

SECTION VII -- COURT HERALDRY

1) Philosophy of Court Heraldry (Spring, XXI)

[a] Some Musings on Court and the Function of the Herald Therein

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Abstract: Philosophical musings with magical overtones. Reprinted from the Collegium Nebulorum XX.

[b] On Courts

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Abstract: More practical considerations of the philosophy of doing Court for the Crown.

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SOME MUSINGS ON COURT AND THE FUNCTION OF HERALDS THEREIN

Frederick of Holland (November, XX)

The following are some thoughts that I have had on the matter of what is a "court" in the SCA and what the proper function of a herald is in such a court. These are private musings and in no way delimit College of Heraldry policy on such matters. These are printed for the session of Collegium Nebulorum in October of the XXth year of the Kingdom of the West.

Let us consider the word "court" in its mundane context. It is a word with multiple meanings, many of which are related or interact. A court is a place marked out to play certain games on, as a tennis court. It is an area surrounded by walls, sometimes within, sometimes just outside some other building, as a courtyard. It is used to indicate the people who normally accompany royalty either as servants or as advisors or as guests, which meaning laps over into the SCA as in, "Who's going to be on the court of the new Princess?" It is occasionally the normal location of these courtiers, or where the royalty carries out their business. It is also a place where legal judgements are rendered, either in equity or in law. As a verb it means to woo or to supplicate, to entreat a person to gain favors of one sort or another. All of these meanings interact and reflect on each other. For instance a petitioner might court the favor of the member of the King's court to gain a more favorable reception.

Note that we do not find a meaning corresponding to the way the word is used in the SCA when the herald announces, "Court will be on one half hour." The SCA use of the word has its roots lodged to a certain extent in the mundane meaning dealing with the entourage of Royalty and contains resonances from the other mundane meanings. However, our usage has created a new meaning for the word. This new meaning of "court", as an occurrence at an SCA event, encompasses several very different activities. An SCA "court" is: 1) A public gathering to hear the announcements of the day -- the "town crier" function. 2) A royal "sitting in state" wherein the Kings or Princes receive gifts from the populace, or hear petitions. 3) An awards ceremony, wherein the populace watches while the royalty give out awards and recognition. 4) A gathering at which the various important ceremonies of transition take place with the populace as witness. (This includes invocation of Lists, recognition of Heirs, and Coronations and Investitures.) Further, in the SCA these different functions are most often thoroughly MIXED into the same time and space. The result bears little resemblance to anything that the people of the Original Middle Ages would have called "court".

In large part this is so because we do not transact our business on a day-to-day basis as our ancestors, but cram it all into weekends, and the important business into a relatively few weekends. All of the above functions are necessary adjuncts to our recreation, and there is too little time to do anything but put them all together. However, this means that the function of a herald in court is not just one simple thing, but rather a mixture which changes back and forth as the court progresses.

What is the function of the herald in court? I would categorize the functions of the herald into two main aspects, which somewhat overlap and which contain various other functions within them. These are the function of the Herald as "Master of Ceremonies" for the court and the function of the Herald as the "Voice of the Crown".

As "MC" for a court, the herald has the responsibility for making sure that all business which ought to be in a court is located and screened. He must deal gently with the populace and other officers to get all the information needed and to make sure that presentations are appropriate and acceptable to the royalty. He must consult with the royalty to determine what business they will have in court, and advise the royalty with respect to the order of business in addition to determining their wishes in the matter. This is the area of court activity most susceptible to rational analysis, and it is not my purpose to deal with it extensively.

Once court is under way, the "MC" function of the herald includes making sure that the announcements are clear and appropriately phrased so that mundane announcements are both understandable and, to the greatest degree possible, not jarring to the medieval atmosphere of the event. It also includes calling people before the Crown, making sure that both the people and the royalty know what is happening next in court, and generally keeping the business of the court moving along. In these activities there is room for the herald to use his creativity to keep things interesting. Various ways of calling people forward with their presentations, various ways of announcing meetings or contests can be used to enhance the court. Announcements to the populace of the nature of the gifts given to the Royalty, if such is not obvious, not only keeps them interested, but enhances the appreciation of the gift and the givers.

In all this the herald has some identity as a person in addition to being a "herald". He is a member of the King's court (mundane meaning), and even while serving the Crown he is also advisor and spectator. In this role it is occasionally appropriate for the herald to make a public remark about the activity in the court, or even the occasional joke or pun. The herald should not overdo these activities, however. It is nowhere in the function of the herald to be a continuous stand-up comic or jester -- in court the royalty is the star. Commentary and jokes should be indulged in cautiously, but the opportunity is there to enhance the theatre of court when done wisely.

The "MC" function of the herald is basically theatre or circus, and covers largely the first two kinds of business which comes before the court. For the awards and ceremonies, the "Voice of the Crown" function of the herald, always present to some extent, takes complete precedence. These activities are the ones where court most closely approaches the "reality" of the recreation we are performing. In recognizing his subjects with honors, the King or Prince enhances them and makes them more than they were. The higher the honor being given, the more important it is that the reality of the moment not be intruded on. It is the function of the herald in this case to support the royalty and to help create and maintain that reality. Even a simple Award of Arms can be a very real thing; a Knighting or a Coronation is important not only to the people who are involved, but to the whole populace and to the surrounding suspension of the mundane. In those moments the herald becomes, with the ceremonies before him, the voice of Tradition, the counterpoint to the words which Their Majesties speak directly, and the guarantor that the ceremony has been done correctly, and that the result of the King's action is right and proper.

In a very real way, ceremonies are magic, and the more important the ceremony, the stronger is the magic. But our 20th Century minds by and large distrust magic, and so, the stronger the magic is, the more care must be taken so that the spell is not broken. The herald must not call attention to himself or intrude himself into the action of the ceremony except where it is part of the ceremony. He must work to enhance the ceremony, both in phrasing, in body stance, activity and lack thereof. He must help the royalty do their parts and help them maintain the magic. The words of the ceremony help, but sometimes need to be changed to take care of unusual situations or extra-special circumstances. If this is the case, the herald must act, and it must be the correct action. In the service of the Crown and the magic of the SCA there is not room at that point for ego or aggrandizement. The thought of the herald must be on the potential impact of his words and on the shape of the actions before him. To the utmost extent of his abilities he must bend his attention to maintaining the magic of the moment.

While all the functions of the court herald are important, it is this aspect of court which I feel is the most important. It is also this function which is the hardest to practice or learn, and which is the most subject to natural variation in talent in the herald. At the same time it is the one which gives the most internal reward to the herald who does it well. It is this creation of the magic of court in the SCA which gives me the greatest pleasure and the greatest feeling that I have been of service to the Crown and Kingdom. It is to the creation of this magic on a regular consistent basis that every court herald should strive, no matter what the event or court.

ON COURTS

by William the Lucky¹

1. Never surprise the Crown! --- 'Crown' including, for this document, either the King and Queen, the Prince and Princess, or even the Baron and Baroness. All business for Court should normally be reviewed with the Crown before Court begins. In a few cases (usually where the Crown and the Herald have known each other a long time), Their Majesties may tell the Herald to use his own judgement --- even (perhaps especially) here, the Herald **must** know not only who is making the announcement or presentation, but also what is being announced or presented. There is no excuse for ruining someone's Coronation, as happened once, by letting someone with no taste present a chastity belt to the Queen in Court!
 - ! If the Herald is making some of the Announcements, and others (officers or whoever) are making others, try not to schedule several non-Heralds in a row. Intersperse announcements spoken by the Herald or Awards.
 - ! If someone other than the Herald wants to make an announcement (as opposed to a presentation to the Crown), they should be reminded of the need to project without yelling (so that they can be heard in the back), and offered the option of having the Herald speak for them. How much encouragement they are given to take this option depends on their voice -- if the Herald has several experiences where they cannot be heard 6 feet away, the level of encouragement is liable to become larger.
2. Scheduling:
 - ! If there is an announcement of the schedule for the day, do it early in Court; if the Court is very long, repeat at the end of Court (at least what the next couple of activities are).
 - ! Try to alternate Announcements and Awards. If you have a lot more of one than the other, scatter the ones that you have fewer of thru the others.
 - ! With Awards, build from the lesser to the greater. Do not, for example, do the Peerages before doing the Leaves. It is unfair to anyone to have their big moment turned into an anti-climax because a bigger moment happened just before.
 - ! Similarly, if you have both Leaves of Merit and Rose Leaves, or several Peerages, try to estimate which will bring greater roars from the populace and do them last.
 - ! With each Announcement, make sure that both the Herald and the person with the Announcement are clear on which of them is to speak.
3. Preparation:
 - ! Have scrolls, promissories, tokens, etc. convenient to hand before Court starts. It helps to have them stacked in the order which they will be used --- especially if you do not have another Herald to assist you during court.
 - ! If ceremonies are occurring at Court, look them up ahead of time and mark their places in the Ceremony Book so that you can find them quickly during Court. If the Crown has lines, be sure that They are aware of that, and offer them a chance to review the ceremony before Court starts. If you are doing a ceremony which has optional parts, try to find out which options are being used.
 - ! Check the names of those who will be called at Court. Nobody likes having their name mangled (even if they have gotten hardened to it). A phonetic transcription sometimes helps, especially with the more obscure orthographies.

¹ The opinions expressed herein are those of the author. Notwithstanding the fact that the author was responsible for Court Heraldry and Ceremony in the Kingdom of the West at the time of writing, it does not represent the one and only proper way to run a Court, nor does it establish requirements for Courts within the Kingdom of the West.

4. Execution:

- ! Court is theatre: keep it moving, keep it interesting.
- ! Let those subjects currently before the Throne leave before calling the next. This is particularly important when doing several awards in a row (due to a shortage of announcements to intersperse).
- ! If someone receives an award, it is customary to exhort the cheers of the populace (which also helps fill the time while they are returning to their place).
- ! If someone makes a presentation, tell the populace what was given.
- ! Having written out a schedule, and checked it with the Crown before Court, you should rarely need to consult the Crown during Court about what should happen next. However, it is a good idea to check at the end of Court (when you think the business is finished), to be sure the Crown has not suddenly developed an urge to speak or another bit of business to conduct.

- ! Serious ceremonies (Coronations, Investitures, awards, etc.) should be kept serious. If the Crown or honoree makes a funny, fine, but the Herald should exercise restraint and never initiate joking during the ceremonies.
- ! Occasional humor brightens announcements and such, but Court does not really require a constant flood of comedy. Also, it is worth remembering that the Crown and populace may be much less appreciative of puns than an audience composed solely of one's fellow Heralds might have been.
- ! Especially for large Courts, voice projection is at least as important as it is in field Heraldry. Breathe. Relax. Talk (don't yell) to an individual in the back of the audience.

This is only one way of approaching Court. There are others, which also work well for those who use them. However, before setting out to invent a whole new approach of your own, you might ask yourself "How will this be better than an existing approach?" If the only answer is "Because it's mine," you probably need some advice or some more experience first. On the other hand, it can be really useful to think about what you would do, before someone comes along and drafts you to run one. At least you can make your mistakes in the privacy of your own mind.