

The Stone of Destiny

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For over seven hundred years the Coronation Stone, or Stone of Scone, rested in St. Edward's Chapel of Westminster Abbey as a sacred symbol of England's divine and royal rule. Its theft on Christmas Eve of 1950, by four Scottish patriots, and eventual return, brought new world-wide interest to the ancient story and tempestuous travels of this national relic.

The amazing story of the Stone of Destiny is closely entwined with Masonic history and tradition, particularly in its early years.

Does the stone rightfully belong to England? No more than to Scotland, unless they choose to evoke a "Statute of limitations" or "possession is nine tenths of the law" argument, by virtue of its seven-century rest in London. Does it therefore belong to Scotland? No more than it belongs to Ireland, who possessed it before them - or to Spain - or to Egypt - or to Palestine - all of whom claim previous custody and rightful ownership at one time or another, prior to its arrival in the British Isles.

Perhaps then it belongs to mankind in general, and, if truly a Stone of Destiny, might someday be an international symbol of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. It would thus fulfill the Promise of God, carrying out the traditions and teachings of Freemasonry.

Almost 4,000 years ago the Stone of Destiny was merely another stone lying on the plains of Luz, 11 miles north of Jerusalem. Fate brought Jacob's caravan to this place near Bethel one evening, and then, as even now, it was the custom for the traveller in the Middle East to bolster his pillow and bedding with stones for a more comfortable position. With his head resting on this particular stone, Jacob is said to have had his famous dream, in which God revealed his Divine Covenants and Promises.

Jacob blessed the Stone, sanctified it by anointing it with oil, and set it up as a pillar to mark the spot, vowing: *"If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to keep on, so I come again to my father's house (Bethel) in peace; then shall the Lord be my God, and this Stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's House."*

Perhaps it is well to note here that The Stone in calcareous, is called 'freestone' by Masons. It is purplish in colour with a few pebbles of quartz embedded in it. The most interesting thing about its geological formation is that no similar rock formation exists in the British Isles, but the Rev. Canon Tristram states that there is a stratum of sandstone near the Red Sea geologically like the Stone of Destiny. In the following years, Jacob who prospered in wealth and knowledge, was directed by God to return to Bethel. On his return, the Lord again appeared to him, saying, "I am the God of Bethel." Thus the Lord associated Himself not only with the place of the vision but with the Bethel Stone, and Jacob knew indeed that he had found the true God.

Jacob took the stone with him, and, from that time on it was always set up as a pillar marking the altar to the God of Israel. His twelve sons became the progenitors of the Twelve Tribes of

Israel, and The Stone followed them. Thus, The Stone supplied the physical as well as spiritual needs for the Israelites.

Let us again take note of the physical properties of The Stone. The Iron rings and a pole groove along the top of The Stone, worn from handling, bear witness to its long migrations. How and when were they worn? Not while in the temples of Jerusalem, or the castles and abbeys of Ireland, Scotland and England ! It must have been on the journey with Jacob to Egypt and during the 40 years of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness ! The Bethel Stone, finally, was returned to Jerusalem where it served as the Coronation Stone for the Jewish Kings, ending with the infamous Zedekiah in 578 B.C.

By that time the Bethel Stone had descended to the Ephraimites. Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, had acquired the land of Bethel, together with the Pillow-Rock, as his inheritance. From Joseph it passed to his younger son Ephraim, of whom Jacob had prophesied: "His seed shall become a multitude of nations."

As if to carry out this prophecy, a direct descendant of Ephraim, Gatholus by name, had sailed west through the Mediterranean with a large number of followers and reached Celtiberia (Southern Spain), where he founded a nation. From Celtiberia, a group of Gatholus' descendants invaded Eireann (Ireland) in the sixth century B.C. and established themselves in Ulster, building a beautiful palace called Team-Hair Breagh, and later 'Tara'.

It is to be noted that Gatholus did not possess The Stone and yet it did follow his route through Celtiberia and eventually came into the possession of his descendant Eremon. Thus the prophecy of Jacob was fulfilled. Now let us follow The Stone and its eventual sanctification of Eremon's rule. Jacob was fulfilled. Following the downfall of Zedekiah, Jeremiah and the major part of the Jews were carried captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. Only a few were left under the direction of the prince Gedaliah. Jeremiah was later released and returned to Jerusalem, but following the murder of Gedaliah, he took the remaining Jews to Tahpanhes in Egypt, where the voice of the Lord came to him informing him how to overthrow the image-worshiping Egyptians and seat Babylonia's Nebuchadnezzar on its throne.

The Lord said:-

"Take great stones in thine hand and hide them in the clay in the brick kiln which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanes, in the sight of the men of Judah; And say to them, Thus sayeth the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon, my servant and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them."

Did this mean that, unbeknown to himself, Nebuchadnezzar was given Divine permission to rule Egypt by being coroneted over the hidden Bethel Stone ? According to Irish historians , a few years later (581 B.C.) a small but distinguished group of strangers arrived in Ulster.

They had fled from Palestine to Tahpanes, Egypt, whence they had probably come by way of Caltiberia, the land of their Ephraim - Israelite cousins. In this group was an important patriarch saint called Ollam Folla meaning "Prophet" (Jeremiah ?). This aged man was the guardian of the beautiful Tea-Tephi, a princess descended from a Pharaoh, and a daughter of Zedekiah. He was accompanied by his scribe, so called Baruch (the name of Jeremiah's scribe was Baruch). They had brought with them the Bethel Stone, or Stone of Destiny, together with a royal harp and an Ark. It is significant that the Harp of David has been the royal arms of Ireland for the last 2,500 years.

Irish historians referred to Tea-Tephi as the “Daughter of God’s House”, and to the people to whom she brought the Stone of B-th-l God’s Stone - she could have been no other than the daughter of that house. According to tradition, King Eremon married Tea-Tephi and the royal palace changed it’s name to “Tara”, the root word from Taph meaning “One banished “.

According to Professor Totten of New Haven, “The altars of ancient Ireland were called Botal or Bothal, meaning the House of God. It is from the Hebrew world, B-th-l . So in the union of Tea-Tephi, a descendant of David and Eremon, descendant of Joseph, it not only left the Bethel Stone in the possession of the House of Joseph, but united the two principal kingdoms of of Israel, Judah and Ephraim. Thus came to pass the fulfillment of another prophecy of Jeremiah who said:

“I am Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first born. Hear the Word of the Lord. ye nations and declare it in isles afar off (Britain ?) and say, he that scatters Israel will gather him.”

Here ends the major Masonic significance of The Stone. It remained in Ireland for over 1,000 years where every Irish Ard-Righ (King) was crowned on it, until the advent of King Murchertah, who by some slipshod arrangement without the benefit of council, lent it to his brother Fearghus Mor (the Great) who took it to the Scottish island of Iona. Here 48 kings were crowned on it until the ninth century, when raids by the Norsemen became so serious that it was transferred to the town of Scone near Perth for safekeeping by Coinneach Crudalach (the Hardy) who became King of Alba (Scotland). In Scotland it remained for 400 years as that nation’s coronation Stone.

In the reign of England’s Edward I, and now known as the “Stone of Scone”, the stone was removed from Scotland and placed in Westminster Abbey, in 1292, either by force or mutual agreement (authorities disagree), and there it has remained almost ever since. But the Scottish were ever mindful of their ancient King Kenneth’s admonition that “Wherever The Stone should be, a King of Gaelic blood would reign”. And so in 1950 Scottish Nationalists, under the cover of darkness, removed the Stone from the Abbey and fled with it to Scotland. Four months later it was tracked down and promptly brought back to London. But in 1996 reason prevailed and by an Act of the British Parliament, the Stone was formally returned to Scotland.

An interesting story, some of whose connections would appear to be a bit slim, while others may stretch the imagination a little. Never-the-less, given the total time span and the distances over which, this no doubt ‘unremarkable stone’, has traveled, who is to say that it was not so.

V. Wor. Bro. Ken White
Lodge Gosford No. 742