

On the Giving of Favors & Tokens

compiled by Modar Neznanich

Historically favors were given not just as a symbol of love but also as a display of friendship or allegiance or as an emblem of duties performed and services rendered.

These could range from a simple bit of cloth from a loved one to a "patch" from one's patron worn on your clothes. From a charge to be added to one's banner to a ring given from the great Lord or King. And a lot of other objects as well, including cast metal badges and charges that were attached to belts, armour and other items. One of the most notable favors during the Middle Ages is that of a glove.

Now some people will divide this practice up into the giving of a favor and the giving of a token. To those who differentiate such, a favor is a gift you give to the keeper of your heart to display upon their person, while a token is a gift one gives to a person who has your respect, to display upon their person. In reality, it is the same thing...it is merely the perception one puts on it. In both cases, you are allowing your honor to be carried by another.

Related to the giving of favors and tokens is the historical practice known as largesse. The period definition of largesse is the virtue of generosity. Within the SCA, most people think of largesse as gifts given by the Crown, but past accounts show the giving of gifts between gentles was widespread through all social ranks. These displays of generosity were most notable among those striving to exhibit knightly or chivalric virtues. Typical examples of largesse in period included spices, bottles of beverages, cloth and trim, or books.

There is also the tradition of patronage. This is where someone decides to support or aid another by supplying them with items they may need to perform their craft or skill, which the recipient might not be able to provide for himself. In period, a patron's gift was usually something practical like arms, armor or horses for warriors, or craft supplies for artisans. Many would consider such patronage to be the equivalent of corporate sponsorship today.

Within the SCA various individuals and households have made "Presentations of Recognition" to other gentles. This may be to assist financially when someone is "strapped for cash" (such as buying materials for an artisan so they could continue plying their craft or paying for a SCA membership so an individual could retain their post as an officer). It may be simply done as an "attaboy" to encourage a gentle to continue on the pathway in which they show promise. Or it may be used to raise awareness of exemplary behavior.

So as you can see, the giving of favors, tokens, gifts, etc. can be indicative of the giver's respect and esteem rather than of romantic interest. In these cases, the relationship between the givers and the recipients may be no more than that of friends. Additionally, because they are granted as signs of friendship, the gender of the givers and recipients should be of little or no importance.

Well-known use of favors included pinning a sleeve from the bestower onto the shoulder of the recipient's garment. There was also the wearing of a badge on one's sleeve, belt or clothes to show allegiance. Additionally tying a scarf or other narrow band of fabric on the arm or belt was noted. It is from this last practice that one of the most common displays of favors in the SCA originated with.

While there is no definitive example of the use of heraldry as belt favors, it is a small leap from period references noting the wearing of a liege-lord's badge to the use of heraldry on favors. This use of heraldry makes for ease of identifiability when declaring association with another. Heraldry also adds to pageantry, which fosters the atmosphere we are striving for and enhances the visual experience of those involved.

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