



# Concrete and non-concrete

## An ethnographic study of the contemporary value and authenticity of historic replicas

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**One of the first qualitative social studies examining how replicas of historic objects and monuments 'work', our project aims to advance recent interdisciplinary debates about the relationship between original historic monuments and replicas, as well as inform the use of replicas at heritage sites. Nearing its 50th anniversary, our study centres on the St John's Cross erected in front of Iona Abbey in 1970, arguably the most iconic of Iona's monuments.**

### Our methods\*

- Semi-structured recorded interviews with people who live and/or work on Iona, short- and long-stay residents, tourists, heritage professionals and others with an interest in the replica.
- Participant observation: spending time in a place and observing daily activities.
- With Dr Stuart Jeffrey of Glasgow School of Art, undertaking a community digital workshop with local volunteers to produce a 3D model of the St John's Cross replica and other monuments on Iona.
- Archival research to create a cultural biography of the St John's Cross.

\*Ethically approved by the University of Stirling

Replicas of historic monuments and artefacts are routinely used at heritage sites and museums, although their value is much debated. Authenticity has long been associated with original historic objects and considerable emphasis is placed on the distinct, secondary status of replicas. Yet replicas remain unruly objects, potentially subverting or appropriating the authenticity and value of originals.

This project examines the forms of meaning, value and authenticity associated with replicas using focused ethnographic methods, concentrating on the early Christian carved stones at Iona, where originals and replicas co-exist in museum and landscape contexts. Engaging with key communities of interest, the research will shed new light on how replicas mediate people's relationships with the past. The results of the project will advance recent interdisciplinary debates, and have important implications regarding when and how replicas are used.



### Our research questions

How do replicas 'work'?

What are the implications?

- How do they mediate **experiences**?
- When / how do they acquire **authenticity** / **value**?
- What kinds of **social relations** do they sustain?
- What kinds of **material relations** do they sustain with place, original(s), other replicas, etc?

### Our activities and products

- Project website
- Fieldwork and archival research 2017
- Present findings to stakeholders: Iona community and Historic Environment Scotland in Spring 2018.

Thereafter:

- Articles in academic journals
- Summary accounts in popular magazines
- Case study in other publications
- With permission of participants, archive of anonymised interview transcripts
- Archived photographic record
- 3D digital model of the St John's Cross replica and other digital products freely available online. The original high-resolution data part of the project archive, and offered to the communities that participated in its creation
- Conference papers.