsibility as well as self-government in their home country was a political objective for Scottish politicians in the House of Commons. The MP for Tweeddale, David Steel, declared that the majority of Scots did not just want to have a symbol, but also the content linked with the stone, namely independent control over Scotland's internal affairs.[30] The Labour MP, Andrew Faulds, also emphasised that they did not just expect a symbol of Scotland's independence, but concrete measures for this from the Government in London. John Maxton (Glasgow) stated even more sharply that the return of the stone was irrelevant for those who wanted a Scottish parliament, because the stone was a symbol of medieval feudal tyranny. However, this pointed emphasis remained a minority opinion, even among Scottish MPs. Margaret Ewing, the member for Moray, considered the stone not as a symbol for the rule of kings, but as a symbol for the political sovereignty of the Scottish people that had already been proclaimed in 1320 with the declaration of Arbroath. The Scottish Labour MP, Thomas Graham, spoke in favour of the re-establishment of a Scottish parliament, the members of which would respect the citizens and pay attention to their wishes. However, with the return of the stone the Government was only pursuing a policy of symbols: "not a token artefact; real stones for building houses – that is what our people want."[31] John Major had probably expected more enthusiasm in the House of Commons. But it became apparent that the Scottish members did welcome the return of the stone, however would not allow themselves to be distracted from their real political objectives. This Commons debate is an example of selective dealing with the past. There were several cultural and political traditions into which the stone as a memory box, that so to speak represented these pasts, could be

30 According to The Independent (04.07.1996), Steel said in the Commons that most people in Scotland "want not just the symbol but the substance of the return of democratic control".

31 See footnote 28.

classified. In the Commons, the political memory makers in each case interpreted these traditions with regard to their current political objectives.[32]

Apart from the varied interpretation of the stone as a representation of historic traditions at the highest political level, very practical questions were negotiated. John Major had, it is true, proposed the Castle or St. Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh as the place of display, however, the stone had never before been there, but in 1296 had been transported away by Edward I from Scone (by Perth), the place of the coronation of Scottish kings. Therefore it was no surprise that Bill Walker, in whose constituency Scone lays, demanded the stone be brought back there. He reinforced this opinion once again on 16 July 1996 during a debate in the Commons.[33] The old abbey, in which the stone used to be kept, did not exist anymore, but a suitable building should be erected in its place for the stone, he felt. This building should be large enough to accommodate the stone and to receive the expected masses of visitors. Walker then expounded on the history of the stone in detail, emphasising above all that it had already been stipulated in the Treaty of Northampton in 1328 that the stone should return thither, whence it had been transferred to London, namely to Scone. [34] With a concerted action, the Perthshire Tourist Board, the local Chamber of Commerce as well as the owner of Scone Palace wanted to file a petition in order to support the stone's return to Scone. At all events, the stone should be kept in a building on consecrated ground. And the Scottish regalia (crown, sceptre and sword)[35] could also be exhibited, together with the stone in Scone. Such a centre was the only realistic possibility of giving the stone a prestigious home. This argumentation, with the reference to the religious significance of the place, as well as the planned joint display of the secular symbols of political independence envisaged there, appealed to fundamental aspects of Scottish nationalism.[36]

The minister responsible for Scottish matters, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, finally declared that during a hearing all the local authorities, such

32 GREEN, 2008, p. 105.

33 House of Commons Debate Stone of Destiny 16.07.1996, Column 1051.

34 The Rt. Hon. Member made a mistake here, the stone is not mentioned in the treaty; see STONES, 1965, pp. 329-341; in addition STEVENSON, 2007, pp. 1-15.

35 After the Union with England in 1707, these so-called Honours of Scotland were placed in a chest and immured in Edinburgh Castle. In 1818, Sir Walter Scott received permission to open the chest. He found the regalia allegedly just as they had been laid there, see BURNET/TABRAHAM, 2001, p 47.

36 Even if one may also assume the intention among the supporters of this solution of also promoting tourism in the region.

as Edinburgh, Scone or Arbroath, which had an interest in the stone should explain how they wanted to meet the important criteria of accessibility, security, close connection with the past as well as the promotion of the historical significance of the stone on the spot in each case. The decision was then taken between Scone, where a centre for the Scottish kingdom was intended to be built with the stone as the main attraction, and Edinburgh, which could argue with its large numbers of visitors and the guarantee of security in the case of the display of the stone in the Castle.[37] The security aspect was decisive and it therefore was announced on 21 October 1996 that the stone would be displayed in Edinburgh Castle after its return to Scotland. On 30 November 1996, on St. Andrew's Day, the ceremonial transfer took place. On this occasion, the Scotland Minister, Michael Forsyth, made it clear once again what memory the Government in London associated with the stone. He thanked the Queen for the fact that the stone could return to its old home, where it would stand as a powerful memory of Scotland's heritage and as a symbol for the Scottish nation within the United Kingdom.[38]

But precisely the question of the terms under which Scotland would remain part of the United Kingdom was not resolved with the stone's return. Scottish politicians' demand for greater scope for political action (*devolution*) was no longer to be fulfilled by symbolic politics. In Scotland, on the contrary, concrete changes in political structures and more independence in government matters were expected – the stone should be followed by the establishment of a separate parliament. However, the Conservative government refused this during its 17-year rule. Thus there was speculation about the motives of John Major and his ministers for returning the stone to Edinburgh. In the press it was presumed that it was an electoral manoeuvre in order to win over Scottish electors for the Conservative Party in the elections due in 1997. In *The Independent* one could read: "The Scots asked for a parliament and John Major gave them a Stone."[39] For Alex Salmond of the Scottish National Party (SNP) the return of the stone was a transparent manoeuvre in order to placate Scottish national feelings.[40] Ian Hamilton did not take part in the ceremony for the

37 WELANDER, 2003, p. 238.
38 AITCHISON, 2000, p. 150.
39 The Independent, 04.07.1996.
40 Alex Salmond in HAMILTON, 2008, p. viii: "The final return of the stone by a Tory Government in 1996 was meant to placate Scottish feelings". DEVINE, 2012, p. 615 argues that the return of the stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey "must rank as an especially fine example of the invention of tradition". However, this was not

stone's return to Scotland in November 1996. He was disappointed that the stone was *quasi* just being lent and in fact remained in the possession of the royal family. Thus, despite the transfer of the stone to Edinburgh, an example was not set for Scottish independence. Rather, even in Edinburgh Castle the stone remained a memory box for the Unionist history of Scotland and England.[41]

The Labour Party under Tony Blair gained their electoral victory in 1997 among other things because they had given high priority to devolution. [42] His government had a referendum held in September 1997 in which over 74 percent of voters spoke in favour of a Scottish parliament. The *Scotland Act* was passed in November 1998 and the establishment of a Scottish parliament approved. The first elections took place in May 1999, and in July the newly elected members assembled for the first time.[43] It was then even possible to produce a connection between the stone's return to Scotland and the constitution of a parliament, for the Gaelic prophecy seemed to have come true: "Unless the fates shall faithless prove, And prophets voice be vain. Where'er this sacred Stone is found, the Scottish race shall reign".[44]

In 2006, on the tenth anniversary of the stone's return to Scotland, a discussion flared up again where it should have its best place in Scotland. Murdo Fraser (deputy head of the Conservatives) made the proposal in the Scottish parliament that the stone should be taken to Scone because there were no historical, political, constitutional or economic reasons for the display of the stone in Edinburgh. The stone had always been in Scone and it was now time to return it to its rightful place. This would also give the region an impetus to tourism because people would make their way to Scone to see the stone. The SNP member, John Swinney, supported the move: "It is an iconic image; it is part of the great distinguished history of our country".[45] However, this proposal to bring the stone back to its medieval abode was not taken up, either.

an invention of tradition but rather the use of cultural memory in a current political debate.

41 HAMILTON, 2008, p. 210: "That stone belongs not to any royal family but to the people of Scotland".

42 JEFFERY, 2010, pp. 33-40. In retrospect Tony Blair assessed the devolution policy as a tricky game, because one could not be certain "where nationalist sentiment ends and separatist sentiment begins". Tony Blair's quotation in The Daily Telegraph, 01.09.2010.

43 DEVINE, 2012, p. 617.

44 Quotation in HAMILTON, 2008, p. 7.

45 Stone's destiny is to sit in castle, 2006.

The stone filmed in 2008

In 2007, the Scottish National Party won 31 percent of the votes in the elections to the Scottish Parliament and Alex Salmond became First Minister of a government led by the SNP. According to the Scotland Act of 1999, the Scottish Parliament has legislative powers in the fields of education, agriculture, justice, health and in fixing rates of taxation. In these fields of politics the Scots have been able to act for the most part independently since then and thus fundamental demands for greater political self-determination were fulfilled. Consequently, the political and constitutional position of Scotland within the UK was quite satisfying for the majority of Scots at this time.

In this situation, a film entitled *Stone of Destiny* opened in the cinemas in autumn 2008 in which the history of the robbery (or abduction, respectively) of the stone by the students under the leadership of Ian Hamilton was recounted.[46] One can regard this film as an attempt by memory makers to create an – as they probably thought – important episode in the Scottish struggle for self-government and national pride accessible to audiences at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Just like Ian Hamilton in 1950, the film team also wanted to make audiences proud of being Scottish. But the reactions to this form of presentation of history were not uniform. There were cultural authorities who spoke up for an official memory, such as e.g. film critics who did not find this form of reminiscence work on the collective memory particularly interesting or successful.[47] But there were also very positive reactions from members of audiences,[48] so that the students' "heroic feat" in 1950 apparently had a place

46 Ian Hamilton had first published his report of the events under the title *No Stone Unturned* in 1952; the text then appeared in 1991 with the title *The Taking of the Stone of Destiny* and finally an expanded version was published in 2008 as *Stone of Destiny* in connection with the filming.

47 "Nationalist sentiment is tricky to put into words and the painting-by-numbers script too often comes across as awkward and hollow", EDG, 2008. The review in The Scotsman: "There really isn't much you can do with a script full of patronizing platitudes that spell out the film's themes in 72-point bold capital letters", Film review, 2008.

48 13 of 18 comments in the Internet Movie Database assess the film as very well worth seeing and as a contribution towards strengthening Scottish national pride, Stone of Destiny (2008).

in the "vernacular memory".[49] Perhaps the film did touch the Scottish souls of some members of audiences, and when watching the film they felt the way Ian Hamilton had done when he was able to touch the stone in 1950. In an interview shortly after the film's premiere, he recalled: "I felt I was holding Scotland's soul when I touched it for the first time".[50]

In connection with the release of the film, the question of the genuineness of the stone, which is to be seen in Edinburgh Castle, was raised again. The First Minister, Alex Salmond, again took up the opinion that had often been advocated before, namely that Edward I had already received a fake from the Abbot of Scone in 1296.[51] This view is based on the assumption that the Scots would not have simply handed over their most important symbol of political independence. However, even if a fake stone did not come to England already in 1296, then perhaps a false stone was deposited in Arbroath Abbey on Easter 1951 and the original was hidden somewhere up in the North. In the general memory, the idea that the stone, as the symbol and memory box for Scottish self-government and independence, had never left the country remained very attractive. However, this played a subordinate role in the political debates and in the interpretation of the significance of the stone for Anglo-Scottish relations in the twentieth century. The artefact now displayed in Edinburgh fulfils its function as a memory aid and interpretation aid for the past, regardless of whether or not it is the genuine coronation stone from the thirteenth century.

Conclusion

The coronation stone of the Scottish kings was used in the twentieth century as a vehicle for the selection and interpretation of the political relationship between England and Scotland in past centuries. Like a prism, it has captured various epochs in the history of political-cultural memory.[52] It served the actors in the debates about Scotland's political independence to put historical arguments into concrete terms. Of the various possibilities of interpretation,

49 For the differentiation of "official memory" and "vernacular memory", see GREEN, 2008, p. 113.
50 CRAIG, 2008.
51 Salmond: 'Stone of Destiny is fake', 2008.
52 ASSMANN, 2011, p. 117.

the actors have, above all, brought forward two concepts for recalling Scottish or Anglo-Scottish history on the basis of the stone into the debate and then advocated them in an active and committed manner in each case: The interpretation that the stone had symbolised Scottish freedom and political independence over the centuries competed with the interpretation that, since 1707 at the latest, the stone had been a memory box for the union of Scotland and England and for Scotland within the United Kingdom. The stone is thus one of the artefacts which assume important functions in the choice of what it is intended to recall. It was a carrier of political and institutional ideas over the centuries and therefore a means for cultural transfer in a diachronic mode.

For the young nationalists around Ian Hamilton at the beginning of the 1950s, the stone embodied the cultural memory of a free and politically independent Scotland; it was a witness to that past in which the Scots had defended a special political culture different from the English.[53]

In 1996, it was used by the government under John Major in an attempt to reconcile the two dominant but also diverging memory traditions linked with the stone as a memory box by the transfer back to its country of origin. The acknowledgement of an independent Scottish history was thus expressed, however, without drawing the consequence from this of also granting the Scots self-determination. The memory in Scotland preferred independence, and therefore the transfer of the stone was disputed. As a symbolic measure to placate the Scottish wish for independence and to ward off demands for devolution, thus self-government, it did not work. By comparison with the situation in 1950/51 it becomes clear that the living memory is being interpreted for the political interests of the present. For this reason, the meaning of the coronation stone as a bearer of the memory of Scottish independence and political self-determination has changed. When the students abducted the stone from Westminster Abbey, they wanted thus to arouse or revive their compatriots' national awareness. They were decidedly concerned about a symbol policy with the help of the stone. In the mid-1990s, however, a symbol policy with the help of the transfer of the stone could no longer distract from the demands for self-government. For nationally minded Scots a concrete change in structure was decisive – a parliament, in which Scottish members decide on Scottish matters. The handling of the coronation stone as a memory

53 In this respect the stone is a store in which knowledge of political culture can be transferred over long periods of time regardless of person; ASSMANN, 2008, pp. 111-118; LANDWEHR, 2009, pp. 52-54.

box is an example for the fact that memory in modern societies can no longer be controlled by an elite. There are various memory cultures which compete with each other over the interpretation of the past. That is then a process in which artefacts, such as the coronation stone, are of great significance, because they circulate and influence their surroundings.[54]

Since May 2011, the SNP has absolute majority (69 out of 129 seats) in the Scottish parliament.[55] It had campaigned with the promise, in the event of an electoral success, to hold a referendum in the following legislative period on Scotland's withdrawal from the United Kingdom. In October 2012, Alex Salmond and the English premier David Cameron signed an agreement that envisages the Scots' referendum on independence within a period of two years.[56] The vote will take place on 18 September 2014 and Scottish electors may then answer the question: "Should Scotland be an independent country: yes/no?"[57]

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54 NEUMANN/ZIEROLD, 2012, pp. 225-248.

55 SPARROW, 2011.

56 WATT/CARRELL, 2012.

57 CARRELL, 2013a. The electoral commission pushed through this wording against the proposal by Alex Salmond who had phrased it: "Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?" In this it was criticised that electors would be unduly influenced by "agree" to vote with "Yes". Alex Salmond publicly announced the date for the referendum at the end of March 2013; see CARRELL, 2013b.

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