

WHAT IS DOCUMENTATION?

Sometimes the very word 'documentation' seems to strike fear into the heart of SCAdians who, but for it, would have entered an A&S Competition. This is my effort to demystify the word, and what is required.

Somewhere in between one of our citizens' first attempt at documentation (which was an oral presentation about an arrow which was described as 'a pointy stick to fly through the air' or something along those lines) and a 40 page 'book' about the subject entry into a competition is a happy medium.

If you are making an entry into a competition, the odds are pretty good that somewhere along the road to its completion you will have done some research on the subject. That's great, so let us know what the research was, what it said, and where you found it. Please give us copies of any photographs etc if you are able to, and the details of the books and websites etc that you consulted.

The next step is to let us know how you used the information that you found. For example, you may be submitting a Venetian camica from the 16th century. The original item that you have based your design on may have been made out of silk, and embroidered in silk but for obvious reasons of cost you have done yours on cotton lawn and embroidered it with DMC embroidery cottons for about 10% of the cost of the more 'real' item.

Another example would be if you are doing an item of calligraphy/illumination and in its time period and place it would have been worked on handmade vellum with egg tempura paints and gold leaf. Now some SCAdians would do it that way, but many of us will just use the items that are easily available such as ordinary paper and acrylic paints. Just as acceptable, but of course you won't get as many marks for 'authenticity'. The second option is much better than not having a go at all, and can still produce something of beauty to be proud of.

If you found the design that you used for the embroidery in an item in a museum catalogue where you could actually see the original item, then that is a 'primary source'. If what you have used as your source is a painting that was done at the time, then that is a 'secondary source'. If you got the idea from a sketch that someone else has done from a painting that was contemporary with the object, then that is a 'tertiary source'.

Needless to say 'primary' sources are preferable, but reality dictates that in Australia these are going to be far and few between in terms of anything medieval.

Documentation is really about telling the story of the item that you are submitting:

- What is it,
- where does it come from,
- what was it used for,
- when was it used, and
- why you made it in the way that you did.

Why do we bother with the documentation?

The reason we do it is because from the outset the SCA was seen as an 'educational organisation' that was designed to encourage research and scholarship about the pre-17th century period in history, in a way that was fun and lets its members 'live' the times to the extent that they wish to.

If you don't want to take things that seriously it is up to you entirely, and you shouldn't feel intimidated by those who do. If you do want to work harder at it (and many people vary this over the years) then there is a framework in place to help, and the documentation shows the work that you have done.

There are lots of sources of information available. Some of the many Kingdom websites have great A&S sections, and many of the major museums such as the Victoria & Albert in London have extensive sections of their collections viewable on line. In coming months I will provide details of some of these as I come across them.

Yours in Service

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