

George IV's Coronation as Festival: Invented Traditions, Material Culture, and the Multisensory Meanings of Diamonds in Britain in 1821

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KEYWORDS

history of the senses

thing theory

orientalism

India

historical consciousness

British monarchy

light

visual culture

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes George IV's coronation as a multisensory festive experience in order to understand the meanings of diamonds within British material culture in 1821. Reframing the coronation as a festival allows historical scholars to bridge the premodern/modern divide in early nineteenth-century historiography and demonstrates the ongoing centrality of festivals in consumer culture in the modern era. It also offers a vantage point from which to study sensory paradigm shifts and clashes that occurred in this context and evaluate diamonds in relation to other pieces of material culture outside of the confines of a formal marketplace. The article argues that the coronation shifted how diamonds were thought about in Britain, though this shift was subtle and deeply embedded in the turmoil of the moment. On a widespread scale, the event normalized the association of diamonds with monarchy, imperial power, and light, in ways that made diamonds seem like quotidian items. The article is based on accounts of the event in newspapers, periodicals, and official histories.

1. "The Coronation," *Manchester Guardian*, June 9, 1821, 4; "Thursday's Coronation," *Times*, July 21, 1821, 3; "Coronation," *Scotsman*, July 28, 1821, 234; and "The Coronation of His Majesty George IV," *La Belle Assemblée*, August 1, 1821, 21.

2. Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 205; and Thomas Laqueur, "The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV," *Journal of Modern History* 54, no. 3 (September 1982): 417–66.

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In 1821, it was common for such publications as the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Times*, the *Scotsman*, and even ladies' fashion magazines like *La Belle Assemblée* to refer to George IV's coronation as a "festival."¹ Approaching this coronation through the lens of festive studies allows for an analysis of the event on its own terms rather than as a foil for later expressions of popular monarchy or a footnote in the history of monarchical scandals. Instead of reading the coronation as a top-down affair, produced by the monarch and for the monarch, I read it as a broader public event through which cultural understandings and practices of many kinds were contested and promulgated, particularly in terms of ideas about consumption, material culture, and embodied sensory experience. In framing the coronation as a festival—addressing issues of consumption and material culture historiography—and analyzing the material content and sensory experience of diamonds in their multiple meanings, I argue that the coronation represented a shift in how diamonds were thought about in Britain. This shift was subtle and deeply embedded in the period's sensory and material culture. The coronation both naturalized and denaturalized diamonds in British material culture in how their meanings were tempered and how future monarchs and regular consumers alike could "use" them in public events.

Festive Studies and Coronations

Scholars, in one of two ways, have generally framed George IV's coronation in terms of the power of the British monarchy: first, as a final act in the scandal known as the Queen Caroline Affair, and second, as the low point preceding the rise of popular monarchy in nineteenth-century Britain. George's attempt to divorce his wife, Caroline, in 1820, fueled by extensive press coverage, quickly devolved into a battle between Tories and Whigs, drawing people across Britain and empire into the debate. As historians Anna Clark and Thomas Laqueur have argued, the affair reveals how ideas about gender, sexuality, and marriage operated at the center of British politics.² George's refusal to include Caroline in the coronation was the final battle in the war that was their marriage; the queen died only five weeks later. The taint of scandal lived on, however. In this historiography, Caroline's unsuccessful attempt to enter the venue on the day is covered in passing as a final public humiliation.

In the second framing, historian David Cannadine, in arguing that nineteenth- and twentieth-century rituals of the British monarchy—though presented to the public as centuries old—were largely invented to give a precarious institution the aura of unshakable continuity, positions the 1821 coronation as the nadir from which the success of popular monarchy in the late Victorian period grew. In this vein, George IV's coronation is instructive for what it lacked: the "coherent ceremonial language" of the coronation of James II (r. 1685–88), which had been so disrupted by the vicissitudes of the Glorious Revolution that by 1821 there was no "vocabulary of pageantry, no syntax of spectacle, no ritualistic idiom." As a result, George IV's coronation "simply did not work" and was "so overblown that grandeur merged into farce." It typified what Cannadine understands as the first stage of the invention of monarchical traditions that spanned between 1820 and 1877: "ineptly managed ritual, performed in what was still preponderantly a

3. David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance, and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition,' c. 1820–1977," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 116, 118n55, 117, 108.

4. Valerie Cumming, "Pantomime and Pageantry: The Coronation of George IV," in *London—World City, 1800–1840*, ed. Celina Fox (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 39–50; and Geoffrey de Bellaigue, "A Royal Mise-En-Scène: George IV's Coronation Banquet," *Furniture History* 29 (1993): 174–83.

5. Alessandro Testa, "Doing Research on Festivals: *Cui Bono?*," *Journal of Festive Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 6.

6. Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600–1800*, trans. Brian Pearce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14, 115–19, 146; Peter Gurney, *The Making of Consumer Culture in Modern Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 103; Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, eds., *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850–1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999). Roche, for example, implies that the influence of the festival falls off with modernity, and Gurney, despite looking for ways the working classes became involved in the making of consumer culture in modern Britain, ignores

localized, provincial, pre-industrial society."³ Ultimately this framework treats the coronation as a springboard for a more fulsome discussion about a later historical context.

While both of the above framings have allowed us to integrate George IV into broader discussions of British political history, they also decontextualize the day itself and obscure the cultural dynamics that created the coronation's short-term failure and long-term success as the start of many invented traditions. Two studies, however, suggest the merits of anthropological and material culture approaches to recontextualize the coronation: fashion historian Valerie Cumming's chapter in *London—World City, 1800–1840* on pantomime and pageantry at the coronation and art historian Geoffrey de Bellaigue's article on furniture at the banquet.⁴ Both tease at the possibilities available when we read the coronation as a culturally tense moment and not as if it were taking place within a vacuum of meaning. But what is to be gained by contextualizing the coronation and what reframing devices can we use to do that work?

This is where the festive studies approach is instructive. Sociologist Alessandro Testa notes that the definition of "festival" has grown sufficiently broad to include many types of public events.⁵ One payoff of this is that festivals can be identified and compared across time periods, which is critical for reassessing the premodern/modern divide in European historiography. In European consumption history, for example, early modernists often discuss festivals as important sites for the propagation of new public tastes and consumer practices between 1500 and 1800. Nineteenth-century specialists, however, relegate festivals to a premodern past and emphasize the modernity of retailing, department stores, exhibitions, and advertising strategies, giving the impression that the world of the modern consumer was different not only in degree but also in kind.⁶ Historians focused on labor, such as E. P. Thompson, tend to characterize festivals as part of a vanishing eighteenth-century "moral economy," superseded by nineteenth-century forms of capitalism and consumerism.⁷ Coronation studies likewise conforms to the premodern/modern divide, assuming the historical significance of the ritual pre-1800 and eschewing it afterward, in part because not all monarchies persisted after 1800.⁸ Reframing nineteenth-century coronations, jubilees, exhibitions, and other public events as festivals encourages a reevaluation of the novelty of these events. Moreover, it allows for a better appreciation for how these events, as well as the experiences and activities of festivalgoers, were constitutive of modern consumer culture, regardless of whether people directly purchased things. Thinking about festivals more broadly encourages ways to keep the spirit of "history from below" alive in studies of modern capitalism, governmentality, and monarchy.

Historicizing Material Culture

In this spirit, and following Testa's insistence that festive events be examined through ethnography and thorough grounding in the historical context, I consider the coronation-as-festival as historically significant on its own terms and alive with contingency and tension.⁹ Provincializing monarchism and the monarch within a discussion of a coronation reframes the event as a complex negotiation of new tastes and consumer practices among the public. For those interested in particular material culture *things*, studying festivals offers a different vantage point on a problem that plagues most single-commodity studies: the tendency to decontextualize that item in order to press it into a diachronic narrative and, perhaps, overemphasize its place in a given context. As commodity historian Stephen Topik and others have noted, it

festivals and festive methodology
altogether.

7. E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present*, no. 50 (February 1971): 135.
8. János M. Bak, ed., *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
9. Testa, "Doing Research on Festivals," 6–7. Although Cannadine identifies at least ten aspects of ritual, performance, and context essential to studying the effects of rituals of the monarchy, including economic structure, fashion, and the setting in which the event took place, he does not operationalize these in his own analysis of 1821. Cannadine, "Context, Performance, and Meaning of Ritual," 106–7.
10. Stephen Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr Frank, eds., *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500–2000* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–5.
11. Roche, *History of Everyday Things*, 1–6.
12. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3–63; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA:

becomes impossible to study one commodity when the production and consumption of it was inextricably bound up with others; tea, sugar, and opium, for example, have deeply intertwined histories.¹⁰ Likewise, the meanings of material culture things are constituted vis-à-vis other living and nonliving things in the material context. Festive events offer material culture historians opportunities to study particular commodities in specific contexts that do not assume the significance of that commodity. And because public events tend to generate more archival sources, they allow for a study of the commodity within a fuller world of goods and embodied experiences than might be gained by only studying shops and shopkeepers.

The narrative arc of Europe's material culture history, as historian Daniel Roche has shown, is one about the uneven and gradual shift from material scarcity in the sixteenth century to abundance by the twentieth.¹¹ What else shifted to adapt to this material change, and how did people cope with the knowledge of new goods on offer, regardless of whether they could personally possess them? How did an abundance of things effect change?

Thing theory, which questions the divide between subject and object, offers one approach to answering these questions. Sociocultural scholars, like Alfred Gell, Arjun Appadurai, Bruno Latour, and Daniel Miller, have argued that the material world—*things*—influence how people relate to and understand one another and their material environment.¹² In ways that are not necessarily textual, things have *affect* and can suggest emotions, ideas, and meanings, fostering connections, memories, and frameworks. In British studies, thing theory has been applied most successfully in art history and literary criticism where the artistic artifact itself creates the boundaries of analysis.¹³ Thus, literary critic Elaine Freedgood argues that exhaustive descriptions of objects in early and mid-Victorian novels facilitated mid-Victorians coming to terms with the new abundance of goods around them. Because these objects were underdetermined in Victorian fiction, their meanings ran wild in novels, out of the control of the author, and evoked popular knowledge about colonial exploitation and commodity chains, which in turn informed people's understanding of the novels and their own society and material culture. In other words, the objects carried meanings that were more embedded in their historical context than the confines of the novel.¹⁴

As compelling as thing theory has been for literary criticism, and while historians often talk about affect, they have been more reluctant to deploy thing theory directly, perhaps because of the difficulty in applying it to a more disparate, reticent source base. Yet ethnographic sensitivity in festive studies reminds us of the anthropological/sociological context out of which thing theory emerged. Framing George IV's coronation as a festival gives it both an analytical genre to read within and temporal boundaries not found in many other singular events. It is a good case study to discuss the agency of things in creating meaning and significance and an important site to examine the contingencies and fugitive meanings alive in this shift from scarcity to abundance.

Historicizing Sensory Experience

To enact the kind of ethnography that Testa implores, we also have to think about embodied experiences, how understandings of festival are mediated through the senses and how sensory paradigms themselves were subject to change over time and to upheaval in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁵ Classic scholarship on the history of the senses has (over)emphasized

Harvard University Press, 1993); and Daniel Miller, "Materiality: An Introduction," in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–50.

13. Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1–22; and John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

14. Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

15. Martin Jay, "In the Realm of the Senses: An Introduction," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (April 2011): 309.

16. Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 19–26.

17. Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 136–46.

18. David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 10–11.

19. Constance Classen, "Introduction: The Transformation of Perception," in *A Cultural History of the Senses: In the Age of Empire*, ed. Constance Classen (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1–24.

20. Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5, 10–12, 62–98.

21. Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf, eds., *Exploring the Senses:*

sight in charting Europe's modernity. From the advent of the printing press and a concomitant emphasis on literacy, to the scientific revolution's emphasis on observation and empiricism and use of instruments to expand the visual field tele- and microscopically, ocularcentrism was underwritten by the cultural valuing of sight as masculine, respectable, and civilized. The world was thus best appreciated by the literate and learned, who were most often men. In keeping with a shift toward the visual, roses came to be valued for their look more than their smell, and ballet—rather than bawdier, more raucous "peasant" dances—came to exemplify beauty in dance.¹⁶ By the 1840s, visitors to museums, previously encouraged but now forbidden to pick up objects, could only understand and appreciate things through observation alone.¹⁷ Better and more lighting, photographic technology, and the rise of surveillance governmentality in the nineteenth century furthered the supremacy of sight. It also came to be associated with not only masculine superiority but also distal objectivity, class, and racial superiority. "Base" senses, such as touch and taste, were associated with proximal subjectivity, the primitive, the feminine, the lower classes, and the racially or civilizationally inferior.¹⁸

Subsequent scholarship has complicated this narrative by arguing that a fully ocularcentric culture, if it ever was, only pertained to a small percentage of Western populations, with the majority still making meaning through dim lighting, uncomfortable temperatures, smells, touches, and noncurated sounds. The department store of the mid-nineteenth century, often reduced to a visual extravaganza, was an onslaught on all the senses as proprietors scrambled to figure out what would increase profits.¹⁹ And, as historian Chris Otter has argued, the supremacy of illumination, optics, and visibility, as part of the apparatus of political economy in the nineteenth century, had an especially bourgeois inflection bound up in liberalism and respectability. The gaze, wielded oligoptically rather than panoptically, went in many directions and deliberately overlooked certain spaces. Conflating the control of sightlines with the control of private property, the liberal drive to distinguish private from public created a reverence for, a delight in, and an anxiety about unseen spaces.²⁰ Respectability, then, became about disciplining the senses and using them properly: not touching in a gallery; observing but not staring; listening with an educated ear; not making loud noises; keeping suitable distance between bodies, especially bodies of varying categories of difference (gender, race, class, and religion, namely); eating politely; and exhibiting pleasant odors. Moreover, as Europeans came into contact with greater diversity out in the world and "at home" in their metropolises, they encountered not only different material goods but different sensory worlds as well.²¹

The 1820s were marked by clashes between different sensory paradigms—old and new, foreign and domestic—that mediated the meanings of such things as diamonds. Diamonds, in particular, were embroiled in controversy in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century. The quantity of Queen Charlotte's diamondiferous jewelry, showcased at court and on public occasions, became a lightning rod for critiques of monarchical spending and ideas about capricious, feminine consumption habits.²² As art historian Marcia Pointon has argued, "subsequent representations [of the queen] often mediated her persona through a discourse of ornament and precious stones." The provenance of the jewels was a crucial part of the outcry: many diamonds had been given to her by Indian nawabs or agents of the East India Company, including the disgraced Warren Hastings, governor of Bengal, who was impeached by Parliament in 1786 and underwent a scandalous trial for his conduct in India that lasted until 1795. During that

South Asian and European Perspectives on Rituals and Performativity (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014).

22. Marcia Pointon, *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones & Jewellery* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 179–99.

23. *Ibid.*, 185, 178, 192, 195, 197, 199. “Bulse” comes from a Portuguese word used to describe the sacks of diamonds Indian gemstone traders used. The fact that the word was used in caricatures is evidence of how much the British reading public knew about the Indian diamond trade at that time.

24. Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143–49, 155–65.

25. “Jottings from Birmingham,” *Jeweller and Metalworker*, July 1, 1897, 788.

26. “The Coronation of His Majesty, King George the Fourth,” *European Magazine, and London Review*, July 1821, 26–64; “The Coronation of His Majesty George IV,” *La Belle Assemblée*, August 1, 1821, 21; “Coronation,” *Birmingham and Lichfield Chronicle*, July 26, 1821; “Coronation,” *Dublin Evening Post*, July 24, 1821; “Our Readers Will Sympathize,” *Star*, July 21, 1821; and Robert Huish, *An Authentic History of the Coronation of H. M. King George the Fourth* (London: J Robins and Co., Albion Press, 1821), 273.

27. Sylvanus Urban, “The Coronation,” *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle*

time, diamonds became inexorably linked to bad governance in India, corruption, and plunder. Contemporary caricatures depicted Hastings as turbaned, sometimes labeled as the “knave of diamonds” or “the wise man of the East,” accepting bribes of bulses of stones from nefarious Indians and, in turn, feeding those stones to the Tory prime minister, Charlotte, George III, or John Bull, as a representation of Britain.²³ For many at that time, diamonds were emblems of “the East” and connoted a decidedly un-English and unprogressive way of dressing, governing, and consuming.²⁴ By 1897, however, a different set of meanings for diamonds is evident in the popular celebration of Queen Victoria’s newly invented Diamond Jubilee. The stones resonated as emblems not of the East but of British power at home and abroad. The queen’s fashion and consumption habits were still topics of debate but not to such an extent that the royal household was wary of participating in a festival nominally centered on diamonds.²⁵

In grappling with this shift in the meaning of diamonds over the nineteenth century, George IV’s coronation, read here as festival, emerges as a key moment for bridging the premodern/modern divide and demonstrating the ongoing centrality of festivals to consumer culture; for excavating the early nineteenth-century sensory paradigm shift and the imbrication of sight with such other senses as sound, taste, and smell, and even time in the experience of and creation of meaning; and for examining the contentiousness of diamond consumption, the multivalence of diamonds, and the constitution of those meanings vis-à-vis other things. What follows is my analysis of the sensory experience and materiality of George IV’s coronation. This method, while emphasizing the senses, works to gauge the meanings of diamonds within this festive context. While efforts have been made to show a range of press reports of the day, the *Observer’s* coverage takes center stage because it was the most reprinted (or plagiarized). Versions of the *Observer’s* coverage appeared in, for example, the *European Magazine*, *La Belle Assemblée*, the *Birmingham and Lichfield Chronicle*, the *Dublin Evening Post*, the *Star*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Statesman*, the *Suffolk Chronicle*, and Robert Huish’s *An Authentic History of the Coronation of H. M. George the Fourth*.²⁶ As the *Gentleman’s Magazine* said, “we are indebted ... to the liberality of the public-spirited Proprietor of the *Observer*.”²⁷

Confounding the Senses

On July 19, 1821, George IV was crowned king of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Ireland, and Hanover in a ceremony that was so elaborate and piqued with drama that every English monarch for the next century would work to distance themselves from it. George recalled the event as one of “inexpressible tortures” and confided in the gonfalonier of Pesaro that he “would not endure again the sufferings of that day for another kingdom.” Those in attendance also remembered it as a physical ordeal, a day of heightened embodied experiences that “confounded the senses.”²⁸ Some of this confoundment was by the design of the Department of Works, the bureaucratic unit tasked with carrying out the coronation, though other elements arose spontaneously on the day, resulting from the activities of festivalgoers or the abundance of costume and props.

The day, a Thursday, was a public holiday. *La Belle Assemblée* described the multitudes:

It appeared as if the whole metropolis and its vicinity had poured forth their entire population. Shops were shut—all business ceased—and the whole world seemed to be animated by one sentiment of exultation at the

from *July to December 1821* 91,
part 2 (August 1821): 105.

28. "Coronation of His Most
Gracious Majesty George the
Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821,
10.

29. "The Coronation of His
Majesty George IV," *La Belle
Assemblée*, August 1, 1821,
21. This was not a universal
sentiment. *The Scotsman* wrote
that they expected more people to
be interested in the proceedings
than had appeared. "Proceedings
in the Open Air," *Scotsman*, July
28, 1821, 235. They characterized
public opinion on the day as
"generally unfavourable."

30. Sylvanus Urban, "The
Coronation of His Majesty
King George the Fourth," *The
Gentleman's Magazine and
Historical Chronicle from July to
December 1821* 91, part 2 (July
1821): 3.

31. "Coronation of His Most
Gracious Majesty George the
Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 9.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Mary Wigram, "Coronation
of George IV: A Girl's Letter; The
Problem of Court Dress; Inside
the Abbey," *Guardian*, May 8, 1837,
13; and "Coronation of His Most
Gracious Majesty George the
Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821,
11.

34. Wigram, "Coronation of
George IV: A Girl's Letter," 13.

35. Francis Sandford, *The History
of the Coronation of James II*
(London: Thomas Newcombe,
1687); "Coronation of His Most
Gracious Majesty George the
Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821,
9; and Robert Fulford, *George the*

magnificent and various pleasures which had been prepared for the festive occasion. The streets, during the
whole night, were crowded with ladies and gentlemen, in full dresses, hurrying to Westminster Hall and Abbey.²⁹

The crowds began amassing as early as 1:00 a.m. and moved through the city in the dark until
the sun rose around 4:00, filling the air with a gray morning mist.³⁰ The writer for the *Observer*
recorded that "foot passengers" might have heard the event before seeing it because the bells of
St. Margaret's in Westminster announced the festivity every half hour beginning at 3:00. Once the
sun rose, the bells were joined by artillery blasts from Hyde Park and the sound of boats along
the Thames. These sounds and others suffused the event from the beginning, and because they
could be "plainly heard in the distance," people gained a larger sense of the city and dimensions
of the festival through sound.³¹

As the fog lifted, the first curious sight might have been the "gay apparel" of people making their
way down to Westminster. Ladies and gentlemen were required to wear full court costume,
though few, it seems, had seen this announced in the newspapers. An "Extraordinary Gazette"
was circulated only days prior to remind people of the dress code, and all of London was thrown
into uproar as people purchased, bartered, and borrowed anything formal they could get their
hands on: "The ladies rushed in swarms to their mantua-makers and innumerable dresses,
which had pined in solitude for months before, were suddenly drawn forth and launched into
unexpected gaiety." Men combed through thrift shops, borrowed all kinds of uniforms, and some
refurbished outfits worn at George III's coronation sixty years prior. In terms of fashion, rank,
and context, the effects were kaleidoscopic: "Lawyers were seen dressed as field officers; *petite
maitres* as fierce dragoons; and honest tradesmen as tip top courtiers."³² *The Observer* judged
that "the metamorphosis produced" was "truly comic," while others were appalled by the audacity
of those who donned others' military uniforms from the recent Napoleonic Wars despite never
having fought themselves.³³ Some attendees, many "even in the Royal Box," did not bother with
court costume and came in their "plain clothes," increasing the uncanny effects of the day.³⁴

The sartorial scramble, and resultant comical palimpsest of fashion, had the effect of
destabilizing markers not only of social rank but also of time. The latter effect, though not
intentional, bolstered organizers' goal of playing with attendees' sense of time. The first sight of
monarchical power, aurally bolstered by connections to the church and military with bells and
blasts, would have been His Majesty's footguards, who stood (all night) in full dress uniform
at various posts along the way. Each one drew a crowd. Their uniforms were meant to look
traditional, vaguely medieval or early modern, and thus evoke the feeling of a centuries-old
practice. It was well reported in the papers that organizers had drawn much inspiration from
genealogist Francis Sandford's *The History of the Coronation of James II* (1687), though they
"did not feel themselves bound strictly to adhere to any of the precedents which they had
discovered, but resolved to adopt such improvements as their own experience, and we may add,
their own ability, justified the public in expecting."³⁵

The sense of the coronation as a practice vaguely centuries old was reinforced by renovations
done to the abbey and the hall, which amplified the "ancient Gothic style."³⁶ *The Observer*
characterized the coronation's overall decorative style as "purely in the Gothic taste," which
perhaps meant fourteenth century.³⁷ Sir Walter Scott's description, however, printed widely via
the *Observer* and its copiers, identified it as Elizabethan.³⁸ And *La Belle Assemblée* labeled it as

Fourth (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1935), 243.

36. "The Coronation," *Observer*, June 5, 1820, 2.

37. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 2; and Bellaigue, "Royal Mise-En-Scène," 177.

38. Walter Scott, "The Late Coronation: A Letter to the Editor," *Observer*, August 21, 1821, 4; and Huish, *Authentic History of the Coronation of H. M. King George the Fourth*, 273.

39. "The Coronation of His Majesty George IV," *La Belle Assemblée*, August 1, 1821, 21. The chivalry angle of the coronation is discussed briefly in Laqueur, "Queen Caroline Affair," 464n92.

40. Wigram, "Coronation of George IV: A Girl's Letter," 13.

41. "Thursday's Coronation," *Times*, July 21, 1821, 3.

42. Peter Sherlock, "Sandford, Francis (1630–1694)," in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), ref.odnb/24633, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref.odnb/24633>.

43. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 9.

44. "The Coronation of George IV: A Letter from Louisa Marchioness Cornwallis to Her Daughter, Lady Jane Neville," *Gentlewoman*, June 28, 1902, 965.

45. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 9.

"every thing that is delightful in the annals of British Chivalry, and venerable in our constitution," underlining the indeterminate impression of time.³⁹ Though the organizers publicized the event as seventeenth century in inspiration, attendees projected onto it their own assumptions about what and when was traditional monarchical ritual. What the fifty-year-old Scott (mis) understood as rooted in Elizabethan grandeur based on his own historical consciousness, the teenaged Mary Wigram née Turner (mis)interpreted as inexplicable artifice. The reference to James II did not translate to her at all as she observed the king wearing "the most *hideous* auburn wig and hanging ringlets you can imagine, which looked still worse by being contrasted with the bald heads of his brothers."⁴⁰

In eschewing, or at least decentering, its own context of the 1820s, the event left it up to audience members' individual historical consciousnesses to create meaning. Cannadine blames the lack of cohesive messaging about Britain and its past on inept management and parochialism, but it reveals more about the unmanageability of the context, the clash of sensory paradigms, and the shifting meanings of things, Britishness, the monarchy, and the past in 1821. Why did the Department of Works choose to model the coronation of George IV on that of James II, or at least publicize that they did? Perhaps out of a desire to elide memories of George III's coronation, which famously incorporated Queen Charlotte into the ceremony. *The Times*, a pro-Caroline publication, contrasted the two coronations to highlight George III's popularity vis-à-vis the political turmoil caused by his son. Instead of detailing the 1821 coronation, for example, they chose to reprint coverage of 1761's.⁴¹ Perhaps George IV and the Department of Works were captivated by Sandford's lushly illustrated history of James II's coronation and thought they could recapture the mystique of the monarchy before the rise of parliamentary power. Published in 1687, just before the king's popularity hit rock bottom, Sandford's account had been written to show that James connected with the populace and they him.⁴² In either case, in inventing traditions, organizers needed to reach back further than George III for inspiration and also find precedent for the kind of sumptuous, multisensory demonstration George IV felt he needed to make. The event fluttered between a solemn homage to the history of an institution and the hierarchies it supported, on the one hand, and a costume festival that denaturalized those hierarchies, on the other.

As the sun rose, diamonds appeared amid a crowd of other sensory data. The experience of the coronation was mediated not just by the sounds of bells and artillery or the visual and temporal effects of clothing and architecture but also by the aromatic and tactile contours of the city. Those privileged enough to have tickets to the hall or abbey or the grandstands outside risked being barred from entering if they arrived later than 7:00 a.m.⁴³ Lady Louisa (Gordon) Cornwallis was among the attendees stuck in a 6:00 a.m. traffic jam of carriages that stretched over a mile past Grosvenor Square.⁴⁴ Despite being graveled overnight, the roads were muddy from the crush of horses and buggies and the animals relieving themselves. Lady Cornwallis and her society peers, fearing tardiness, left their carriages and tracked through the muck in their full court dress, much to the amusement of onlookers who milled about or were seated in the many outdoor galleries that had been built along the path, and the "tops of houses, even to the chimney tops, stages and benches were likewise everywhere visible."⁴⁵ From these vantage points, many non-elites glimpsed their first sight of diamonds (or what they thought were diamonds as many were likely fakes):

46. Ibid., 10; For a discussion of fakes, see Pointon, *Brilliant Effects*, 35–37.

47. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 9.

48. Ibid., 2.

49. Ibid., 10.

50. Mary Wigram, "Coronation of George IV: The Ceremony, Account by an Eye-Witness; 'A Real, True Kiss,'" *Guardian*, May 10, 1937, 9.

51. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 4; and "Thursday's Coronation," *Times*, July 21, 1821, 3.

52. "Preparations for the Coronation," *Observer*, June 18, 1821, 2–3; and "The Coronation," *Globe*, July 20, 1821, 1.

The intermixture of waving plumes, glittering diamonds, and splendid costumes, with the assembled multitude, gave a singularly striking appearance to the scene. Many of the nobility, attired in their coronation robes [alighted] ... and the contrast of their splendid robes and coronets, with the surrounding groups, was pleasingly striking. Every moment some object of attraction was presented to the view of the gazing multitude. The splendid, and in some instances grotesque dresses, of those who were to form part of the grand procession, excited wonder and admiration.⁴⁶

Sights not usually seen were thus cast into a comic, saturnalia-like framework, with the "glittering" echelon of society among the aspirers and pretenders, all dragging their own robes through the muck and commonness of the streets.

The stink of manure might have been mitigated by the smell of fresh lumber that had been used to construct the onlookers' grandstands.⁴⁷ Other smells associated with food and fire infused the scene: twenty-three kitchens that had begun cooking for the event's evening feast eleven days prior and continued to work furiously throughout the day contained "four immense ranges ... each capable of receiving four rows of spits, which were turned by one man in an adjoining scullery," "pastry and confectionary rooms, vegetable depots, larders, fruit-rooms, dishing rooms, and a hake-house," "with every requisite of hot hearths, stoves, and boilers," and a coffee house "was ordered to be kept constantly ready" for the use of the king and other top people in the ceremony throughout the day.⁴⁸ Crowd members could have smelled the food reserved for those with tickets to the banquet and been simultaneously alienated from the event and included in it through this sensation.

Thus, the crowds' first experience with diamonds on the day was not necessarily at an untouchable distance but instead within the din, muck, and smell of the proximal everyday: fire, wood, cooking food, manure, yelling, horses, and the thrill of watching elites make their way on foot alongside commoners. As bizarre a scene as it must have been, it also placed diamonds on the same level as many onlookers, normalizing them amid this abnormal scene alongside scores of plumes, pearls, velvet, ermine, and silk. Everyone was in costume that day and this both naturalized diamonds as emblems of elite performance because they were so frequently seen and denaturalized them as common (in both senses) baubles. In this moment, they gave no one, even Queen Caroline, special powers to overcome the physical trial of getting to the abbey. Though unwelcome, she alighted her carriage at Westminster Hall Gate wearing a petticoat of silver brocade, a purple scarf, and a "splendid diamond bandeau on her head, with feathers."⁴⁹ Refused entry by the guard, she reportedly said a very loud expletive as she returned to her carriage.⁵⁰ A much greater disturbance erupted as the pro-George crowd yelled, "shame, shame!" and "off, off!" while Caroline's supporters started throwing stones and mud at windows and anyone dressed in "splendid liveries" before being dispersed by troops.⁵¹ In this moment, diamonds, again, functioned ambiguously, naturalized as an aspect of elite performance and encoding Caroline's political power yet simultaneously linked once more to elite shenanigans, political struggle, scandal, and even physical danger to person and property.

For those who had been admitted to the venues, the visual spectacle—generally, and of diamonds in particular—was no less fleeting, partial, or mediated through other senses. Organizers had chosen crimson velvet and silk for the various thrones, canopies, upholstery, cushions, lining, robes, and uniforms, while blue cloth covered many of the thoroughfares.⁵²

53. "General Observations on Fashion and Dress," *Observer*, August 21, 1821, 4.
54. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 12.
55. Scott, "Late Coronation," 4.
56. Pointon, *Brilliant Effects*, 35–37; and Martin Holmes and H. D. W. Sitwell, *The English Regalia: Their History, Custody, and Display* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1972), 28.
57. "The Coronation of George IV: A Letter from Louisa Marchioness Cornwallis to Her Daughter, Lady Jane Neville," *Gentlewoman*, June 28, 1902, 965.

The reds and blues were complemented accidentally by white, the preferred dress color for many women in attendance, accessorized with an "extremely magnificent" display of jewels that included "coronets, tiaras, aigrettes, circlets, combs, etc., of diamonds, pearls, and coloured gems, [which] were mingled with feathers in the head-dresses." The fashionista for the *Observer* commented that

many [stomachers] were embroidered in silver or steel, to correspond with the dress; some were ornamented with diamonds, and a great many with pearls. We observed, in several instances, a row of diamonds, pearls, or coloured gems, round the bust of a dress; and where this was the case the sleeves were looped with jeweled ornaments to correspond.... *Ceintures* of net steel were also very numerous: the greatest part of these had diamond clasps.⁵³

The same writer intoned that this bejeweled effect was multiplied when "the Peeresses, (their natural attractions heightened by every aid which art or fancy could supply, their dresses sparkling with jewels, and their white feathers waving in the wind) thronged into the seats appointed for them ... to the number of one hundred and fifty-five, without a single creature of the grosser sex to disturb the uniformity or break the delicacy of the scene."⁵⁴ Scott, on the other hand, located the flash of jewels to the box assigned to foreign ambassadors, which, he wrote, was "perfectly in a blaze with diamonds." The Hungarian prince Paul Anton Esterházy "glimmered like a galaxy," and his daughter-in-law "wore as many diamonds as if they had been Bristol stones."⁵⁵ Again, this profusion of jewels in the audience was likely a mixture of real gemstones and imitations, as well as many borrowed and rented pieces, including most of the diamonds in George's regalia.⁵⁶

Not only was this a day about abundance, but it was also an abundance performed by the attendees as much as the monarch; elites were conspicuously consuming more than they could afford or wanted to spend on jewels and this fakery was naturalized. As commentators found the flash of diamonds and other jewels noteworthy and perhaps even thrilling, they did not record it as grotesque. They also did not record it as out of place with the seventeenth-century theme, though diamonds would have been, given the relative lack of supply during the time of James. Pearls were more in keeping with Tudor-Stuart court culture. Moreover, this spectacle was created by the audience, perhaps for the benefit of the monarch, but also certainly for each other and those who watched them enter the venues. Diamonds had been naturalized as emblems of elite performance to the extent that this anachronism was not commented upon. The stones were expected, even if they were politically loaded, even if they were fake, even if it was 6:00 a.m., and in this way, the audiences both within and without the venues were complicit in normalizing their consumption. George, as I discuss below, worked to make diamonds key pieces in his coronation, but his sensibilities were not categorically out of step with those around him.

In keeping with Otter's discussion of oligoptics, attendees commented on how their sightlines were disrupted, especially by the long ostrich feather headpieces most ladies wore. Lady Cornwallis, seated at the back of her section, could not see the king being crowned because "the ladies in front nodded their plumes most unmercifully." She could, however, hear the cacophony of the moment the king was crowned. Closing her eyes and feeling the cool air coming up from the tombs, she judged the outfits and reactions of those around her.⁵⁷ Thus, the visual spectacle of the day should be thought of as fleeting, partial, and crossways and not merely emanating

58. "Death of Lord Gwydyr: The Oldest Peer; Memories of George IV's Coronation," *Observer*, April 4, 1909, 3; and "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 9.
59. "The Coronation of George IV: A Letter from Louisa Marchioness Cornwallis to Her Daughter, Lady Jane Neville," *Gentlewoman*, June 28, 1902, 965.
60. "The Coronation," *Sun*, July 21, 1821, 6.
61. "The Coronation of His Majesty, King George the Fourth," *European Magazine, and London Review*, July 1821, 56; and "The Coronation of His Majesty George IV," *La Belle Assemblée*, August 1, 1821, 32.
62. "The Coronation of the Georges," *Guardian*, June 23, 1911, 22.
63. "The Coronation of George IV: A Letter from Louisa Marchioness Cornwallis to Her Daughter, Lady Jane Neville," *Gentlewoman*, June 28, 1902, 965.
64. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 9.
65. *Ibid.*
66. "Coronation," *Dublin Evening Post*, July 24, 1821, 3.
67. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 2.
68. John Ashton, *Hyde Park from Domesday-Book to Date* (London: Downey & Co., 1896), 77.
- from the monarch; it was also tempered by and understood through other senses.
- As the bejeweled attendees sat and familiarized themselves with what they could see of the audience and venue, they would also have become aware of their hunger, the heat, and the long wait ahead. Most had begun traveling in the early hours of the morning and refreshments (fruit, ice cream, water, cold port, chocolate drops) would not be made available until after the procession left the abbey.⁵⁸ Lady Cornwallis's daughter, Louisa, did not eat a full meal until after eight that night and fainted just before food was served in the hall.⁵⁹ A similar circumstance befell Princess Esterházy. *The Sun* reported that attendees "seemed very well disposed to take whatever refreshments they could get."⁶⁰ Though the lack of food and drink diminished the need to relieve oneself, there were other discomforts: by noon, the hot and sunny weather, for instance, had made the venues stifling. Several ladies and at least two gentlemen had to be removed from the abbey "in a fainting state."⁶¹ In the hall, thousands of chandelier candles meant for the evening banquet melted and dripped wax onto the audience, and when the candles were lit in the evening, they created their own horrific heat.⁶² Lady Cornwallis was happy to sacrifice her view of the stage for her cooler spot in the abbey.⁶³ And then they waited. At around 8:00 a.m., the procession began to assemble in the hall and the audience anticipated that soon it would start. An hour passed. Peers, in full court dress, sat on the steps of the hall or lay down in the thoroughfare. Another hour passed. At 10:00, the man-of-war stationed off Cotton Gardens fired its gun, signaling the beginning of the event to the metropolis and the trumpeters began playing "God Save the King." When no king appeared, they transitioned into a "martial air," which they kept up for the next half hour.⁶⁴
- This meant the event officially began for those outside the venues before it did for ticketholders.⁶⁵ All of the physical discomforts those in the hall and abbey faced—boredom (the *Observer* called it ennui), heat, hunger, exhaustion—were in stark contrast to what those in the crowds outside and in Hyde Park and other festive areas of the city were experiencing. The masses had the day off and the weather was good. Usually they were the ones toiling in hunger and heat, getting up before dawn to service their higher-ups. Those presumably without diamonds enjoyed the festivities outside, unaware of the "physical trials" elites in Westminster were enduring. Hundreds of thousands gathered for "Coronation Amusements": a boat race, river boat displays, and some three thousand fireworks in Hyde Park; the ascent of an air balloon in Green Park; and special theatrical performances in Covent Garden and other theater districts.⁶⁶
- Organizers employed orientalist themes to promote a carnivalesque, timeless, exotic atmosphere. The main attraction during the day was "a splendid triumphal car drawn by two elephants, one before the other, as large as life, and caparisoned after the Eastern manner, with a young woman, dressed as a slave, seated on the back of each, and affecting to guide the animals with an iron rod."⁶⁷ *The Observer* did not clarify what it was about the women's outfits that identified them as slaves, but this description appeared in a number of print sources, suggesting that it might have been precirculated by the event planners.⁶⁸ Connecting orientalism with sexualization, the crowd was invited to imagine the women as sexual slaves. Alongside this were scores of representations of the crowns at the coronation, meaning that while diamonds were not necessarily present in these popular venues, they maintained an emblematic presence. Here, the connection between diamonds and India, however subconscious, was meant to be

69. "The Coronation of George IV: A Letter from Louisa Marchioness Cornwallis to Her Daughter, Lady Jane Neville," *Gentlewoman*, June 28, 1902, 965.

70. "Coronation Vestments and Robes of Estate," *Observer*, May 3, 1902, 12.

71. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 10, 12.

72. Wigram, "Coronation of George IV: A Girl's Letter," 13.

73. "Coronation Vestments and Robes of Estate," *Observer*, May 3, 1902, 12. See also "Coronation," *Star*, July 20, 1821, 1.

74. Scott, "Late Coronation," 4.

75. Christopher Hibbert, *George IV: Regent and King, 1811–1830* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 190.

76. "The Coronation," *Saturday Magazine*, September 22, 1821, 271; and "Coronation," *Dublin Evening Post*, July 24, 1821, 3.

77. "The Coronation," *Sun*, July 21, 1821, 1.

78. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 12; and "The Coronation," *Globe*, July 20, 1821, 1.

celebrated within this saturnalia-like atmosphere that was full of visual splendor but also other diversions: the suggestion of sex and food, the proximity and noise of the crowds, the gun blasts. Diamonds were enfolded into the embodied experience of the day, naturalized in and among the people. The diamondiferous qualities of crowns, as I discuss below, were emphasized that night via the illuminations on offer.

The King and the Crown: Sensory Assaults

When the king finally entered the venue, he was unable to hide his own discomfort; this festival was a world turned upside down, where the privileged suffered and others enjoyed the day. Lady Cornwallis noted that George appeared "whiter than anything you could conceive, and ... very nervous."⁶⁹ His greatest fear was that Caroline would hijack the ceremony, and to manage his anxiety, his doctors had bled him the night before to an extent that alarmed Sir William Knighton, keeper of the privy purse.⁷⁰ And though his strict orders to bar the queen's entry to the abbey had been followed, George spent the day terrified that she would reappear. On top of that, he had been complicit in planning a physically demanding ceremony. This was to be the last coronation where the monarch would proceed from the hall to the abbey, through all the various rituals at the abbey, and then back to the hall for that evening's banquet. The day was a marathon of standing, sitting, proceeding, being vested and divested, carrying heavy pieces of regalia and costume, kneeling, standing, orating, listening, and directing, all under intense scrutiny in an environment that exhausted even seated audience members. He was neither young (at fifty-eight years of age) nor in good shape (weighing about 245 pounds) and was visibly suffering from blood loss and exertion.

The king entered the hall in a state of agitation, yelling at noblemen and officers. As he entered the abbey, he "appeared distressed almost to fainting. It was with uneven steps and evident difficulty that he made his way up the aisle."⁷¹ Turner wrote, "When the King entered, he looked dreadfully hot, and was too much fatigued to take his seat in the chair of State ... and immediately retired into one of the inner apartments."⁷² There, the archbishop of Canterbury's secretary recorded that "he stripped off all his robes, cooling himself," which he did periodically throughout the day, and, at certain times, "was only revived by smelling salts." The secretary also recalled, "During the long ceremony of the homage ... he was perpetually wiping his streaming face with innumerable handkerchiefs, which he handed in rapid succession to the Prince."⁷³ Even the sympathetic Scott admitted that the king was "most oppressed with heat and fatigue [but] roused himself with great energy."⁷⁴

In addition to the heat, George also suffered under the weight of his coronation robe, which he had had specially constructed to the well-publicized expense of twenty-four thousand pounds.⁷⁵ It was twenty-seven feet long, made of crimson velvet, lined with ermine fur, and generously decorated with heavy gold brocade. It required as many as eight attendants to support the train, instead of the customary six, and throughout the day George could be heard yelling at the pages to "hold it wider," so as to take more of the weight off of him.⁷⁶ *The Sun* recorded the burden of the robe as "monstrous."⁷⁷ *The Observer* quipped that "the weight of the state cloak alone might have overpowered a man in the most vigorous bodily health," thus suggesting George's lack of physical prowess rather than semi-divine glory.⁷⁸

79. "The Coronation of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria," *Observer*, July 1, 1837, 8.

80. Scott, "Late Coronation," 4; Wigram, "Coronation of George IV: The Ceremony," 9; and "The Coronation of George IV: A Letter from Louisa Marchioness Cornwallis to Her Daughter, Lady Jane Neville," *Gentlewoman*, June 28, 1902, 965.

81. "Coronation," *Scotsman*, July 28, 1821, 234.

82. Kenneth Baker, *George IV: A Life in Caricature* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).

83. Fulford, *George the Fourth*, 84, 144.

84. Holmes and Sitwell, *English Regalia*, 32.

85. George Fox, "An Account of the Firm of Rundell, Bridge, and Co., the Crown Jewellers and Goldsmiths on Ludgate Hill" (unpublished manuscript, 1843–6), 9–15, 61–66, Victoria & Albert National Art Library, London.

86. Fulford, *George the Fourth*, 167–72.

87. *Ibid.*, 180–83.

88. Bellaigue, "Royal Mise-En-Scène," 177–78.

The crowns he used throughout the day also posed a burden as they weighed about seven pounds each, almost twice the amount of what subsequent monarchs would wear. The St. Edward's crown had been refurbished for the event, and his new imperial crown, which featured over twelve thousand diamonds, was used for the coronation moment that day. By comparison, George III's crown contained 444 gemstones of various kinds.⁷⁹ The irony of George literally struggling with the weight of his new station, his physicality more on display than any divine investiture, could not have been lost on onlookers, though many, like Scott, Turner, and Lady Cornwallis, chose to highlight how good he was to persevere through it.⁸⁰ In contrast, the liberal newspaper the *Scotsman* said that he came off as "feeble."⁸¹

Why would George and the organizers have designed the coronation as a series of physical trials? Perhaps to vitalize George's public image. George IV was perhaps the most caricatured monarch in British history; his likeness was a lightning rod for critiques of the establishment from the beginning of his regency. His physical girth was made his defining feature and used to imply laziness and debauchery.⁸² The press and public, in contrast, celebrated the Duke of Wellington, Lord Anglesey, and the future William IV (George's brother) for their imperial and Napoleonic military triumphs. George had asked to go to war and been refused.⁸³ He wanted the coronation to elevate him to the same level as these martial heroes, but it failed miserably in that regard.

In addition to these physical trials, George attempted to appeal to the peers, press, and public in a manner he knew well: throwing parties. Diamonds were an important asset here because they meant monarchy, but they were also associated with India and with light. Wellington was known to show off the swords he had appropriated from Tipu Sultan as war booty from his time in Mysore; George had a jewel-encrusted Sword of Offering created for the coronation that, arguably, was reminiscent of Eastern design; it certainly was not "Gothic."⁸⁴ George also insisted on the new diamond-dominant imperial crown that would put his regalia on a level none of his predecessors could have envisioned.⁸⁵ George's affinity for diamonds was partially about India and orientalism, themes present in his interior and exterior design, for instance, the onion domes and "Chinese" rooms he had built for Brighton Pavilion.⁸⁶ Diamonds, like the Eastern features of the Hyde and Green Park festivities, would have evoked the idea of India in the minds of coronation attendees. But George also drew on the diamond's association with light. This is where his aesthetics spelled success for the coronation.

The king, ever interested in interior design and decoration, was a proponent of more sunlight and decorating in brighter colors to enliven a room. Many of the renovations he oversaw in Somerset House and the Brighton Pavilion were about enlarging windows and decorating with white as he brought these older properties into the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ He was also keenly interested in lighting schemes. Gloom was one characteristic of "traditional" England that he did not wish to emulate in the coronation.⁸⁸ As early as 1819, he began to renovate Westminster hall to include new "Gothic" dormer windows and "thus, the daylight scenes of [the coronation] were relieved from the gloom in which they would otherwise have been involved." Twenty-eight elaborate chandeliers, containing sixty candles each, were rush ordered from Birmingham so the hall would be well lit for the banquet. Two other chandeliers hung close to the sideboards, and over the tables were hung twelve more, each containing sixteen wax candles in glass saucers. Small oil lamps were placed around the hall or hung from the ceiling. The dishware for the banquet was

89. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 9.

90. Scott, "Late Coronation," 4.

91. Turner was wrong; the crown contained a massive pearl but she could not see it.

92. Wigram, "Coronation of George IV: The Ceremony," 9.

93. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 1.

94. "The Coronation of His Majesty, King George the Fourth," *European Magazine, and London Review*, July 1821, 34.

95. "The Coronation of George IV: A Letter from Louisa Marchioness Cornwallis to Her Daughter, Lady Jane Neville," *Gentlewoman*, June 28, 1902, 965.

96. "Preparations for the Coronation," *Observer*, June 18, 1821, 3.

gold-plated and designed and placed specifically to reflect as much light back to the head table as possible, which featured a gilded throne. The total effect was to make the king and his crown at the banquet appear "extremely brilliant."⁸⁹ In the abbey, the moments when George was to be crowned and take the throne were purposefully staged to catch light from east- and south-facing windows, which worked perfectly on such a sunny day. Scott waxed poetic about the coronation as an event ordained and almost conducted by light:

The effect of the scene ... was, beyond measure, magnificent. Imagine ...the King encircled by the nobility of the land and the counsellors of his throne, and by warriors wearing the honoured marks of distinction, bought by many a glorious danger,—add to this the rich spectacle of the aisles, crowded with waving plumage, and coronets, and caps of honour, and the sun, which heightened and gladdened as if on purpose, now beaming in full lustre on the rich and varied assemblage, and now darting a solitary ray, which caught, as it passed, the glittering folds of a banner or the edge of a groupe of battleaxes or partizans, and then rested full on some fair form, 'the cynosure of neighbouring eyes,' whose circlet of diamonds glistened under its influence; imagine all this, and you will be able to form a faint idea of this awful and imposing scene.⁹⁰

The light, as well as attendees' eyes, bounced from one luminous object to another and sanctioned the event, its attendees, and the material culture that created it as important and good. The only moment that would top this divine play of light was, of course, the crowning itself.

George used his new imperial crown to full effect. Turner wrote of the crown's "magnificence" and elegance in being "composed of diamonds unmixed with any other stones."⁹¹ She was also delighted with the crowning moment's choreography: "When the Archbishop placed [the crown] on the King's head, all the Peers at the same moment put on their coronets."⁹² The peers were forbidden from decorating their coronets with diamonds so that the imperial crown upstaged them all and cemented a link between diamonds and royalty in that moment. This was an experience of diamonds as light, divine right, and emblems of separation, as opposed to physical proximity, which had been the sensual experience of much of the coronation up until that point. This crown created the kind of visual spectacle that was enjoyed at a distance, and in doing so, it created distance. A journalist seated in the outdoor galleries reported that when George emerged from the abbey wearing the crown, the king's forehead was "radiant in the sunshine, with the light and elegant Crown ... one blaze of diamonds!"⁹³ *The European Magazine* later described the crown as of "unequaled" luster and "it's [sic] general effect confirms the opinion, that his present Majesty is the first British sovereign who has possessed a diadem worthy of this proud and potent empire."⁹⁴ Diamonds were potent emblems of a potent empire.

Lady Cornwallis only heard the moment of crowning—as a rousing chorus of "God Save the King."⁹⁵ The experience of the new crown was thus not merely visual but also sonic, in ways that were mutually constitutive. The organizers planned for this effect, curating a sonic assault on the city at the crowning moment:

The trumpets sound a point of war, the drums, which are without, beat a charge, and the people, with loud and repeated shouts, cry, God save the King! And a signal being given from the battlements of the north-cross of the church, by two gunners; one of them takes his station on the inner roof of the area, to observe the exact minute of his Majesty's crowning, and thereupon, hastening to the battlements, commands his companion (there placed) to fire a musquet [sic], and light a port-fire. Upon which, the twenty-one great guns in St. James's Park are fired; and upon the same sign the ordnance of the Tower are discharged.⁹⁶

97. "The Coronation," *Scotsman*,
July 20, 1821, 2.

98. Scott, "Late Coronation," 4.

99. Godehard Lenzen, *The History of Diamond Production and the Diamond Trade*, trans. F. Bradley (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 29, 39; Padnitabhushana V. Subrahmanya Sastri and Vidwan M. Ramakrishna Bhat, *Varahamihira's Brihat Samhita: With an English Translation and Notes* (Bangalore: VB Soobbiah and Sons at the MBD Electric Printing Works, 1946), 283; and Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf, "Exploring the Senses in Rituals and Performances: An Introduction," in Michaels and Wulf, *Exploring the Senses*, 13–15.

100. Holmes and Sitwell, *The English Regalia: Their History, Custody, and Display*, 14–28.

101. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 9; George Nayler, *The Coronation of George the Fourth* (London: Robert Havell, 1824); and Holmes and Sitwell, *English Regalia*, 28.

102. Huish, *Authentic History of the Coronation of H. M. King George the Fourth*, 47.

Diamonds were brilliant, indeed ablaze, but also martial, rippling out through London in a wave of war-beats and artillery blasts. Crowds in the parks experienced the diamond crown as the flash and noise from explosions and a show of military strength, which was underlined by the twenty thousand troops in and about London that day, which the *Scotsman* referred to as a "military occupation."⁹⁷ Scott interpreted the moment as both loyalty and military strength displayed through sound, mingling with the visual effects of the crowning:

At the moment when the crown was placed on his Majesty's head; all the nobles then put on their coronets, and shouts and acclamations of "God save the King—God bless the King!" burst from every heart and mouth, and rung through the vaulted roof and aisles of this magnificent cathedral. These were soon echoed from without; and the union of sonorous cannon and tens of thousands of human voices rent the air, till the senses were almost overwhelmed with the powerful emotions which such a scene could not fail to excite.⁹⁸

Though the coronation was meant to be a moment when the Indianness of diamonds, and, indeed, the orientalism of George IV, was subsumed by an English-made-British invention of tradition, it was also a moment when the multisensory meaning of the gemstone might have most closely paralleled the classical Sanskrit meaning of diamonds. *Vajra*, the word for diamond commonly used in such texts as the *Garudapurana* (circa eleventh century CE), is often translated into English as both diamond and thunderbolt.⁹⁹ As a bolt of thunder, George's diamonds optically, sonically, and haptically assaulted the senses as they caught the light of the sun amid jolting artillery blasts and voices of the crowd and choir at the moment of his crowning. The crown had a multisensory resonance, which was underlined in the night's celebrations of fireworks and illuminations that would bring together explosion and light in the meaning of the crown.

Although the success of the crowning moment naturalized diamonds as necessary for monarchical ritual, subsequent coverage of the crown diminished the diamond-forwardness of the occasion. News outlets that had been given plans for the event, including the *Observer*, and George Nayler, the official historian for the event, had been told by the Department of Works that the St. Edward's crown would be used and thus their accounts describe a more subdued piece featuring "historic" gemstones (a ruby and a sapphire) from the royal collection. This crown—allegedly used in the thirteenth century, reconstituted for Charles II following the Restoration, and then not used since William III (1689)¹⁰⁰—was undoubtedly a better fit for the sense of historical continuity organizers sought to evoke in the ceremony. These accounts downplayed the Sword of Offering as well.¹⁰¹ Other accounts described the correct crown but diminished or dismissed it as, for instance, "one unvaried mass of diamonds."¹⁰² This magnitude of diamond display was certainly not in keeping with the English material culture and design of centuries past and shows how the coronation both looked to the past and the present in ways that were confusing but also emblematic of the moment regarding the meanings of diamonds and the monarchy.

Whereas a profusion of diamonds, understood as visual emblems but experienced visually and sonically, may have registered as something decidedly new about this coronation, other elements of the coronation worked to revive a more early modern multisensory paradigm, to uneven effects. Coronation planners connected George IV with English rulers of the past and the king to his audience through smell. Organizers resurrected the tradition of herbwomen, who strew flowers and rosemary along the procession's pathway, sweetening the scent of the passage for

103. "Preparations for the Coronation," *Observer*, June 18, 1821, 3.

104. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 4; "Our Readers Will Sympathize," 2; and Bellaigue, "Royal Mise-En-Scène."

105. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 2.

106. "The Coronation," *Globe*, July 20, 1821, 4.

107. "Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fourth," *Observer*, July 23, 1821, 2.

the king and, in early modern medical thought, making it healthful. Herbaceous scents, and the heavily perfumed holy oil used to anoint the king, would have diffused throughout the venues, including those assembled in their protective domain and impressing on them the importance and proximity of the royal body.¹⁰³ The "tradition" of herbwomen ceased with George IV; they appeared in neither William IV's nor Victoria's coronations later in the century, indicative of how little smell meant in the popularization of monarchical power in the nineteenth century. Taste through the banquet experience also receded in later nineteenth-century coronations. Although newspapers reveled in the culinary abundance, lavishly detailing the pomp and circumstance of the many courses presented to the head table, attendees in the galleries and rest of the hall were less impressed, having grown ravenous waiting for their food to be served. The king, exhausted from the day, retired at 8:00 p.m. and the scene became a free-for-all of people scooping up food, porcelain, plates, and cutlery to take home, a scene not repeated in later coronations.¹⁰⁴

Out in the city, official celebrations concluded at 9:00 p.m. with fireworks and illuminations. As "an immense concourse of person flocked to Hyde Park," large illuminated transparencies (backlit paintings on paper or cloth) were set up on rafts on the Serpentine,

representing, amongst other things, his Majesty in a triumphant car drawn by milk white horses: nearly opposite to which, on the right bank, was a handsome lighted temple, surmounted by a crown. It was also illuminated at the other sides; in addition to which, the car and elephants mentioned above were brilliantly lighted up with lamps, which, together with those of the towing boats, which were blue, had a very singular and pleasing effect, moving along the surface of the water.

The lights of the crown—diamonds—literally became lights for the crowd. By the time the fireworks commenced, the *Observer* estimated that there "must have been more than half a million persons present."¹⁰⁵ Everything in the park was illuminated: lamps encircled trees, Chinese lanterns were hung from strings between trees and poles, and the fireworks were much remarked upon.¹⁰⁶ Here, the coronation meant lighting up the night, in ways that would have been special for the masses who could not normally afford candles and lamp oil for activities after dark.

Private households and businesses throughout London were also encouraged to create their own "illuminations" in honor of the coronation, and no doubt many passersby took these in as they made their way down to Hyde Park. Special praise went to the transparency of Messrs. Rundell and Bridge, the crown jewelers who had created the new imperial crown and many other diamond-encrusted pieces for the day. Their transparency depicted the coronation ceremony in the abbey: "It was a very large one, and was surmounted with lamps of various descriptions. The transparency was surmounted by a brilliant crown and the letters G.R.IV."¹⁰⁷ Although businesses and individuals were free to design their transparencies and lamp configurations as they saw fit, they overwhelmingly depicted the crown. Sometimes it was a diamondiferous display of white lights representing the imperial crown; at other times, different colors of lights suggested either the St. Edward's crown or an imagined crown. Illuminations in the theater districts, shopping streets in the West End, and the East End popularized the consumption of the crown as light and, by extension, the consumption of diamonds as light, visual emblems, monarchical authority, and a multisensory festival atmosphere in ways that went far beyond the physical manifestation of the imperial crown and the relatively small number of people who directly saw it that day. The

108. Testa, "Doing Research on Festivals," 6.
109. "Coronation Rejoicings," *Sun*, July 21, 1821, 6.
110. Laurent Sébastien Fournier, "Traditional Festivals: From European Ethnology to Festive Studies," *Journal of Festive Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 13.
111. Robert W. Lovett, "Rundell, Bridge and Rundell—An Early Company History," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 23, no. 3 (September 1949): 157.
112. "The Coronation of the Georges," *Guardian*, June 23, 1911, 22.

crown became part of the "sociocultural effervescence" of the day.¹⁰⁸ *The Sun* reported that the next day people gathered in public spaces hoping to continue the festival, but it was over.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Festive events, according to anthropologist Laurent Sébastien Fournier, feature both the extraordinary and the quotidian at once and work to make one look like an element of the other.¹¹⁰ This is exactly how diamonds operated in the coronation of George IV. On one level, they were understood both implicitly and explicitly as things denoting privileged status, the exotic, and the special. They were emblems of visual magnificence and impressed at a distance; in illuminated displays depicting the crown, they were literally light. Their effect was heightened through extraordinary sounds: gun blasts, firework explosions, people chanting or choirs singing "God Save the King!" And they connected India, orientalism, and British imperialism to the body of the monarch in ways that were framed as celebratory, understated, and untroubling. On another level, the saturnalia-like quality of the coronation made diamonds relatively close and ordinary as elites in ridiculous costumes fought through the street muck, involuntarily fasted for the day, watched a distressed man struggle with the burden of his vestments, and endured sweltering heat. The abundance of representations of the crown on offer at the festival made diamonds ubiquitous instead of rare. They denoted the power of the crown in terms of hierarchy and military might; they also denoted sexual scandal, inept management, and overspending. All of those registers mingled in the context of the festival, in which the populace of London were not just spectators but also participants.

In the years that followed, the *Observer's* quip about how the coronation "confounded the senses" proved to be prescient; in retrospect, the event seemed nonsensical. It took two years for Parliament to learn the extent of what was spent on the day, which ended up being a scandal about monarchical overspending.¹¹¹ When George died in 1831 and it was his brother's turn to plan a coronation, William IV asked if he could skip the ritual altogether.¹¹² In terms of diamonds, however, George IV's coronation festival cemented them into the invented traditions of modern British monarchy. The 1821 coronation's overtures to the English past of coronation ritual projected diamonds into the medieval and early modern periods in the public's historical consciousness, tempering fugitive narratives about Indian plunder evident in material culture about diamonds at the time. The populace assumed that thousands of stones, though rented, were part of the royal jewelry and that this was an acceptable and, indeed, expected level of diamond consumption and display for a coronation. It would take a century for the royal collection to approach anywhere near the number and kinds of stones that were already expected of it and this would be predicated upon colonial plunder in India and southern Africa. The coronation festival promulgated a veneration for diamonds among the public, who could never afford this kind of elite material culture. In that way, the event made diamonds much more naturalized and quotidian than ever before. During her coronation in 1837, Victoria's version of the imperial crown was just a scaled down version of George's and it went without controversy.

Investigating George IV's coronation as a festival prompts an analysis of the participation of the crowd on the day and the multiple meanings and registers of *things* on offer in the ceremony. From this emerges a more nuanced understanding of how tense the meanings of diamonds were in 1821 and how a festival like the coronation worked to if not alleviate that tension

altogether at least normalize it. In this way we can study the democratization of diamond veneration that happened before the democratization of actual diamond consumption much later in the century and observe the role of festival in this process.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Erica Fraser, James Warren, Kerry Abel, and the two anonymous peer reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

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HOW TO CITE

Kinsey, Danielle. "George IV's Coronation as Festival: Invented Traditions, Material Culture, and the Multisensory Meanings of Diamonds in Britain in 1821." *Journal of Festive Studies* 3 (2021): 215–235. <https://doi.org/10.33823/jfs.2021.3.1.62>

The Journal of Festive Studies (ISSN 2641–9939) is a peer-reviewed open access journal from [H-Celebration](https://www.h-net.org/), a network of [H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online](https://www.h-net.org/), and is the inaugural journal published through the [H-Net Journals](https://www.h-net.org/journals) initiative. It can be found online at <https://journals.h-net.org/jfs>.