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'The King offereth but only Gold': Coins and Royal Ceremony in Tudor and Early Stuart England

The giving and receiving of coins has been a feature of royal rituals in many cultures. Their intrinsic value makes them obvious symbols. That something of that value is literally being transferred from the giver to the recipient is usually pretty unambiguous. Barrie Cook therefore surveyed the whole range of ceremonial occasions on which such gifts were given at the early-modern English court, although he deliberately said little about the best-known of those ceremonies, the royal maundy and touching for the king's evil, on the grounds that they are so well-known. One of the more high-profile occasions on which monarchs were presented with money was when they made formal entries into London, most notably during their coronation processions. By tradition, the recorder of the City presented a gift of 1,000 marks on behalf of the corporation of London. At the coronation itself, the monarch made offerings of coins, until the seventeenth century, when bars of gold were substituted instead. Coins and later medals were also distributed to the spectators within Westminster Abbey. The king similarly made offerings of gold bezants in the Chapel Royal on the major religious feast days. By the late sixteenth century gifts presented by senior courtiers to the monarch on New Year's Day conventionally took the form of money, with those courtiers receiving gifts of plate in return. The presentation of coins by the City of London was paralleled by the gifts presented by other civic corporations during royal progresses. In accordance with the age-old practice common throughout Europe, the present delivered to the visiting monarch usually took the form of a splendid cup filled with gold coins. Many of these customs involving coins were still recognisable features of the life of the English court as late as the age of Queen Anne and, of course, some of them, such as the maundy, continued to this day. **AB**