

The Coin Stack Trick

Summary of Ignacio López's lecture on the history of the Coin Stack trick

Personal Origins

Ignacio López recounts how it all began when he saw John Carney perform the trick in which coins vanish and travel beneath a cylinder. The effect fascinated him as a young man and led to years of historical research, eventually resulting in a book.

Historical Background (16th–17th Centuries)

- The pieces used were not coins but “counters,” employed in dice games, which were extremely popular but prohibited by law, sometimes even under penalty of death.
- A painting from the period depicts a soldier—a representative of the law—playing such a game, highlighting the irony of its illegality.
- The dice were tiny and could be concealed in the mouth to avoid detection.
- Magic was performed at fairs, on bridges, and in taverns, alongside jugglers and musicians.
- Ignacio shows an original coin stack made with wire rather than glued coins, corresponding to a description in a reference work by Decremps.
- An important quotation from the period advises against telling the audience that the cup is empty, revealing an early understanding of the psychology of deception.

Evolution (18th Century)

The older routine disappears and is replaced by a more participatory version, featuring a large silver coin at the center of the table and involving the audience—a more commercially effective approach.

The 20th Century

- John Wyman performs a version in which coins pass through the hand, the earliest documented performance of this version, presented for Abraham Lincoln. His coin stack is preserved in a museum.
- Vernon also owned a famous coin stack, which became widely known through television.
- John Ramsay (in the 1920s, during the era of the first magic conventions) takes the routine from the book *Monk of Cure*, with four coins appearing one at a time beneath a cylinder. Ignacio analyzes a 1939 recording (at an IBM convention, filmed by Sidney) showing the method involving two small corks: one to simulate the false stack and the other for the actual load.
- Vernon revisits and expands the routine, publishing it in *Genii* and inspiring numerous variations (Paul Marco, Alberto, Piedrahita with a toilet-paper roll, etc.).
- Ignacio discovered a previously undocumented technique used by a street magician who pretended to swallow the coins by striking his throat.

- He mentions Tom Stone, Giacomo Bertini, and Eric Mead (who performs Tim Conover's version) as more recent exponents.

Conclusion

The final routine in the book is that of Ignacio's teacher. As an addendum to the lecture, Ignacio explained that Gea—who wrote the book's foreword—had pointed out to him, after a conversation, that Gabi Pareras's routine was not included in the book. Consequently, the lecture concluded with a video of Gabi Pareras performing the Cylinder and Coins routine.

The Book and Its Editions

The various editions of the book were also presented: a standard edition, a handcrafted edition (€170), and a deluxe set including a leather coin purse, a handmade cylinder, and an antiqued finish (€230, with a special discount offered at the presentation).