

= Royal touch =

The royal touch ( also known as the king 's touch ) was a form of laying on of hands , whereby French and English monarchs would touch their subjects , regardless of social classes , with the intent to cure them of various diseases and conditions . The thaumaturgic touch was most commonly applied to people suffering from tuberculous cervical lymphadenitis ( better known as scrofula or the King 's Evil ) , and exclusively to them from 16th century onwards . The disease rarely resulted in death and often went into remission on its own , giving the impression that the monarch 's touch cured it . The claimed power was most notably exercised by monarchs who sought to demonstrate the legitimacy of their reign and of their newly founded dynasties .

= = Origins = =

The kings and queens regnant of England and the kings of France were the only Christian rulers who claimed the divine gift ( divinitus ) to cure by touching or stroking the diseased . This special aptitude was thought to be evidence of God 's high esteem of the two monarchies , though they never agreed upon whose predecessors the ability was first conferred . In England , Saint Edward the Confessor ( r . 1042 ? 1066 ) was said to be the first monarch to possess the healing power of the royal touch . The French , who normally traced the origins of their monarchs ' divine gift back to Philip I ( r . 1059 ? 1108 ) or even Robert II ( r . 987 ? 1031 ) , denied that Saint Edward used the royal touch . They insisted that the first English monarch to claim the ability was Henry I ( r . 1100 ? 1135 ) , and that his touching was a politically influenced imitation of the gift granted exclusively to French monarchs .

The physician André du Laurens ( 1558 ? 1609 ) claimed that Clovis I ( r . 481 ? 511 ) was the first king who touched for scrofula , but the medievalist Marc Bloch ( 1886 ? 1944 ) argued that it was probably Philip I. Modern scholars , most notably Frank Barlow ( 1911 ? 2009 ) , agree that the French practice most likely originated from Saint Louis IX ( r . 1226 ? 1270 ) . The earliest direct evidence of the royal touch in England are the financial records dating from the reign of Edward I ( r . 1272 ? 1307 ) . The crusading Edward I did not arrive in England until 1274 but the custom of giving one penny to each patient had become well established by 1276 , suggesting that the practice dated at least from the reign of his father , Henry III ( r . 1216 ? 1272 ) . Henry III , known for insisting on his arbitrary decisions , loved public displays and was as pious as his beloved brother @-@ in @-@ law , Saint Louis IX , all of which makes it likely that he introduced the practice in England .

= = England = =

Henry I 's successors did not consider the royal touch fundamental , reducing its application . The ritual remained a marginal aspect of kingship until the 17th century , when its appeal grew to unprecedented proportions and when it suddenly became an object of scrutiny in literature .

Since the reign of Edward IV ( r . 1461 ? 1470 , 1471 ? 1483 ) , monarchs presented the diseased with a gold medal known as touch piece and hung it around the subject 's neck . The reverse of the medal depicted a ship , while the obverse showed the archangel Michael slaying a dragon , which led to the medal being popularly referred to as an Angel . The diseased were instructed to wear the medal constantly to ensure the success of the treatment . Not all people embraced the notion of the royal touch and miraculous medals ; many were simply eager to obtain the medal , which was then sold on the market .

= = = Procedure = = =

Henry VII ( r . 1485 ? 1509 ) , the first Tudor on the English throne , was preoccupied with legitimizing his reign . It was he who firmly established the procedure , relying heavily on precedent set by his predecessors . It consisted of four distinct elements :

The monarch touched ( or , alternatively , stroked ) the face or neck of the infected person .

The monarch hung the medal around the person 's neck .

Passages from the Gospel of Mark ( 16 : 14 ? 20 ) and the Gospel of John ( 1 : 1 ? 14 ) were read . Mark 16 contains themes that confirm monarchs ' immunity to infectious diseases : " They shall take up serpents ; and if they drink any deadly thing , it shall not hurt them ; they shall lay hands on the sick , and they shall recover . " Mark 16 : 18

Prayers were offered . Until the English Reformation , the prayers were addressed not only to God but also to Virgin Mary and the saints .

The touch was originally meant to cure tuberculous cervical lymphadenitis ( commonly referred to as scrofula or the King 's Evil ) , rheumatism , convulsions , fevers , blindness , goitre and other ailments . Since the reign of Elizabeth I ( r . 1558 ? 1603 ) , however , the touch was applied only to people suffering from scrofula . The Henrician practice was rarely modified , and the changes were minor ; Elizabeth I made the sign of the cross above the infected person 's head , while her squeamish successor , James I ( r . 1603 ? 1625 ) , made stroking motions above the abscesses instead of actually touching them .

= = = Frequency = = =

The ritual was normally performed between Michaelmas and Easter , when cold weather made it less likely to contract a disease from the infected subject . It was believed that the treatment was more likely to be successful if performed on a holy day . English monarchs generally touched less frequently than their French counterparts . Edward I touched up to 1 @, @ 736 people annually , but did not touch during his frequent military campaigns abroad . His immediate successors followed a similar pattern .

Henry VII touched seven or eight infected people annually , and there were intervals lasting several years during which he did not perform the ritual at all . Henry VIII ( r . 1509 ? 1547 ) touched 59 people between early January 1530 and late December 1532 . The Protestant Edward VI ( r . 1547 ? 1553 ) apparently did not perform the ritual , but the Catholic Mary I ( r . 1553 ? 1558 ) took it somewhat more seriously . Early in her reign , the Protestant Elizabeth I was reluctant to participate in a ritual whose efficacy she probably doubted . Although she resumed the practice in 1570 , after the Roman Catholic Church excommunicated her and alleged that she had lost her healing power , Elizabeth decisively downplayed her own role in the miraculous healing . The Elizabethan surgeon William Clowes , who asserted that the royal touch proved her legitimacy , claimed that Elizabeth could also heal foreigners , citing a Dutchman as an example .

Although the strictly Protestant James I wished to end the practice , he found himself having to touch an increasing number of people . The practice spread to Scotland , where James reigned as well as resided before the Union of the Crowns ; the Scots started believing that their king , now also king of England , possessed the ability to heal them . Charles I ( r . 1625 ? 1649 ) issued plenty of edicts in an attempt to restrain the growing public demand . On 27 December 1633 , he touched 100 people at Holyrood Palace .

The frequency of the ritual reached its climax during the reign of Charles II ( r . 1660 ? 1685 ) , the only English monarch who applied royal touch more than French kings . Over 92 @, @ 000 scrofulous people were touched by him ? over 4 @, @ 500 annually . James II ( r . 1685 ? 1688 ) was very skeptical about the ritual but nevertheless indulged in it . He was deposed by William III ( r . 1689 ? 1702 ) and Mary II ( r . 1689 ? 1694 ) , who refused to take part in what they considered a superstition . When a subject asked him for a touch , William reputedly said : " God grant you better health and better sense . " Anne ( r . 1702 ? 1714 ) reintroduced the practice almost as soon as she ascended , touching 30 people on 6 October and 20 on 19 December 1702 . She took it very seriously , even fasting the day before . On 30 March 1712 , she performed the ritual for the last time ; Samuel Johnson ( 1709 ? 1784 ) was the last of the 300 scrofulous people Anne touched that day . George I ( r . 1714 ? 1727 ) permanently discontinued the practice , but the exiled James II 's Jacobite heirs claimed the ability until the 1780s .

The physician Sir Richard Blackmore praised William III and George I for abandoning " that

superstitious and insignificant ceremony " , which he believed was a " Popish " plot . The Glorious Revolution and subsequent abandonment of the idea of the divine right of kings rendered the royal touch unnecessary as means of proving monarch 's legitimacy . Reports of Jacobite claimants curing scrofula by touch were rebuffed by a contributor to the General Evening Post : " The illustrious Royal Family now on the Throne despise such childish Delusions , such little pious Frauds , to prove their Divine Right to the Crown . They act upon noble Principles ; they want no chicanery to support their Throne . " The ceremony finally disappeared from the Book of Common Prayer in 1732 .

= = France = =

By the Late Middle Ages , the royal touch had become an integral part of the coronation of the French monarch at Reims Cathedral . The rite included the anointing of the king 's hands , which was believed to confer on him the ability to cure . The coronation and anointing were immediately followed by a journey to Corbeny , the site of the shrine of Saint Marcouf ( d . 558 ) , patron saint of scrofulous people . After the pilgrimage was completed , the newly crowned king was deemed to possess the sacred power of touch . On his deathbed , Philip IV ( r . 1285 ? 1314 ) reportedly instructed his son and heir , Louis X ( r . 1314 ? 1316 ) , about healing scrofula by touch . Philip VI ( r . 1328 ? 1350 ) , the first Valois king , sought to demonstrate that he shared the thaumaturgic powers of his sovereign cousins and ancestors , thus proving himself as their rightful heir . He touched 35 people between 1 January and 30 June 1337 ; some of them had come from Brittany , Brabant and Vivarais .

The demonologist Pierre de Lancre ( 1553 ? 1631 ) boasted that even dead French monarchs could heal ; it was , indeed , still believed in the 16th century that the healing power was retained by Saint Louis IX 's arm , preserved in Poblet Monastery in Catalonia . In order to be touched by the French king , people traveled from as far off as the present @-@ day Italy and Spain already in the 13th century . The foreigners were ranked in a specific order , with the Spanish taking precedence over all others and the king 's own subjects coming last .

= = = Wars of Religion = = =

The idea of the royal touch promoted the power of the monarchy , but the ceremony was seldom performed in the 16th century . During the French Wars of Religion ( 1562 ? 1598 ) , the worsening conditions helped scrofula spread more than ever and the interest in the disease steadily increased . The Catholic League started a propaganda claiming that Henry III ( r . 1574 ? 1589 ) was unable to heal by touch due to his immorality . After the assassination of Henry III and accession of the Protestant Henry IV ( r . 1589 ? 1610 ) , the League warned that God would revoke his gift if the French accepted a Protestant as their sovereign and that the scrofulous would never be cured again .

After converting to Catholicism and establishing his authority , Henry IV was hailed not only as the healer of the scrofulous , but also as the healer of the kingdom . The first Bourbon on the French throne , he decided to take advantage of the ability attributed to his predecessors and use it to confirm the legitimacy of his reign . He was , however , in an inconvenient situation : he was crowned at Chartres Cathedral rather than Reims , and thus made no visit to the shrine of Saint Marcouf . He maintained that the royal touch was something he was handed down by his predecessors and by God 's grace , rather than an ability conferred by the rite of coronation . Henry decided not to exhibit his " divine gift " immediately after his coronation at Chartres in February 1594 ; instead , he decided to save the mystique element of his kingship for his entry in Paris in March . Two weeks after the event , on Easter , Henry exercised his healing power for the first time . He was determined not to show any skepticism about the ritual , fearing that it might cast doubt on the sincerity of his conversion .

Henry IV 's decision to indulge in the practice served as visual evidence to his subjects that God approved of his reign . Royal physicians and others who witnessed these ceremonies insisted that at

least half of all the diseased people he touched were healed within days . The ceremonies took place in other cities and at least four times a year : on Easter , on Pentecost , on All Saints Day and on Christmas . On Easter 1608 , Henry IV touched 1 @, @ 250 scrofulous persons . He complained that the hours @-@ long ceremony exhausted him , but continued the practice and consistently gave the impression that he was doing it only out of concern for the well @-@ being of his subjects . The ceremony was performed in the presence of the princes of the blood , almoners , bodyguards , and physicians . The latter presented Henry with patients , and he proceeded to make the sign of the cross on his scrofulous subject 's cheeks , touched the subject 's sores , and exclaimed : " The King touches you , God cures you . " ( French : " Le Roy te touche et Dieu te guerit . " )

= = = Decline of practice = = =

Louis XIII ( r . 1610 ? 1643 ) and Louis XIV ( r . 1643 ? 1715 ) both actively took part in touching ceremonies . The latter touched 1 @, @ 600 people on Easter 1680 . Voltaire ( 1694 ? 1778 ) scornfully wrote that he had lost confidence in the royal touch upon hearing that a mistress of Louis XIV died of scrofula " despite being very well touched by the king " . After 1722 , the sentence exclaimed by the king upon touching the infected changed to the more hopeful : " The King touches you , may God heal you . " ( French : " Le Roy te touche et Dieu te guérise . " ) The new formula , rather than implying that God would inevitably grant the monarch 's wish , was a prayer that may or may not result in a cure . Louis XV ( r . 1715 ? 1774 ) was skeptical about the royal touch . He performed it early in his reign , but caused a scandal when he failed to summon the scrofulous at Eastertide in 1739 and never again touched the diseased . The custom was thus suspended for 36 years , until Louis XVI ( r . 1774 ? 1792 ) revived it at his coronation on 11 June 1775 by touching 2 @, @ 400 people . That was probably the only time he touched the scrofulous . At his coronation on 29 May 1825 , Charles X ( r . 1824 ? 1830 ) touched 121 of his subjects ; the royal touch was never again employed .

= = Legacy and comparisons = =

The royal touch was not the only " miraculous " healing power attributed to European rulers . Members of the House of Habsburg were believed to be able to cure stuttering by a mouth @-@ kiss . The medieval monarchs of Castile were reputed to possess the ability to exorcise demons by making the sign of the cross and calling on God , while their Hungarian counterparts supposedly cured jaundice . Similarly , English monarchs distributed cramp @-@ rings , which were said to be a cure for " diabolical " sicknesses such as cramps and epilepsy .

Inoculation , an early form of immunization , was introduced into England during the reign of George I , who had put a definite end to the royal touch in his kingdom . The royal family strongly supported it , but it was controversial medically as well as politically and theologically . The medicine historian Adrian Wilson described it as " the Whig and Hanoverian equivalent of the Stuart practice of touching for scrofula ... But whereas the Royal Touch mobilised divine powers , based on hereditary right , inoculation deployed natural powers harnessed by man , with the monarch as the benevolent onlooker rather than indispensable participant . "

Scholars have held different opinions about the royal touch , ranging from deprecation in the 19th and early 20th century to more sympathetic treatment . The Whig politician Lord Macaulay ( 1800 ? 1859 ) ridiculed it as an " absurd superstition of a pre @-@ enlightened age " . The University of London medicine professor Sir Raymund Crawford published a study in 1911 , revealing his fascination with the " dubious if exotic " practice . A study by the French historian Marc Bloch followed in 1924 . Bloch was baffled by the tenacity of the esoteric practice and agreed with Lord Macaulay 's assessment that it was grounded in a form of mass hysteria . Recently , however , historians have avoided attributing the popularity of the royal touch to naivety of the masses . The British historian Keith Thomas discussed the royal touch in the context of religion and magic , while his colleague and compatriot J. C. D. Clark attributes the survival of the practice into the 18th century to the persisting notion of the divine right of kings .

