

The Althing, A&S Edition

A.S. XLIII



Acknowledgements

The Editor would like to thank everyone who made this issue possible. The contributors of all kinds of content, articles, artwork, clipart and so on. The officers of the Barony-Marche of the Debatable Lands for the constant support and input on an array of matters regarding planning and other mundane elements of this project. Her supervisor at her mundane work who sent her to learn In Design, and of course, you, the reader, who she hopes that will find this read enjoyable and useful.

Disclaimer

This is the Althing, a publication of the Barony-Marche of the Debatable Lands of the Society of Creative Anachronism, Inc. It is not a corporate publication of the Society of Creative Anachronism, Inc., and does not delineate SCA policies. Opinions are those of the authors and may not reflect or imply the view of the Althing or any member of its staff. Content is used with permission.

Contents

Notes on Discovering, *by Lady Margretha La Fauvelle*

The Great Halls of 14th-century British Castles, *by Baron Thomas Byron of Haverford*

Knitting Madonnas, *by THL Myfanwy ferch Rhiannon*

The Elder Futhark, *by Hrefna frupikona Þorgrímsdóttir*

English Coifs, *by Lady Renata l'Rouge, known as the posh rot*

Transcending Politics: the SCA Bard in the Social Crisis, *by Master Michael Alewrite*

Cover art by THL Myfanwy Ferch Rhiannon. Illustrations by THL Myfanwy ferch Rhiannon, Lady Margretha La Fauvelle, Lady Renata l'Rouge, known as the posh rot, Hrefna frupikona Þorgrímsdóttir.

Cover artwork based on "The Virgin Weaving the Curtain of the Temple", stained glass panel, c. 1505-1510 (detail). Workshop of Veit Hirschvogel the Elder after designs by Hans Baldung Grien and Hans Suess von Kulmbach. From the Cloister Karmeliterkloster, Nuremburg, now in Nuremburg-Grussgründlich Evangelical Lutheran Pfarr-Kirche Sankt Lorenz [originally with the arms 'of a certain Herr Petz'].

Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremburg 1300-1550. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1986. [exhibit catalog for the self-named exhibit, held at the Met April 8-June 22, 1986, and at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremburg July 24-September 28, 1986]. [p. 360].

Notes on discovering

By Lady Margretha La Fauvelle, loud person.

When I was a kid studying classical music at the Conservatory back in Greece, there were times that I had to wait in the hallway before my class started, either because my mother would drop me early, or because the previous student had been late. I didn't have much of options to entertain myself other than waiting in a room with two uncomfortable benches on each side of the room, and various depictions of either composers or musical performances being hung on the walls. Although I was often mesmerized by the enormous mustache of Edvard Grieg or the Abraham-like beard of Johannes Brahms (no one in my family ever grew facial hair for some reason), the one picture that I could spend hours looking at was one of two musicians, one with a large tabor-like drum and the other with some instrument similar to a double pipe. They looked positively exotic in the middle of pictures of aforementioned composers or the odd lady sitting at a harpsichord (I have nothing against harpsichords, mind you!).

As most of you who know me by now would have guessed, I was rather torn as to whom I 'd rather be; the guy with the drum or the guy with the woodwind. I sure didn't know that pipe and tabor existed, not to mention that being a 10 or 11 year old piano student, I had great difficulty grasping the idea that an instrument with barely two octaves of range could produce self-sustaining melodies. My head was full of elaborate piano lines with melody and accompaniment, of ensembles of music from the quartet to the symphonic orchestra that our tutors would play for us in the theory classes. It took me starting to study counterpoint, being involved in an impromptu madrigal choir and taking part in an Orff-Schulwerk group (which involved much silliness with glockenspiels, recorders and rattles of various sizes and shapes, as well as drawing while listening to a lovely recording of various villancicos) before I was irreversibly sold to the music of the middle age and the renaissance.

This is why I joined the SCA, more or less, the idea of interacting with like-minded people and making music together was rather attractive to me. Of course, the more involved I got, the more interests I undertook. Starting something new can be intimidating, but also immensely rewarding. This Arts and Sciences issue of the Althing is been put together with this thought; that it can be a nudge towards trying something new.

By now, most of you will probably know that I am leaving our fair lands seeking new adventures (not so far away), so let this be my last and fond farewell to you all. I had great fun putting it together, and I hope it'll make for an enjoyable read!

In Service,

Margretha

Editor, Althing A&S Issue,
Minister of Arts and Sciences, BMDL



The Great Halls of 14th-century British Castles

by Baron Thomas Byron of Haverford

The great hall was the center of castle life throughout the medieval period. It was usually the largest room in a castle, and was used for official business, entertaining, and even as sleeping quarters. The late 14th century represented the pinnacle of great hall development in Britain, before advances in warfare and nationalism lessened the importance of castles as military fortifications, and construction focussed more on comfort and livability. This article will focus on the history and development of the great hall in British castles, the layout of great halls, and the architectural elements that were commonly found within.

History

Beginning with Norman keeps in the 12th through the 13th centuries, and extending into the early 14th century, 2nd-floor great halls were more popular than ground-floor great halls. The majority of these 2nd-floor halls had timber construction. Because 2nd-floor halls were accessed from stairwells (often exterior stairwells), they were more defensible than their ground-floor counterparts. However, 2nd-floor ground halls were inconvenient because of reduced accessibility and inconvenience. They were also more expensive to build because the floor needed to be able to support the weight of the hall timbers, and the timbers needed to be raised to the second floor. In the late 13th and 14th centuries, when building materials and techniques could provide improved defense, great halls moved to the ground floor. (It is worth noting that British sources refer to the “first floor,” when Americans would say “second floor”.)

Aisled halls (also known as arcaded halls) preceded true great halls. In an aisled hall, rows of columns are used to support the roof. This allowed for a wider hall despite the lack of long-timber ceiling construction. The result was the construction of huge halls, up to 110 by 60 feet. Unfortunately, the columns obstructed vision across the hall and reduced mobility and utility of floor space. Thus, in the 14th century, once construction techniques advanced to allow vaulted ceilings, aisled halls fell out of favor. (They do, however, remain popular in fantasy movies.)

The last major change that was necessary for the development of the great hall was the transition away from central fireplaces. The central fireplace was an important motivation for the high ceilings found in pre-14th-century great halls. Once chimneys became popular, central fireplaces were abandoned, but the high ceilings remained, adding to the grandeur of the hall. Some central fireplaces did persist into the 14th century, often combined chimney fireplaces in the same room.

Eventually, chimneys completely replaced central fireplaces, and celiings came down. But for a short period, the celiings remained high, the fireplaces were in the walls, and the pillars were replaced by vaulted ceilings. This represented the pinnacle of great hall construction, and in Britain, it occurred in the late 14th century.

Layout

The size of 14th-century great halls varied greatly, from the 20x40 foot hall found at Bodiam castle (1385 AD), up to 240x68 feet. One end of the hall is designated the “high end”, where the lord’s dias and the fireplace are located. At the “low end” of the hall are the servants’ passages, guest entrances (often with movable screens to keep the lord from having to see the comings-and-goings), and the musicians’ gallery above. At the low end was also a series of three or four archways that would lead to stairwells or storage areas.

Ceilings

A key element of the later great hall is its vaulted ceiling. The degree of steeping varied geographically, with higher peaks in Britain than in mediterranean locations (perhaps due to snow load). As the vaulted

timbers reached the top of the walls, decorative figures would be placed at the bottom of the timbers (at the corbels). These were often figures of people, and may represent the individuals who built or worked in the castle. (An excellent example of these can be found at Penshurst Place, 1341 AD.) The timbers of the roof were held together with mortise and tenon joinery, relying on dowels to hold the wooden beams together rather than metallic nails.

Flooring

The least expensive flooring for a great hall is dirt. This option is particularly inviting if the great hall is to be used for housing animals. Stone floors, particularly slate, are widely found. Wood flooring is used predominantly in upper floors. The wood planks used in medieval castles are much wider than those used in modern construction, with widths in the range of 12-18 inches.

Of greatest interest are tile floors. Although the most expensive option, tiles were used extensively in great halls, and are frequently depicted in illumination. Medieval tiles were square, 3-6 inches in width, and had a limited range of colors (greens, tans, and reds). They were placed on the floor in stereotypical patterns (often squares within squares).

The high end of the hall was often raised to form a dias on which the “high” table was set.

Fireplace

Fireplaces might be found only at the high end of the hall, or might be found in several walls. Halls with combined central hearths and chimney fireplaces were unusual in central Britain, but were more frequent in Scotland and France. The fireplaces were very large by modern standards, limited only by the air draw needed to prevent smoke from entering the hall. To improve smoke control, a hood could extend out over the front of the fireplace. The hood was often decorated with tiles and painting. An excellent example can be found in the Tower of London (1278 AD).

Traffic Flow

Centered in the wall at low end of the great hall was a traditional set of three archways leading to servant areas. In most castles, the center archway would lead to the kitchen, and the other archways would lead to the pantry and the buttery (the buttery did not contain butter, but rather kegs of alcohol called “butts”). The center archway might be slightly larger than its counterparts, or might be the same size, but they were always the same shape. Both gothic arches and smooth arches were utilized. Occasionally, a fourth archway was present. In some castles, mobile screens would be set up in front of the archways to block the view of the traffic from the high end of the hall. Guest entrances to the great hall would be placed at the low end of the hall for similar reasons.

Galleries

Galleries are openings in the walls that allow viewing of the great hall from the second floor. They usually have railings (either solid or open) for safety and comfort. The galleries may overhang the great hall, or they may be set back behind the wall. Overhanging galleries might have screens extending down from their edge to the floor of the great hall. The musicians’ gallery, in particular, is a predictable feature in great halls. It is located at the low end of the hall, far from the lord’s table. (Presumably, this is intended to enhance acoustics, rather than slight the musicians. The high vaulted roofs of great halls provide excellent musical acoustics for musicians in this location.)

Squints

A squint is a spyhole for the lord of the castle to observe his guests without their knowledge. At its

most basic, a squint is a hole in the wall between the lord's chamber and the great hall. But many squints were elaborately decorated or hidden. For example, the hole might be covered with artwork or stonework, such that the observer would be looking through the eyes of a green man or other carving. Alternately, the squint might be disguised as a religious niche. But sometimes, the squint was left wide open, and secrecy depended on the guests not looking up at that particular bit of wall.

Wall Decoration

Modern depictions of castle interiors often have walls of stone showing in every room. But for the medieval interior decorator, stone was to be covered, usually with white plaster, and then colorful decorations placed on the walls.

In the 15th century, tapestries would become commonplace in medieval castles. But in the 14th century, they were still quite rare and expensive. Only the most wealthy castle owner would have a tapestry hanging in the great hall.

Wall paintings were far more popular than tapestries in this time period. These paintings would consist of earth tones, because the paint was a mixture of dirt and gum arabic. Thus, wall paintings would have a more limited palate than illuminations from the same period, although typical stylistic elements would still be present. Ideally, paintings would cover every exposed bit of plaster, even in unlikely niches or alcoves. The best extant example of these wall decorations is at Ightham Mote (c. 1330 AD).

Windows

Windows were either gothic or rectangular in shape. Windows that faced the interior courtyard were substantially larger than the arrow slits on the exterior of the castle, allowing excellent natural lighting in the great hall. The upper half of a gothic window would be divided up by elaborate traceries of wood or stone, with quatrefoil patterns being quite popular. The lower half would be vertically divided. Glass was rarely available, and probably filled only the upper traceries of the windows.

Lighting

Great hall lighting relied on simple ironwork or stonework to form perches for candles or torches. Chandeliers in 14th-century Britain consisted of simple iron rings with cups spaced around the edges. (In Italy and Flanders, much more elaborate metalwork was expected.) Wall brackets would be made of iron or stone, some with more elaborate carvings, and might be put upon corbels. Iron spikes were used to hold candles in place, and iron rings were used for torches. Sometimes, niches would be carved into the walls to hold candles.

Furniture

Despite its great weight, the furniture in the great hall was designed to be deconstructed and moved. This was necessary so that the hall could be used for many different purposes. Tressel tables were the mainstay for serving feasts, and long benches would be placed on either side of them. The lord's and lady's high chairs would be placed at the high end of the hall. Alcove chests of various sizes could be found (as the name suggests) in alcoves, and might be used as additional seating. Window seats were very popular in this period, but were more commonly seen in other rooms, rather than the great hall.

The Decline of the Great Hall

As the 14th century drew to a close, great halls were becoming smaller, and the ceilings were lower. The rectangular layout was abandoned in favor of more square proportions. High-set bay windows and oriel projections began to appear, as construction techniques improved. The great hall was often divided into a

parlour and living quarters. A separate dining room at the low end of the great hall displaced the traditional kitchen, which made the great hall less useful for feasts. As the ceiling dropped and the living and dining quarters were separated away, the wondrous great halls of medieval Britain slowly transformed into our modern family room.

REFERENCES

1. Wood M. The English Mediaeval House. Studio Editions Ltd, London. 1994
2. Braun H. English Mediaeval Architecture. Bracken Books, London. 1985
3. Quiney A. The Traditional Buildings of England. Thames and Hudon Ltd, London. 1990
4. Schofield J. Medieval London Houses. Yale University Press, New Haven. 2003
5. Ightham Mote Guidebook. The National Trust, Kent. 1998
6. Oggins RS. Castles and Fortresses. MetroBooks, New York. 1994

“Knitting Madonnas” and Weaving Virgins: A Brief Overview of Images of the Virgin Mary in Relation to Textile Arts Production

Lady Myfanwy ferch Rhiannon
(Ruth Morrisson)

The earliest iconographic representation of knitters and knitting date to the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. There are several paintings from this time period that are collectively known as “Knitting Madonnas”, because they show the Virgin Mary engaged in that craft. Various theories abound as to why they appear, such as a new emphasis on the Holy Family as a *family*, and Mary’s role as housewife and mother, rather than (or in addition to) that of Queen of Heaven:

These show the Virgin and child in a more domestic and more human light. They were representations of, and venerations to, the virgin’s humility and natural motherhood.... The pictures do not tell us whether both the rich and the poor practiced knitting, or give any indication as to whether it was a leisurely pursuit. We can assume that it must have been associated with femininity and female virtue, but perhaps also a sense of diligence and industry. ¹

The “Knitting Madonna” paintings invariably show her working on multiple needles in the round, suggesting that the artists were at least somewhat familiar with the technique; that it is Mary doing the knitting suggests:

we can read it as saying that knitting was at least an activity that was honorable enough for the Mother of God to

be seen practicing, and thus a worthy craft.²

There is some suggestion that she may be making Christ's shirt for the Crucifixion; Lynn White cites the most often reproduced image, known as the "Buxtehude Altar":

The first evidence of a knit body garment ... is on an altarpiece from Buxtehude near Hamburg painted in the last decade of the fourteenth century. It depicts the Virgin Mary knitting a shirt on four needles for the Christ child³⁸ [sic].³

The footnote referenced in the text describes the iconography of the image further, citing other sources:

38. Hamburg, Kunsthalle. On the date and context see Wilhelm Worringer, *Die Anfänge der Tafelmalerei* [sic] (Leipzig, 1924) [sic], 193-94, fig. 59, and Alfred Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik* [sic] (Nedeln, 1934) [sic], 2: 145-50, figs. 178, 181. The knitted shirt is the seamless garment that Christ wore at his crucifixion; legend says that his mother made it and that it grew as he did. The precocious infant turns from reading scriptural prophecy to meditate upon the vision of two angels holding instruments of his passion.⁴

The image in this painting, also known as "Visit of the Angel" is a detail section of one panel of a triptych of "The Buxtehude Altar", which is believed to have been painted by Master Bertram of Minden sometime between the late 1300s to about 1400 CE. It shows the most completely identifiable image of knitting, in that the work (a shirt or tunic with short sleeves) is largely completed, and is detailed enough to see the loops of the thread on the needles.⁵



The Buxtehude Altar ("Visit of the Angel"), Master Bertram of Minden (detail)

Several other "Knitting Madonnas" can be found from around the same time period. They are (in no particular order):

1) “Madonna of humility with St. Catherine and another virgin martyr” by Vitali degli Equi (Vitale of Bologna); it is dated to around 1353, and found in Cappella Scrovegni (Arena Chapel), Padua. ⁶



“Madonna of Humility with St. Catherine and another virgin martyr“, Vitali degli Equi [Vitale of Bologna] (detail)

2) A painting known as “The Holy Family”, attributed to Ambrogio Lorenzetti (c. 1345) and from Siena (now in the Abegg-Stiftung, Collection, Riggisberg, Switzerland). ⁷



“The Holy Family”, Ambrogio Lorenzetti (detail)

3) A panel by Tomasso da Modena (1325-c.1375). ⁸



“Our Lady Knitting”, Tomasso da Modena (detail)

There are also images of saints doing various textile arts, including knitting -- it appears to be a sock -- as well as embroidery and fingerloop-braiding. ⁹



female saints doing fingerloop braiding and knitting [“Tablac”] (detail)

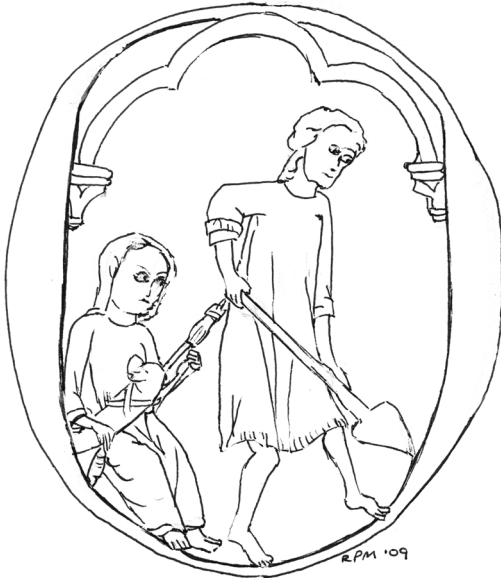
Additionally, various depictions of Eve with a distaff and/or spindle; ¹⁰ Sandra Meisel, in her article titled “The threads of our lives” says:

Because spinning is the quintessential female activity, Eve was often portrayed as a spinner. ¹¹

In addition to the knitting images, there are depictions in medieval art of Mary working on other textile crafts besides knitting. There is a tradition of her doing spinning or weaving or other needlework:

This typically feminine activity is frequently related to the motif of the Temple Virgin and occurs also in depictions of the Annunciation and the Holy Family of Nazareth. The legend of Mary’s life in the Temple (from age three through twelve) [sic] is presented in the

Pseudo-Gospel of Matthew [sic] and is based on the Proto-Evangelium [sic] of James. According to the latter Mary one day, although already betrothed to Joseph and living in his house, was called to the temple with other maidens and given wool to weave a new curtain for the temple. While spinning this purple wool at home, she was visited by the angel of the Annunciation. Thus, spinning is one of the typical activities in representations of Mary's Annunciation, pregnancy and Joseph's doubt. Weaving is more typical for Mary's activities as Temple Virgin [sic], and is frequently combined with representations of an angel bringing food or the presence of Mary's companions. There are depictions of Mary in old manuscripts where she is sitting in a group of women, her friends, at Nazareth and is either spinning, knitting or doing embroidery. Meanwhile, Joseph is teaching Jesus. ¹²



Adam and Eve, Liège mss, 13th century (detail)



Eve spinning, from a medieval English church wall painting (detail)

One of the earliest depictions is a 5th century wooden carving; ¹³ a description of the piece says:

The bas-relief [sic], sculpted in fig-tree [sic] wood and heightened by paint, shows the Virgin Mary seated, a basket in her left hand and her right hand raised in a gesture of spinning.... The messenger Archangel was in front of her, but the break has made him disappear and only his foot remains. The iconography is taken from the "Apocryphal Gospels" [sic] which describe Mary at the moment of the Annunciation. She is spinning purple wool which will be used to weave the veil for the temple of Jerusalem. [sic] ¹⁴



Mary spinning [5th c. Coptic wood carving] (detail)

Other pieces show similar images; in at least some of these, the work can actually be identified as tablet weaving as the cards are visible on the warp, which is stretched between poles.¹⁵ Another painting, which is contemporary with the “knitting madonnas”, is a German altar panel of Mary with Elizabeth; Mary has a distaff and Elizabeth a yarn winder; a description of the painting says:

Mary and Elizabeth engaged in domestic chores is not a traditional subject in representations of the life of the Virgin. The women are seated on a stone bench. Mary, her hair undone as befits a virgin and wearing the crown of the Queen of Heaven, holds a distaff and lets her book slip from her lap. Elizabeth, her cloak pulled over her head, turns the crank of the reel as she winds on the threads from the spindle. In the box below are skeins of yarn and spindles. The infants sit on cushions at their mothers' feet, and, like their mothers, have golden haloes; that of Jesus is cruciform. He holds a spoon and, in his left hand, a pan that John also grasps as he addresses his mother, Elizabeth, with these words, which appear on the scroll that he holds in his other hand, “Sichin muter • ihesus t{°u}tmier” (“Look, mother, what Jesus is doing to me”). [sic] Neither the inscription nor the image is easy to interpret. Is John complaining? If so, the children's dispute would have to be explained in terms of a complete humanization of Christ.¹⁶



Mary tablet weaving, Boucicaut-Meister, Livre d'heures (detail)



*Mary doing some sort of narrowwork weaving:
“The Holy Family at Work”, [The Hours of Catherine
of Cleves: Saturday Hours of the Virgin - Sext] (detail)*

Ironically, these images of the Virgin knitting or weaving appear at approximately the same time that the role of women in textile production, particularly cloth-weaving, was increasingly being marginalized. Ruth Mazo Karras examines how technological changes (such as the development of the horizontal loom) and economic forces (the rise of the guild system and the urbanization of society) tended to push women out of their traditional role as textile providers, especially for woolen cloth (a major trade commodity by the later Middle Ages). Commercial weaving was generally done by men, and women were often prohibited from working in the craft; Karras cites ordinances from Bristol and York to that effect.¹⁷ Women tended to be spinners (especially if unmarried, although spinners were sometimes equated with prostitutes)¹⁸ or worked strictly with silk and not wool; when they did work in the industry they generally were not paid as well. However, Karras also says:

It is in other sorts of works, though, which are not depicting clothmaking as industrial production, that women are more often depicted doing the actual weaving work.... The Virgin Mary is sometimes depicted weaving during her service in the Temple, for example at Augsburg Cathedral on a fourteenth-century [sic] portal, in a series of fourteenth-century [sic] windows from Germany, and tablet-weav- [sic] ing in several books of hours.... Elsewhere she knits, another task that in terms of craft production was also restricted to men. In a late fourteenth- [sic] century altarpiece from Buxtehude she knits for a young Jesus.... Here textile production and meeting the needs of the family is clearly connected with feminine virtue: What better way for a woman to employ her time than creating a garment for the Christ child? ¹⁹



Mary and Elizabeth at Their Housework” (detail)

Karras finds that textile production, particularly weaving, is culturally considered to be an acceptable occupation for women, even as they were pushed out of the industry, as it involved caring for the family:

This connection with married women in particular emphasizes the importance of treating marital status as a category of difference among women. Medieval society valorized marriage, and the reason why textile work, in particular weaving, continued to be an accepted feminine occupation is because it was closely connected with the married state and the management of a household. Even if aristocratic women no longer wove to clothe their household, and bourgeois and even peasant women might purchase cloth, the idea that a woman would busy herself to provide the clothing for her family remained an aspect of feminine virtue. ²⁰

Ultimately, it is in this context, that of a virtuous woman engaged in a respectable activity for the benefit of her family (or -- perhaps -- in the case of the images of the Virgin weaving for the Temple, the community or society as a whole) that the “Knitting Madonnas” and similar images can be placed. In the Middle Ages, Mary is considered to be the paramount exemplar of femininity and feminine virtue; it is only natural for her to be portrayed engaging in activities that abundantly demonstrate that virtue.

Notes:

¹ Downey and Conway, p. 22.

² Op. cit., p. 25.

³ White [URL: http://www.historians.org/INFO/AHA_History/lwhite.htm] .

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Bridgeman Art Library [URL: http://www.bridgemanartondemand.com/art/76853/Visit_of_the_Angel_from_the_right_wing_of_the_Buxtehude_Altar]; also other online sources; Rutt, p. 49; and in *Piecework*, issue 1, p. 29 (but shown as a mirror image).

⁶ Rutt, p. 46; *Piecework*, issue 1, IFC (contents page); also online [URL: <http://flickr.com/photos/claning/359845616/>] and [URL: <http://www.maedbhawkins.net/images/large/art-vitale1-a.jpg>]; detail [URL: <http://flickr.com/photos/claning/359845608/>].

⁷ Rutt, p. 45; *Piecework*, issue 1, p. 32; also online [URL: <http://flickr.com/photos/33802198@N00/359843181>]; detail [URL: <http://flickr.com/photos/claning/359843180/in/set-72157594483569366/>].

⁸ Rutt, p. 47, p. 44 [from Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna], also *Piecework*, issue 1, p. 30; and online [URL: <http://flickr.com/photos/claning/359843189/in/set-72157594483569366/>]; and detail [URL: <http://flickr.com/photos/claning/359843186/in/set-72157594483569366/>].

⁹ Painting of the Virgin and Child enthroned and surrounded by female saints [URL: <http://flickr.com/photos/claning/361270060/>]; details [URL: <http://flickr.com/photos/claning/361270062/in/set-72157594483569366/> and <http://flickr.com/photos/claning/361270074/in/set-72157594483569366/>]. The full painting has been given the title on Flickr as “Tablac” but unfortunately no other information (such as date or provenance) is given.

¹⁰ Liège, thirteenth century; Pierpont Morgan Library, NY; found in Warner, fig. 27 [between pp. 293 & 293]; other images of Eve spinning can be found online: [URL: <http://www.maedbhawkins.net/fiber-church.html> and URL: <http://www.maedbhawkins.net/fiber-boucicaut.html>].

¹¹ Meisel [URL: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0IUK/is_ai_86504540].

¹² From an FAQ website link for The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, at the University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio [URL: <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/questions/yq2/yq299.html>].

¹³ Louvre, E 17118 [URL: <http://www.maedbhawkins.net/fiber-ancient3.html>].

¹⁴ Ibid. [graphics and text listed as being courtesy of the Louvre’s Coptic Collection of Egyptian Antiquities]

¹⁵ Boucicaut-Meister, *Livre d’heures*, um 1410-1420 (Ausschnitt). Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, ms. 469, fol. 13. fol. 13. The image, and other similar ones, are found in Wyss, Robert L. “Die Handarbeiten der Maria” in *Artes Minores: Dank an Werner Abegg*, edited by Michael Stettler and Mechthild Lemberg. Bern: Verlag Staempfli & Cie, 1973; they have been posted online [URL: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/30202115@N03/2827421219/in/set-72157607106701044/>]. Another depiction of what may also be tablet weaving can be found in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* [plate 92], in an illumination of the Holy Family at Work, for the Saturday Hours of the Virgin - Sext.

¹⁶ MMA, p. 142; another description of the painting (but no image), also found online [URL: <http://www.maedbhawkins.net/fiber-medieval3.html>], but the URL link for the quote’s source does not appear to work, and may for a page that has been taken down or changed

¹⁷ Karras, p. 96.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 99

¹⁹ Op. cit., pp. 101.

²⁰ Op. cit., pp. 104

Bibliography:

Downey, Gail, and Henry Conroy. *Knit Couture*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007. [Excerpts also available online through Google Book Search [URL: http://books.google.com/books?id=NCD_sAceFCEC&pg=PA22&lpg=PA22&dq=%22Knitting+Madonnas%22&source=bl&ots=LgTsPjC9tA&sig=Pv38Oae1HjswoVj914mGZkegucM&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=5&ct=result]

<http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/>

<http://flickr.com/photos/claning/>

<http://flickr.com/photos/30202115@N03/sets/72157607106701044/>

<http://www.maedbhawkins.net/>

<http://www.umilta.net/equal1.html>

Meisel, Sandra. "The threads of our lives: Sandra Miesel on how women as diverse as Mary Queen of Scots and Armenian orphans have let their fingers do the talking" Women's Quarterly, Spring, 2002; found online at [URL: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0IUK/is_ai_86504540].

Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg: 1300-1550*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1986. [exhibit catalog for the self-named exhibit, held at the Met April 8-June 22, 1986, and at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg July 24-September 28, 1986].

_____. Piecework, (Premiere Issue): March/April, 1993, pp. 28-32, and IFC. Reprint of the section in Rutt on the knitting madonnas: images are printed in color, unlike in Rutt, but the Buxtehude piece is mirror-image to every other version I have found -- include Rutt itself!]

Rutt, Richard. *A History of Hand Knitting*. Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 1987. [originally published London: B.T. Batsford, 1987]

The Bridgeman Art Library [URL: <http://www.bridgemanartondemand.com/>]

_____. *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*. Introduction and Commentaries by John Plummer. London: Barrie and Rockliff (Barrie Books Ltd.); and New York: George Brazillier, Inc., 1966. [Facsimile reprint from the Illuminated Manuscript belonging to the Guennol Collection and the Pierpont Morgan Library.]

White, Lynn, Jr. "Technology Assessment from the Stance of a Medieval Historian". Presidential address given to the American Historical Association in 1973, and published in American Historical Review: 79:1 (February 1974): 1-13; found online at [URL: http://www.historians.org/INFO/AHA_History/lwhite.htm] .

A Short History of Runes

Hrefna frupikona Þorgrímsdóttir

The Old Norse were literate people even though they left behind no vellum manuscripts and relatively few written records. What records they did leave were in a writing system foreign to modern people. Yet, this writing system was used across northern Europe during, before, and after the Viking Age. It was called runes.

Runes appear in a many short texts carved into stone and wood, a few surviving letters in birch bark, some personal accounts, and church records. Runic inscriptions can be found where ever the Old Norse traveled. This area includes all of northern Europe, Russia, Paris, Rome, and Constantinople.

Most runes record text in Old Norse. To date, archeologist have found over 5000 inscriptions. Curiously though, there are no surviving Scandinavian manuscripts written in Latin until 1165. Even such texts as the Havamal and Icelandic sagas were written down after the Viking Age and in a Latin alphabet.

The word "Rune" means mystery, secret and wisdom. Zoega's Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic defines *rúnar* as "secret, hidden lore, wisdom", "written characters, runes" and "magical characters or signs." The word is derived from *rúni* and *rúna* which means "intimate (male and female) friend". In Old English *Rūn* meant "mystery, secrecy, hidden knowledge." Among its derivations are *gerūna* (counselor or confidant), *rūnere* (whisperer, tale-bearer), *rūnian* (to whisper, murmur, tell secrets) and *rūnwita* (rune-knower, counselor, advisor). Runes also had a magic connotation. *Rūncræftig* (rune-skilled) meant "skilled in mysteries, the occult", while *rūnlic* (rune-like) translates to "mystical, occult". Even today, Dictionary.com contains the following definition "an aphorism, poem, or saying with mystical meaning or for use in casting a spell."

The origin of runes is unknown. The Havamal attributes their invention to Odin:

138

Wounded I hung on a wind-swept gallows
For nine long nights,
Pierced by a spear, pledged to Odhinn,
Offered, myself to myself
The wisest know not from whence spring
The roots of that ancient rood

139

They gave me no bread,
They gave me no mead,
I looked down;
with a loud cry
I took up runes;
from that tree I fell.

140

Nine lays of power
I learned from the famous Bolthor, Bestla's father:
He poured me a draught of precious mead,
Mixed with magic Odrerir.

141

Waxed and throve well;
Word from word gave words to me,
Deed from deed gave deeds to me,

142

Runes you will find, and readable staves,
Very strong staves,
Very stout staves,
Staves that Bolthor stained,
Made by mighty powers,
Graven by the prophetic god,

143

For the gods by Odhinn, for the elves by Dain,
By Dvalin, too, for the dwarves,
By Asvid for the hateful giants,
And some I carved myself:
Thund, before man was made, scratched them,
Who rose first, fell thereafter

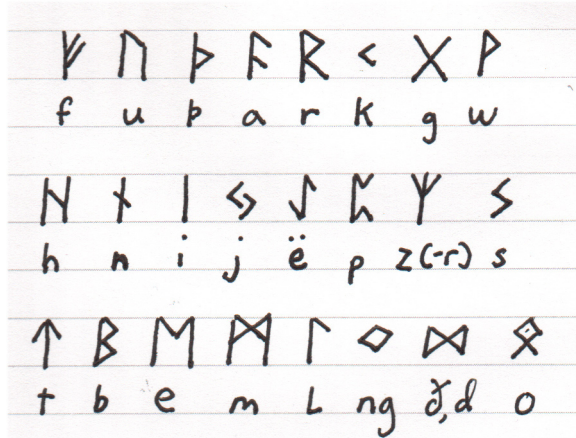
144

Know how to cut them, know how to read them,
Know how to stain them, know how to prove them,
Know how to evoke them, know how to score them,

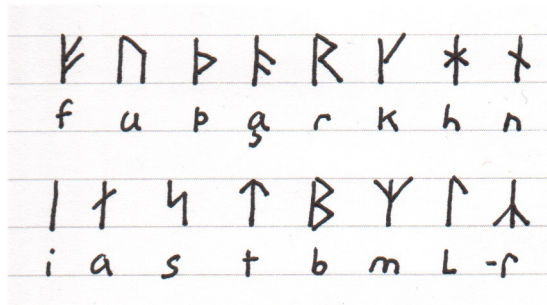
Know how to send them”; know how to send them,

The earliest rune-like writing are pictograms that come from the 2nd century BCE. Runes most likely formed into a writing system 400 years later. Scholars debate where this formation occurred. Some argue for the Italian Alps, while others claim an area near the Black Sea. The oldest runic inscriptions in Scandinavia come from the 3rd century in Sweden on a spear blade in Gotland and a silver brooch in Skane.

Runic letters and forms varied by time and place. Each version of the runes is called a futhark, a name formed from the first six letters. This name is similar to the word “alphabet” in Greek. The oldest futhark is called the Elder Futhark, which has 24 letters:

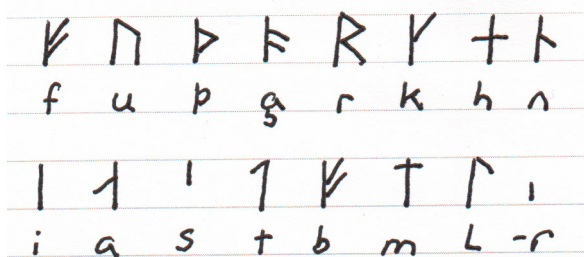


The next futhark to be developed is called the Younger Futhark. Its other names are long stem, common runes, or Danish runes. The Younger Futhark was invented approximately 800 CE. Its development was coincident with changes in spoken language. With this futhark, one letter could represent multiple sounds which resulted in the need for fewer runes. This futhark has 16 letters:

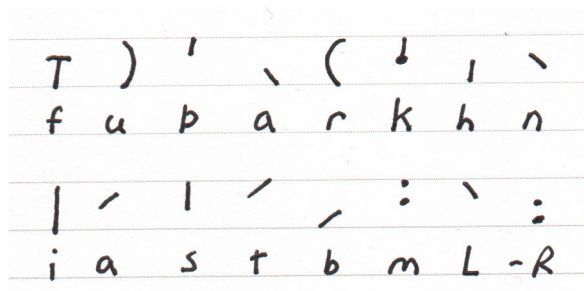


This futhark has the vowels U, I, O (a short A) and long A. The constants can be pronounced with and without voice, such as k/g, t/d, b/p. So Gormr could be written kurmR and Svein as Suin. The constant N is omitted if it is before another constant. To quote Stephen Pollington in Rudiments of Runelore “This strange contradiction makes the reading of northern inscriptions unnecessarily difficult and problematic: many runes have to represent several sounds each, so that interpreting a Norse text is a matter of fitting the possible sounds to the rune and seeing if a word emerges!” Therefore, there is lots of dispute on the meanings of inscriptions. Reading inscriptions is made even more difficult with the variation in form and curviness used throughout Viking world.

The next futhark to appear was the Short Twig futhark in the late Viking Age in Sweden and Norway. It too has 16 letters and could vary in time and place.



Staveless runes appear in Sweden after 900 AD. There is no evidence for them in the rest of Scandinavia. Sven Jansson in Runes in Sweden argues that the staveless runes were a sort of “stenography” used in common every day life. Location of the mark became important as the stave was now removed. There are 16 letters in this futhark.



Runes did appear outside of Scandinavia and Norse-held lands. An Anglo-Saxon futhark was used in England between 700 CE to 1200 CE.



Runes continued to be used well past the Viking Age. During a medieval revival in the early 14th century, a new futhark emerged. This futhark appears in such manuscripts as the Codex Runicus. Medieval runes were an enlargement of the Younger Futhark:



Use of runes mostly died out after this revival. However, in the province of Dalarna in central Sweden, runes stayed in use until the 19th century.

Most runic inscriptions are short. Scholars believe that the majority of runes were carved into wood and birch bark, although stone and metal comprise most of the remains. These inscriptions were used for a variety of reasons, from identification and correspondence to magic and graffiti. Runes also appeared on many types of objects: jewelry, boundary posts, name tags, and manuscripts to name a few. Runestones are, of course, the best known of runic inscriptions. Approximately 10% of surviving medieval runes are Latin inscriptions. These inscriptions generally have religious overtones.

When it came to writing runes, they flow in several different directions. Runestones have letter running from left to right, right to left, in boustrophedon (with the first line proceeding right to left and the second line proceeding left to right), vnderuner (written as a mirror image), stupruner (upside down), and as bindrunes. Bindrunes were two runes that were bound together, e.g. “Æ” would represent A+E. A single rune could also signify two runes, e.g. “FE” could signify “FE + FE”. Runes were a majuscule script; no lower case letters existed. Words would often run together or be separated by an x or columns of 1, 2, or 3 dots. In some instances, words were painted different colors on runestones. Numerals were either spelled out or abbreviated. They had no special characters.

Runes were a writing system that pre-dated the Vikings. Like other writing systems, they changed and evolved over time, most likely to meet the linguistic and practical needs of the writer. Despite New Age and Fantasy writers’ claims the contrary, runes have no inherent magic. They were used to record ownership, travel and graffiti. Runes (like any other secret code) derive their mystery from the words they spell out and that keeps them fascinating.

Sources:

- Campbell, J. Graham ed. The Viking World. London: Francis Lincoln, 2001.
- Fitzhugh, William W. and Elisabeth I. Ward, ed. Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.
- Hauge, Arild. Arild Hauge's Runes. Århus, Denmark: 2006. 21 Dec 2008 <<http://www.arild-hauge.com/eindex.htm>>.
- “Hávamál, The Sayings of Hár” The Asatru Alliance. Trans. W H Auden and P B Taylor. Payson, AZ: The Asatru Alliance. 21 Dec 2008. <http://asatru.org/havamal.html>.
- Jansson, Sven B.F. Runes in Sweden. Trans. Peter Foote. Sweden: Gidlunds, 1987.
- Page, R.I. Runes. London: The British Museum Press, 1987.
- “Rune.” Dictionary.com. 2008. 21 Dec 2008 <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rune>>.
- Ward, Christie. “Runes and Writing”. The Viking Answer Lady. Texas: Christie Ward, 2003. March 13,

2003 <<http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/callig.shtml>>.

Zoëga's A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic. 2004. Northvegr Foundation. 21 Dec 2008 <<http://www.northvegr.org/zoega/index002.php>>.

Ladies Early 16th Century English Coif

Lady Renata l'Rouge, known as the posh rot

Most paintings and artistic depictions of female headwear in the first half of the 16th century show women wearing some type of hood, usually a gabled English style hood or a French hood. Though extant examples of what was worn beneath the hoods are rare, period portraits, sketches and engravings leave us a couple of clues as to the coif worn beneath these hoods.



This picture, painted by Holbein between 1532 and 1543, shows a female, thought to be Anne of Cleves, wearing a basic coif underneath some type of hat. You can see the front edge of the coif, slightly shaped by wire, as well as a forehead cloth beneath. We should be careful not to assume from this picture alone, that this was the fashion in early 16th century England because, if the depiction *was* of Anne of Cleves, she was a foreigner and may have brought this style of coif from Dusseldorf as opposed to adopting the style from England.



This picture, by Holbein from the 1530's, is of Anne of Boleyn. Here we see a forehead cloth, underneath a coif covering which has wings down over the ears. The front edge of this coif appears to be wired, as we can see flaring above the ears. It also appears to tie below the chin, as evident by the distinct line drawn along the jaw. There seems to be a third layer which knots at the base of the head and either clips or ties to the ear wings. Drea Leed, on her Elizabethan costuming site, presupposes that this coif is intended to be worn beneath a hood. "The line of the coif follows quite closely the line of the gable and transitional hoods worn at the time, a good indication that this coif was worn underneath a hood as well as by itself." (Leed)



This picture of Lady Audley, by Holbein from 1538, depicts a French style hood. What is of interest in this sketch is the bottom most layer shown, which ties beneath the chin. This layer has the same ear “wings” as the Anne Boleyn picture above, and also seems to be wired. Could this be the coif beneath the hood, or is it simply a layer of the hood? If we follow Drea Leed’s assumptions based on the Boleyn picture, this might be the finished look for the coif above, with the added hood.



This picture of Catherine Howard, by Holbein from 1540, again shows an under coif, beneath a hood, which ties under the chin. Though it almost appears as though the coif is attached to the lower billament, (the corrugated edging framing her face,) Ashelford, in *A Visual History of Costume of the Sixteenth Century*, describes it as such: “On the head is worn a French hood of the later style. It consists of a white undercap that curves forward onto the cheek and is secured under the chin by a strap.” (Ashelford, 45) When viewed in conjunction with the portraits and sketches above, it would seem that the ‘undercap’ is the same coif as those worn by Anne Boleyn and Lady Audley.



This is another Holbein portrait, from 1540, of a lady titled Mrs. Pemberton. There is an embroidered forehead cloth, covered by a coif with ear wings and a brimless bonnet. The coif, itself, has a wired front edge and is shaped to flare around the ears, the same as the pictures above. (Coincidentally, this is the earliest embroidered forehead cloth that I have found. There are, however, ample extant examples of embroidered forehead cloths and coifs dated to the late 16th and early 17th century.)



This brass engraving of Jane Ingleton from 1557 shows the lady wearing a hood over a coif. There is not much detail to the coif, and we can not tell whether the front edge was wired or whether it was adorned on any way. Again, when analyzed along side the pictures by Holbein, we could assert that the coif had a wired front edge, with slight shaping, and chin straps that held the coif in place.

From these portraits, sketches and engravings, we are able to generalize the basic construction of a coif style from the first half of the 16th century in England. In four of the pictures above, a forehead cloth was apparent under the coif. Over top of this cloth, was the coif itself, which had a wired edge and was shaped so that the coif flared around the ears. In one of the pictures above, the wired edge had a peek at the top center of the forehead. Also apparent in four of the pictures above, the coif had “wings” that extended over the ears and at least three of these pictures, the coif had a chinstrap that tied under the chin. This style seemed to serve as the basic coif style throughout the first half of the sixteenth century in England.

Works Cited and Consulted

Ashelford, Jane. *A Visual History of Costume of the Sixteenth Century*. (1983) London, Great Britain: B.T. Batsford Ltd.

Leed, Drea. *Tudor and Elizabethan Coifs*. Retrieved from Elizabethan Costume website: <http://www.elizabethancostume.net/headwear/coif.html>.

Mikhaila, Ninia and Jane Malcolm-Davies. *The Tudor Tailor*. (2006) London, Great Britain; Batsford.

All Holbein portraits found online on freeware sites.

Transcending Politics: the SCA Bard in the Social Crisis

by Master Michael Alewright

A QUESTIONABLE CROWN.

I once had the displeasure of watching the final round of a crown tournament in which the ultimate winner seemed distinguished more by his unflagging desire to win at any cost and by the apparent thickness of his hide, than by his honor and his fighting prowess. This was many years ago, and out of respect for the passage of time and in hope that he has since taken a better path, I will not name him here. Call him “Joe Sixpack.”

I was the Kingdom bardic champion at the time, and had been charged to create a piece in praise of the new Prince. I fulfilled my duty and performed the piece with apparent enthusiasm, but at that moment it tasted no better than ashes.

Before Prince Joe assumed his shadowed crown I yielded my championship to my successor, but I remained troubled over the matter. It became increasingly clear to me over time that many others were likewise troubled, but that few or none felt empowered to speak. No one discussed the “rhino in the corner” save in low-voiced grumbles uttered in sympathetic company, or as passing snide references. I felt the need to speak out like a growing pressure within me, but was at a loss for how to approach the matter constructively.

Welcome to the Bard’s Dilemma.

A BARD’S DUTY.

I believed then, as I do now, that part of the duty of the SCA bard is to empower others by speaking out when all other voices have been silenced by fear, reluctance, politics or an inability to articulate. When it becomes necessary, someone must be willing to stand and say that the emperor has no clothing. Someone must speak the words that all are afraid to say. Someone must lance the boil so that the patient may heal, and must be able to do so with finesse and precision.

While most people in our Society refer to any solo vocal performing art as a “bardic” art, to my mind what separates the working bard from the minstrel is his ability and willingness to carry and perpetuate the conscience and memory of our culture without becoming preachy. The bard is not merely an entertainer; he is also a “social engineer,” rediscovering and refining the power of words, enhancing atmosphere, teaching by example, praising what is praiseworthy, condemning what is not, serving as a safety valve on the culture, and hiding his message in a shell of entertainment much as the fabled Trojan Horse concealed the Greek soldiers. Where a shout might be ignored or resented, the skilled bard may whisper while his audience strains to hear him. He can offer necessary emotional release in difficult times or make his audience see things in a new and more constructive way, always with intent to ennoble both himself and those who hear his words. He can offer stories by which we may better define ourselves, and refine our actions.

The author Orson Scott Card, in the preface to his short-story anthology *Monkey Sonatas*, wrote, “Our very identity is a collection of the stories we have come to believe about ourselves. We are bombarded with the stories of others about us; even our memories of our own lives are filtered through the stories we have constructed to interpret those past events. We revise our identity by revising our self-story. Traditional psychotherapies rely heavily on this process: You *thought* you were trying to do X, but in fact your unconscious purpose was Y. Ah, now I understand myself! But I think not – I think that in the moment of believing the new story you simply *revised* your identity. I am no longer a person who tries to do X. I am a person who was being driven to do Y, without even realizing it. You remain the same person, who performed the same acts. Only the story has been changed.” At risk of being stoned, I submit that bards revise our X-pectations of ourselves and others by telling us Y we do what it is that we should be doing.

The ultimate message of the bard: *You are watched. What you do and say will be remembered. Become great through your deeds, and we will make you immortal. Abuse your strength and influence, and we*

will take them from you.

The ultimate warning to the bard: *You are watched. What you do and say will be remembered. You are strong only through those who offer you their ears, and who trust you with their hearts. You may become great only in your humility. Your power can vanish in an instant.*

A CHAT WITH KING SARNAC.

While I was still struggling over what to do about King Joe, I had the good fortune at a post-revel to find myself in a conversation with King Sarnac of Ealdormere, of revered memory. I sought his counsel on what was troubling me, and he gave me my first introduction to the power that the bard may wield: "In Ealdormere, bards open their mouths and Kings tremble." To illustrate, he referred to the official Royal lineage of Ealdormere, which boasts of its Royalty but for one King "of whom the Bards are silent." When I asked His Majesty where one ought to draw the line between the need to speak out, and the need to be (for lack of a less odious term) "politically correct," he responded very simply: "A bard is above politics." For me in that moment, it was as if the scales fell from my eyes. I felt free to write.

WHAT I WROTE.

Advice to a King

*You are the King of the land, Joe,
You are the King of the land.
You gained your own Court, all
Your foes proved but mortal,
For Death was but yours to command, Joe.
You are the King of the land.*

*All will recall what they saw, Joe,
All will recall what they saw.
The King's declaration
Revealed your station
And all those who watched were in awe, Joe.
All will recall what they saw.*

*When you command us we go, Joe,
When you command us we go;
For yours is the throne,
Let your will become known.
Wish it and see it is so, Joe;
When you command us we go.*

*History's vision is clear, Joe,
History's vision is clear;
And honors will rest
Upon all of the best,
So what would it please you to hear, Joe?
History's vision is clear.*

*All of our eyes are on you, Joe,
All of our eyes are on you.
Be you light or dark
So will go Æthelmearc
Long after your reign will be through, Joe.*

All of our eyes are on you.

Having written the piece, but still more than a little fearful, I “play-tested” it to a gathering of three friends, two of whom are themselves writers. When I was done, one friend said in a low tone, “Ooh!” The second asked the first, “What’s wrong with *that*?” The third spoke up to say, “I’m not up on all the politics of the situation, but that song could be taken more than one way.” Bingo! A second play-test before a gathering of bards early in King Joe’s reign showed me that the piece did what I hoped it would do.

One more step remained. Since the song identified the King by name, I did not consider myself “licensed” to perform it until I had sent a copy to King Joe himself, giving him a chance to respond and discuss the matter. He chose not to do so, presumably for reasons that seemed good to him.

THE REACTION.

I was fortunate: the sky didn’t fall upon me, perhaps because by this time King Joe seemed to have few friends remaining. The reaction to the piece was generally positive, although I selected with some care the time and place to perform it, and tried not to become tiresome about it (overplay can dull a message much as overuse dulls a blade). I received variations of some of the sweetest words any bard can hear: “I have been very upset over this. Thank you for saying what I could not.”

Others have been less fortunate, swimming these dangerous waters. No doubt the boy who proclaimed that the Emperor was naked had an appointment with a gibbet the next day. Fortunately for us our Kings have no such power, but know that there will always be those who will accuse *you* of having made the trouble. As long as your creed is the same as a medical doctor – *first, do no harm* – and your actions are carefully considered, you may face your detractors with calm compassion. Resist the temptation to involve your own ego in the work – which can be sorely tempting – and write in such a way that you can answer for your work to the person you wrote about, with your head held high. Be prepared to answer gently some heartfelt questions, such as “Why are you doing this to me?” and “What gives you the right?” Make sure that the true answer is *never* the hubristic, “Because I’m a *bard*, of course.” License abused is license revoked. Always consider trashing your work unperformed, especially if the person who inspired it recognizes and honors your concerns, or if performing it might be (or have become) inappropriate to the circumstances. The cure can be worse than the disease. Don’t mistake your role as watchman with the combined roles of judge, jury and executioner.

Some of those who hear or read your piece may someday be in a position of authority; let them learn now – as gently and subtly as possible – what they will face, and what damage they might do if they forget themselves and surrender to their baser natures. Let them learn now that there are always those who watch, and let them give thought to how they might like to be remembered. Give some thought to that, yourself, and also on these:

*Humility must be your first principal, and your last.
Deplore the sin, but love the sinner.
There is a line between satire and abuse, and between service and arrogance.
Speaking the truth is not enough; truth unheard is truth unspoken.
No one asked you to become anyone’s paladin. Consider what you take upon yourself.
Create no conflict of interest, real or perceived.
You are not important, although your service might be.
Take the high road, understand the temptations of the lower one, and teach both.
Always question both your motives and your actions.
Always leave your target an honorable “out.” Seek to ennoble even him.
Do not hide behind a pseudonym; show your true face.
You may not be able to stop what you start.
Know when to back off and remain silent.*

... and on these:

The moment it becomes about you, you're done.
The moment it becomes personal between you and someone else, you're done.
The moment it becomes personal mockery or smear, you're done.
The moment it becomes a crusade, you're done.
The moment you use truth as a weapon, you're done.
The moment people start to think that any of the above is true, you're done.
The moment you inspire another to act shamefully, you're done.

TRANSCENDING POLITICS

Thinking about King Sarnac's advice, and my experience in the King Joe affair and in others over time, it seems to me that it is not so much that bards are above politics, as that we have the power to *transcend* politics. We are the ones who stand outside the political structure, or who use it openly, and for worthy ends. We consider our conduct, so that we need not fear to answer for our actions. We make sure of our facts, so that we need not fear the truth. We choose our words with careful attention to how they will be received, so that we need not fear to speak. We treat with honor those whose actions we condemn, so that we need not fear to face them. We prepare before placing our hand into the fire, so that we need not fear to be burned.

In the SCA, bards are rediscovering what our mundane society seems almost to have forgotten: *words have power*. Gain someone's ear, and you are invited into his mind as a trusted guest. Perception creates reality by directing our actions, and we influence perception. Skilled and compassionate hands with access to the social "operating system" can do wondrous good, and unskilled or angry ones can wreak all kinds of trouble. You can drive someone out of the SCA. You can ruin relationships. You can factionalize a group. You can make a reputation, or destroy one, *even by mistake*. You can ruin your own SCA experience. Where matters such as this are concerned, the SCA is not a game; it is a living culture to which people devote substantial time and effort, and for which many come to care deeply. Here, we deal in real lives, real relationships, real reputations... and the potential to create (and become embroiled in) real, and enormous, trouble.

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

You think you see a problem? Not everyone will agree, and you need to consider whether those who see no problem worthy of response might just be correct. Also, those who *do* see a problem might not agree on what to do about it. Reality-check yourself thoroughly, act quickly only if there truly is no time for longer consideration, and consider seriously whether it might be worse to speak instead of staying silent. Make sure that you are up to the task you set for yourself; some knives indeed can heal rather than harm, but even a scalpel becomes an instrument of damage in unskilled hands. Be as sure as you can that your cure is not worse than the disease, remembering that burning at the stake is a guaranteed cure for the Common Cold.

APPROACHING THE TASK.

If write you must, and if write you should, do so with a clear goal, knowing that you are not the one causing the problem, but that you are merely responding to it as constructively as you are able, for the greater good. Do so with a clear idea of what emotions you desire to kindle and direct in your audience, and what ideas will ride along with them. Do so with consideration to how your piece will be heard by people who disagree with your basic premise, including the person whose actions you are deploring. Recognize that it is the *actions* that you are deploring, and not the actor. Whatever you offer, it *must* be entertaining, and while it may sometimes bite, it must never, never be (or be perceived as) mean-spirited or cruel.

There are more approaches to a bad situation than the mere didactic, and more moods to offer than angry accusation. Consider that the axe and the saw both may fell the tree, but the saw does so by

approaching the task sideways.

Don't preach to the choir; it inflames the choir, and alienates others who only expect a preacher at a pulpit when they go to church. Instead, consider the power of the "stowaway" message hidden in a tale; not everyone will "get it," *but that's just fine*. Consider allegory. Consider compassion. Consider friendly warning. Consider particularly the power of good-natured laughter to remove wind from even the fullest of self-inflated sails, without offering the butt of your joke real insult, real harm, any weapon at all to use in retaliation, or any legitimate reason to raise a word or a weapon against you.

Let us imagine the example of a King who makes his own young children Barons of the Court, and threatens banishment against any who might speak out against it. Obviously, he takes himself very seriously, and he is poised and ready to take on all comers who might naysay. He waits for the axe; consider using the saw, instead. Might humor serve your audience better than either reinforcing their anger, or causing more of it? Might wry chuckles release their tension and fear by transforming it into something more positive?

*Make way, make way for the Baron, the pearl of a Royal eye.
He's great in stature, great in wisdom... almost three feet high!
What loving father would not seek to raise his sprouted seed,
And show us all, the rosy place where good intentions lead?*

Anyone can hit a nail. The bard's goal, where possible, is to make the nail drive itself, and maybe even to enjoy the process. The task demands the right tool: when you put the hammer down, make sure that you are not screwing up, instead.

BAD ACTS AND THE GOOD PEOPLE WHO COMMIT THEM.

Set aside the political situation, and your bad-acting target is a human being. He is emotionally invested in his actions. He tends to justify his actions to himself, as do we all; the worse they are, the harder it is for him to face the truth of what he has done, and the more heavily he will be compelled to defend them to maintain his good opinion of himself. He may genuinely see (and respond to) outright criticism as a personal attack, and his pain upon receiving it likewise will be genuine. He tells himself stories about why what he does is not only right, but also righteous, and he believes those stories.

Consider whether what you see is nothing more fiendish than that someone else sees a situation differently than you do, has drawn different conclusions based upon the same evidence, or knows more than you do about what is going on; particularly with Royals, there can be so much behind the scenes that his actions would make perfect sense, if only you could see what he is responding to. He might even be right. Consider this prospect carefully, understanding that good and reasonable people may perceive matters very differently without either one being wrong.

Either way, your "malefactor" is as much your audience as any other, and more than some. He deserves your respect, even as you speak out against his actions. Consider offering him not opposition, but instead new stories that will allow him to think about things in a different way and still save face. Remember that someday you will have to look him in the eye, and will have to answer for your words without defensiveness or anger. Remember that you will find yourself in the company of his friends, who may themselves be innocent but who are involved in the matter because of their love for their friend.

Making things more complicated, there will be those who will forgive your malefactor anything, and who will see in your work not critique, but personal attack. They are also your audience.

Kings come and go. Reputation remains: yours, and his. Never lose sight of your goal.

SAME KING, DIFFERENT APPROACH.

During the reign of King Joe, I wrote a second song inspired by the same set of circumstances. This one had the particular benefit of "plausible deniability," in that if it just happens to condemn the very actions that I witnessed, it does so in the most general sense and *certainly* doesn't point the finger

at anyone! Even more personally satisfying, I had occasion during that reign to perform the song for two visiting monarchs. Both of them applauded the sentiment wholeheartedly.

*Honor, true honor, withstands any blow,
Even the one that will lay a man low;
If flesh is but feeble, of flesh I won't sing,
But of honor, great honor, the mark of a king.*

*A king serves his people, who serve him in turn.
His crown is the coin he must labor to earn,
For wealth, rank and privilege are but empty pride,
But for the staunch honor that shines from inside.*

*Honor, true honor, is not thrown away,
Nor traded for fame that will fade in a day;
For light cannot last when the evening bells ring,
Yet honor will hold back the dark for a king.*

*A thief may abscond with an elegant crown,
And shine as resplendent as kings of renown;
But though he may prance and proclaim as he will,
A charlatan crowned is a charlatan still.*

*Honor, true honor, is sweeter than breath,
And one who has lost it has tasted of death.
Who suffers such loss, who could not feel a thing?
For honor is ever the life of a king.*

*Pray be as a king in the life that you live,
And care not for taking, but learn how to give.
Look to your monarch who sits on the throne,
And think on the virtues for which he is known.*

*Honor, true honor, is worth any cost,
And never is bested, though battles be lost.
Though gold you may lack, shining honor will bring
You riches as worthy as those of a king.*

CHES IN THE WHIRLWIND.

Mundane events sometimes can impact and color the SCA experience. The most obvious, and cataclysmic, example occurred on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, when the world changed and we experienced a different meaning of “living history.”

The following Saturday was to be the coronation of Æthelmearc’s new King and Queen, Andrew and Alexandra, at an event site in Jennerstown, Pennsylvania, approximately twenty miles from the crash site of Flight 93. Unresolved emotions were running high, and I set out to create a piece that, while SCA-compatible, would nevertheless honor the real-world emotions that had entered the game, and that would channel the shared trauma into something to strengthen us rather than to distract and fragment.

Song of the Free

*Unwelcome and armed you come
Your minions invade our land;
And cold grow our hearts when the killing starts,*

But whatever should come, we stand

*You see plunder ripe for taking,
And think to reach out your hand;
But beware of the prey that you hunt today,
For tomorrow will come; we stand.*

*We stand, we stand
Unbowed by your demand.
You will come to see that we still live free,
And despite your sword, we stand.*

*Our souls feel the chill of winter
Through the flames your anger fanned.
Our houses burned but our lesson learned,
In the hills and woods we stand.*

*You've killed us by the thousands,
And wrecked what once was grand.
Commit your crime, we will bide our time
When the moment comes, we stand.*

*We stand, we stand,
And refuse to be unmanned.
Let the hours creep as you try to sleep,
For there in the dark, we stand.*

*Let your eyes be filled with terror,
Ere your mouth be filled with sand.
Let your flesh be meat for the crows to eat;
Let revenge begin—we stand.*

*Let crops grow where they've fallen,
Who moved by your command.
Let their widows fear when we march from here,
And outside your door we stand.*

*We stand, we stand
For the doom of all you planned.
When the sight of me is the last you see,
Let your last thought be: we stand.*

Whether writing to address a single person's antisocial actions, or reacting to wide-ranging cataclysm, the principals are much the same:

*Know and honor your audience
Consider the "ride" you want to offer them, and what you want to leave them with.
Try to encompass both problem and solution in your work.
Try to turn negatives into positives, or at least to seek the best within the worst.
Respect and foster the atmosphere we seek to create.
Separate your ego from your work, and allow the piece to become a shared experience.
Offer your audience meaningful ideas without bludgeoning them.*

THE RISING FLAMES: ADDRESSING PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF ANGER.

Try an experiment some time: at a party, put on a mask. A simple domino mask will do, or a cut paper plate and a piece of string; anything that covers the face, particularly the area around your eyes. Leave the mask on for a while, and see if you don't notice within yourself a peculiar feeling of freedom, a certain sense of license-in-isolation that permits you to act in ways that you might not seriously consider if your face remained uncovered, even though you know perfectly well that your identity is just as obvious as it ever was. Being inside a car offers the same sense of license as you interact with other drivers, and being on the Internet can offer even more. Any time there is sense of disconnection between actions and consequences, the temptation is there. Is it any wonder that people who might never consider insulting you to your face find it easy to express destructive anger remotely?

Even in a Society dedicated to honor, courtesy and chivalry – to the principal of self-governance – it is all too easy for such flames to spread. Trying to address it simply by condemnation accomplishes little. Showing the problem and offering a better alternative may accomplish much more. Leadership is always the best example.

Some years ago in Æthelmearc, a newly-minted Laurel and a companion were revealed to have knowingly used their art as a weapon against another, under circumstances that made the act particularly egregious. Some viewed the Crown's subsequent reaction (for the Laurel, banishment from the Royal presence) as too mild, and private anger began to be expressed publicly on the Kingdom's electronic distribution list on the heels of a public apology by the perpetrators that many considered insufficient. A particular Peer responded to one angry post in a way that seemed calculated to fan flames yet higher:

I was wondering when somebody was going to have enough guts to say what you just said and pose the question: "how tragically ironic and hypocritical is this organization?" Apparently during the days and weeks of silence the answer is "boundless--so as to accommodate the comfort level that all cowards crave."

Anticipating that this inflammatory post – particularly at a time when Peerlike conduct already was at issue – would generate angry response that would lead nowhere worthwhile, I resolved to draw the fire upon myself with a response that addressed my concern without departing from the principles that make our Society strong. If I could demonstrate by example that civil and cultured conduct was a viable and effective answer to incivility, perhaps I could help defuse part of a bad situation while remaining immune to the anger that inspired it; perhaps I could show how one might place a hand into the fire without becoming burned. I chose Terza Rima, an Italian poetry form suitable for discourse.

*Not everyone who thinks will choose to speak,
Nor everyone who speaks gives pause for thought;
If Silence waited only on the weak,
The noise would make such weakness dearly bought!
Anathema pollutes our cherish'd hall
But those who brought it rightfully are caught
And, clothed in disgrace before us all,
Their malice stands exposed as marks of shame.
May every gentle note it, and recall
That what we make here is not but a game
Nor is their deed apologized away.
We each are watched, and even those whose fame
Is great may set in fire at end of day.
Consider, though, that with the damage done
But she unbowed whose joy some sought to slay,
And even as we turn our backs to shun
The ones who fouled the nest where all would roost,
Their path to penance cannot be begun
But by regretful words more rightly loosed
Than were those wicked words that those must chase.
I can but hope to see reintroduced*

*The pious virtues once suppos'd to grace
The culprits; but if it be so or not,
'Tis their affair. And though their deeds were base,
They own them up, as public as their plot
Was private. Think about them what you will,
And let them bear their richly purchased lot,
But do not let their ill breed further ill
Lest we see but the flaw before our eyes
And never more the diamonds. We are still
A worthy folk. When discord would arise,
In civil tongues our greatest virtue lies.*

The private responses I received were overwhelmingly positive, including from the Crown. People really do care about what we build in this wonderful Society of ours – or they would not have been so angry in the first place – and those who demonstrate its strength in the face of adversity perform a service to all.

As you consider involving yourself in such a matter, it is useful to remember that a spirited public dialogue – even a passionate one – is the social equivalent of an individual thinking about a deep concern, and your role as a bard is not to interrupt such dialogue, but rather is to facilitate it by catching it if it begins to slide down the slippery slope into argument. Right-thinking and -hearted people can disagree, and more often than not, no particular faction may claim legitimate title to being “right.” There will always be those who, thinking in black-and-white terms, will tend to equate rejection of a person’s idea with disdain for the person, and who will respond defensively. For that reason it is best to approach the matter gently, and with respect; as above, consider whether the axe or the saw is the best tool for the job. Perhaps the very best response you can receive from an ideological opponent is, “Thank you. I never thought about it that way, before.” Speak to the nobility that lies sleeping within your opponent, and it might just awaken.

I had need and occasion to respond in similar fashion to another inflammatory post by the same angry Peer, under different circumstances. This Peer posted, without visible provocation and in response to someone’s innocuous comment that a certain message was off-topic for the Kingdom distribution list:

By all means, let us keep politics and the like off this list so that we may pursue other more important activities in this glorious organization. I would say that the pursuit of awards, self aggrandizement, petty bickering and the vast stupidities that are indulged in on a hourly basis in the SCA are much more important than a simple act of acknowledging one of our fallen heroes in this, the most beautiful country on God's earth.

I responded publicly with a sonnet, this time using less of the saw, and more of the axe:

*Your base disdain bears little to commend
Those virtues which your station claims to bear,
That you would cast them all aside to lend
Your tongue to use a noble should forswear.
Are we so small? Is what we grow so cheap,
You see it as the blossom of an hour,
And, now the moment's passed, you roar and leap
In wanton rage to crush that idle flower?
Perhaps that is your choice: to trade all this,
And buy instead a jingoistic joy,
Pretending that your words are not amiss,
Nor blushing at the anger you employ.
Whatever honors one purports to claim
Are earned by deeds, and not by acts of shame.*

The offending Peer responded privately and rather less politely, but since I stepped forward both to damp

and draw her fire, I was saddened but not surprised. Again, private populace response was very positive.

Years after I wrote this, a King whom I had not met prior to the commencement of his reign told me that he kept this sonnet of mine to refer to, whenever he became too depressed over SCA politics and started to wonder why he bothered to remain. That leads me to something else for the bard to keep in mind: *Your words matter. You can never know just when they will touch another's life, but you can make sure that when they do, they will touch it for the better.*

COMES THE REAPER.

Look at any picture from the early days of the SCA, and apart from the hairstyles and similar incidental anachronisms, what is truly strange about it to modern SCA eyes is that everyone in the photo is probably of college age. Imagine the cultural divide between that early Society and the one we enjoy today, where children and greybeards abound.

One difference looms large. In any population, given enough time, age, illness and accident will take their sorry toll; sadly, we are not immune. Friends fall. Loved ones fall. Pillars of our Society fall. Answering real grief in real time, in context of our game, requires a balancing act to avoid trivializing or over-fictionalizing the tragedy. Avoid making your piece saccharine or trite, and honor the fallen without turning them into sanctified caricatures. Be sensitive without tiptoeing, and consider the experience you wish to offer to those who loved the departed, as well as those who never knew him; both are your audience.

Hail and Farewell (for Earl Sir Bearengaer hinn Rauthi)

*What paradox we are: immortal flame
Bound fast to flesh, with all its many ills.
We scorn our clay, and in our pride proclaim
Our selves to be our own. We ply our skills,
And seek out friends to share our gifts and lives
Whilst patient night collects our endless days,
Until (at length) a bitter morn arrives
To offer sad reminder with its rays.
Helplessly, we watch a friend laid low,
The burden of his spirit now too great
For mortal flesh to bear; and well we know
That all beneath the sky must share his fate.
So let us rise, and toast that far-off shore
Where wait the ones we lose, who go before.*

(for Baroness Anna of Kiev, of the Debatable Lands)

*Let minstrels' merry songs be stilled.
Let dancers stand aghast.
Let poets ply their pens to frame
An Inspiration passed.
Let those who love the hearthstone weep
To find it now but cold,
And tipplers sip their share of grief
And pray to be consoled.
Let dawn arrive tomorrow, but
This sunset, strike a spark,
And let its glimmer stand for her
Whose passing leaves us dark.*

(for Duke Sir Morguhn Sheridan: knight, duke, patron)
There is a tale that none should know, nor ever should be spoken,
That echoes often in unwilling ears;
That slyly sings of theft of all we love, to leave us broken
With little left to offer, save for tears.

How bitter are the ancient words, refreshed each reddened dawn,
New-writ in dust, to read in weathered stone,
Proclaiming unto all that something marvelous is gone;
And someone weeps, who should not be alone.

Lost in blinding newborn depths of grief, with wails we pay
For every merry song that claimed a voice,
And seek, in mem'ry's faded treasure, vengefully to slay
The truth, that we might someday more rejoice.

We live, we die: there is the tale. The end comes far too soon;
One shaken breath tells all there is to hear.
Come chance, come choice or failing flesh, and fragile clay is hewn
To join the rest who fall, and disappear.

But what of this? If so it be, that each must leave his dwelling,
To go wherever wait the honored dead,
That tragic tale has never needed human lips for telling;
So let us speak of other things, instead.

Here stood a man of middle years, his frame yet hale and tall,
Who lived his days as seemed to please him best,
Who wore a blade-won crown and held two kingdoms in his thrall,
And often valued labor, over rest.

He had his flaws; erase them not, but leave him as we knew:
A well-met friend rough-edged, but also kind,
Who planned and built, who ever served, and earned the love of two
He would have wept in shame to leave behind.

So let us weep as he cannot, and taste the air we breathe,
And raise a glass to toast an absent friend,
And offer comfort, scant but true, to those who most must grieve,
And never judge his story by its end.

And let us live! In us, the tale is not yet fully told,
And life, like scotch, is meant to be imbibed.
With sword or pen or threaded needle: write with what you hold,
And meet your end with chapters yet unscribed.

And sometimes pause, and think of Morguhn, you who knew his light,
For life can offer just one guarantee.
Until that day, we seek the grace to gaze upon the sight
His eyes (we pray) are blessed enough to see.

THE LIGHTER SIDE.

Sometimes, something that has a negative impact is not the product of anger, or malfeasance, or anything more than simple good intentions gone terribly wrong. No one is truly hurt, but many

are angry or annoyed and are left asking, “What was he *thinking?*” His Majesty of the East at Pennsic 37 recognized a genuine problem – perennially unbalanced sides in Pennsic war-point battles – and set out to solve it with the very best of intentions by unilaterally conceding all the war points, at the conclusion of opening ceremonies. This particular set of good intentions did not lead quite where he might have hoped, and he left a situation ripe to be addressed by satire. Where I performed my song (below) at War, people angry and annoyed by what they saw as high-handed action offered up smiles and hearty laughter. Can people remain angry over something that makes them laugh?

*Come on, kids, it's a new kind of War.
Peace has won, and rules evermore.
“Hugs, not thugs” is the song we sing.
All give thanks to the Eastern King!*

*Knights and squires, hear the news:
Tape in pink and baby blues
Graces helms, while the nerf shafts fly.
“Kum-ba-YA!” is our battle cry.*

*“Lose to win” is the sacrifice
The Eastrealm made, so all, play nice!
Let your blows be sweet and light.
Dance a bransle and win the fight.*

*Konrad has a new chancellor:
Hark to the purple dinosaur.
The benefits will never cease...
All the excitement of war and peace!*

*You who came in hope to win,
It can be yours without battle's din.
Want war points? There's still a way:
Be the high bidder when they're on eBay!*

DEAR LORD, WHAT HAVE I DONE?

While I would like to say that Cerian Cantwr is a bad, bad man, in fact he is a good man unable to resist a gleefully impish streak, and who writes catchy songs about subjects that sometimes make a listener's head (or at least his sensibilities) explode. The Polar Cow (that Pernicious Porterhouse of Doom) came first. Miguel the were-llama was not far behind. These were bad enough, but when he wrote a song about Vampire Penguins, enough was very much enough. ~~Vengeance~~ Duty called, and I was compelled to write. I should have known better. Oh mothers, teach your children not to do what I have done:

Cerian's Menagerie

*My friends, I pray you be wary,
And only go out in daylight.
There are menaces here that make merry,
And rejoice in the coming of night.
And meat is the thing they are craving;
Not steak – they eat people with glee.
In fear, anyone would run raving
From Cerian's menagerie.*

The world is a place full of terror

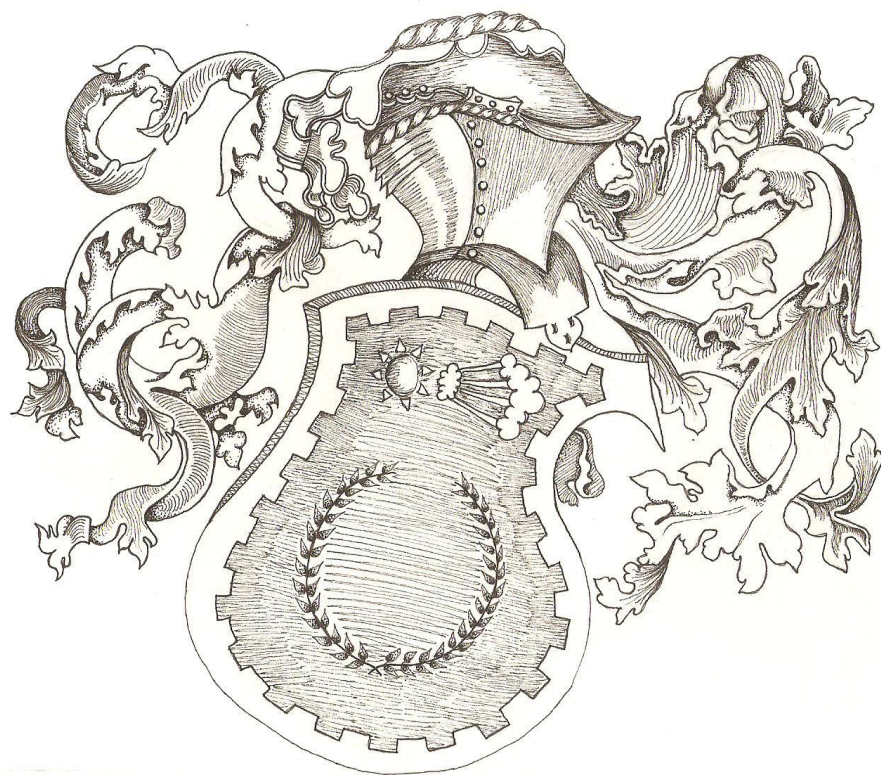
*That walks in an innocent skin.
You won't live to regret your first error;
We'll notify your next of kin.
"How sad," they will say, "he was beaten,
But then, he could never have won.
It's really a shame he was eaten,
That can't have been very much fun."*

*From the Pole to the Pole they are waiting,
And also at all points between.
The cows and the penguins are sating
Their hunger from bones they've picked clean;
And the llamas have left a great stack o'
Remains of their keepers about.
Beware the ferocious alpaca;
By moonlight its fangs will come out.*

*The tales that are told are too bloody
For tender young children to hear;
But survivors will tell you to study
The ways of the things that you fear.
And one has told many a story
Of creatures I pray you don't see,
Or else your short future is gory
From Cerian's menagerie.*

*One wonders what next will be creeping
From out of the darkening trees;
Perhaps a werefrog will come leaping,
Or else it's carnivorous cheese.
They will take you down sooner or later.
The best you can hope is to flee
From monsters and from their creator...
From Cerian's menagerie!*

At last count, there were two carnivorous cheese songs (only one of them by Cerian!) and also a hand puppet. The Menagerie now has grown into a nightmarish jungle of creatures better left undescribed to anyone who clings desperately to the last remaining shreds of his sanity. Cerian's pen has not yet run out of ink. The world as we know it may be doomed, and it is partially my fault. Be afraid.



Elss of Augsburg
c/o Rocky Hayeslip
221 Pine Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Adress Block

The Althing is the newsletter of the
Barony-Marche of the Debatable Lands.
Arts & Sciences Special Issue AS XLIII
FIRST CLASS MAIL – PLEASE DO NOT DELAY