

SCA Documentation Made Easy

How to document a project for SCA competition

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I. Researching the project

Rule # 1: Research before you start on the project.

It is never a good idea to create a wonderful piece of work and then try to shoehorn in documentation to support it. Proper documentation should support the piece, not excuse it.

Rule # 2: Stick to primary sources if possible, secondary sources at the least.

Know the difference between a primary source and a secondary source:

A **primary source** is the item itself or a very good (museum quality) picture of the item. For example: In the case of a recipe, the un-translated original recipe.

A **secondary source** is a second-hand description or commentary on the item, a usual book-quality photo or a drawing of the piece. In the case of our recipe, a translation of the recipe.

A **tertiary source** is someone's interpretation of the piece; a museum reproduction for example. Tertiary sources are good for inspiration but should never be used for documentation.

There are always exceptions to these rules. For example, a professional sketch in an archeological report can be used as a primary source; and some authors have reputations that make them primary sources; Janet Arnold on late period costume is an excellent example.

Rule #3: Check your sources.

Just because it is written down in a bound book does not mean the author knows what they are talking about. Costuming and armor references in particular are suspect. Quite a lot of nonsense crept in from authors who were more interested in romanticizing the period than researching it. Things to look out for: Is the author working from original period sources, or other author's work? Are there obvious mistakes in the book (i.e. chain mail did not consist of rings sewn to heavy leather)?

When researching always ask these three questions:

Why?

Who says so?

Who are they?

Rule # 4: Take notes.

Keep a notebook or a file folder. Photocopies are your friend. Make note of references for your bibliography (photocopy title pages!). Keep your sketches. Do not throw anything away; you might want it in ten years.

II. Documenting for competition.

Competition documentation should be a summary of your research, not the sum of it. SCA judges are usually under a time crunch, and are often unfamiliar with the subject of your research; so you need to strive for brevity and clarity. You do not want to write a book (at least not for a competition). Keep it short (2-4 pages) and to the point. Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Points to cover in your documentation:

What – What is this piece? What is its time period? Where is it from? How was it used, and by whom?

How – How was the original made? What materials, techniques, processes, etc. were used? How was your piece made? What tools did you use, what materials?

Why – What were your decisions in making this piece? How did you decide on materials, what substitutions were made, what compromises and what creative changes and WHY?

A sample outline:

The cover

- A short description of the piece (“A 14th Century German Embroidered Altar Cushion”)
- A photo of the piece, if possible, to enforce judge recognition (which of seventeen woven hand towels does this documentation belong to?).
- If the competition is not anonymous, Your SCA name, mundane name and group.

Page one and on:

- Start page one with a summary: one paragraph summarizing the documentation. This will get the judges minds formatted for the information you are about to throw at them.
- First section, summarize your research on the original piece, technique or source. What is known about it, materials, and techniques and so on? Be brief, clear and to the point. USE PICTURES!
- Second section, summarize your work. What did you do? How did you translate the recipe? What materials did you use? How did you interpret the art style? Especially, what were your decisions and WHY?
- Finally, include a bibliography, list all pertinent sources. (Note: The format does not matter; look up APA or MLA online for examples)

Attachments:

- Here you can go a bit wild. After the main documentation you can include supporting evidence, photocopies of articles (highlighting is good), photos, samples of period dyes. Anything the judges might find useful if they want more information.

A note on formatting:

- Printed is better than hand written. Use a standard font. Don't crowd the page; make good use of white space. SPELLCHECK!

Documentation: Bad Example:

Title does not give enough information

A Medieval Toilet Seat

The toilet seat is a board, as shown below. In recreating this artifact I wanted to get as close as possible to the original. I used a of 1 inch thick plank to construct it, The hole was made with a mallet and wood chisel, and the interior of the hole smoothed with a fine wood rasp. This rasp was also used to bevel the edge of the hole on the upward face of the plank. The result was sanded to prevent possible embarrassing splinters and the wood was treated with linseed oil to protect the wood and bring out the grain. This is probably more than was done to the original, but I like to put out a result that someone would be proud to use.

Font hampers reading and comprehension

- No information about period or place.
- No information about the original artifact(s).



The picture is good, but there is no context or source.

No references or sources

Documentation: Good Example:

A Reconstruction
of a
12th -13th Century Toilet Seat

Clear but
concise title



Photo of finished
project for
recognition

Name and
details (optional)

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Summary

This is a reconstruction of a toilet seat from the twelfth or thirteenth century found during an excavation in the city of York, England. Care was taken to make as exact a copy as possible given modern materials and tools.

Short summary

The Artifact

“York, 16-22 Coppergate, Lavatory (or garderobe) seat, 12th- 13th century, Oak. It is made from a rectangular board and has a central hole the edges of which are chamfered on one face. It was found in the cess pit where it was used. Dimensions: L.1.07m, W.360, T.28mm” (Norman World)

Reference to
Primary Source



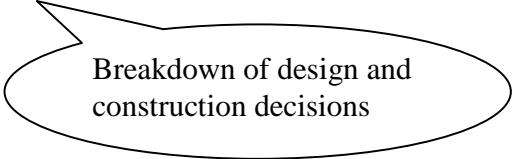
The artifact is a board, made of oak; measuring 42 inches long, 14 inches wide and 1.1 inch thick. The central hole is approximately 9 inches in diameter and slightly oval, possibly due to wear, or poor workmanship. The interior of the hole is beveled on one face. The design of the artifact and its discovery in a medieval cesspit leads to it being identified as a toilet seat.

Description of
original artifact

The Recreation

In recreating this artifact I wanted to get as close as possible to the original. I used a plank of 1 inch thick Red Oak to construct it, this meant a slightly thinner result, but the cost of acquiring a thicker board would have been more than the difference was worth. The hole was made with a mallet and wood chisel, and the interior of the hole smoothed with a fine wood

rasp. This rasp was also used to bevel the edge of the hole on the upward face of the plank. The result was sanded to prevent possible embarrassing splinters and the wood was treated with linseed oil to protect the wood and bring out the grain. This is probably more than was done to the original, but I like to put out a result that someone would be proud to use.



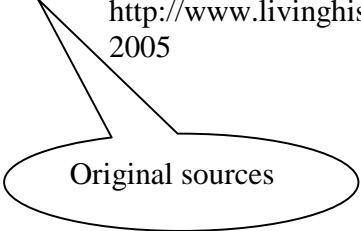
Breakdown of design and construction decisions

Sources

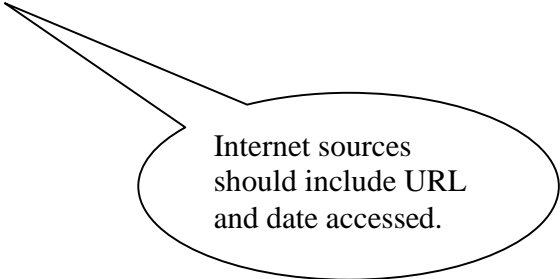
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Phelps, Daniel C. *A 12th Century Hole; A Speculative Reconstruction*. 2002. http://www.livinghistory.co.uk/1100-1500/articles/xw_154.html. Downloaded 01 July 2005



Original sources



Internet sources should include URL and date accessed.