



Penfeathers



Youth Newsletter of the Kingdom of Meridies
A quarterly flight of creativity, learning, and adventure!
February 2026, Anno Societatis LX



The Clerk's Bench

Staff, disclaimers, releases, call for submissions

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PLEASE HELP US EXPAND OUR
DIRECTORY! IF YOU ARE AN **MOY**
IN A **LOCAL GROUP**, SEND IN
YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION. IF
YOU KNOW AN MOY, HAVE THEM
SEND IN THEIR CONTACT
INFORMATION.

WE WANT TO HAVE A **VIBRANT**
YOUTH COMMUNITY, AND ONE
OF THE BEST WAYS TO DO THAT
IS TO HAVE ACTIVE CONTACT
INFORMATION FOR THE OFFICERS
IN LOCAL GROUPS!

SEND TO:
penfeathers@meridies.org

Call for Quills!

Let your words take flight and Penfeathers soar!

We welcome contributions from all across
Meridies — youth, mentors, and families alike.
Whether it's a story, a drawing, a riddle, or a
reflection, ***your voice belongs here.***

SEND US:

Stories & poems for *Tales of the Past and Present*
Lessons, puzzles, & clever facts for *The Quill &
Compass* or *Nest of Riddles*
Artwork, craft ideas, & how-to's for *The Feathered
Palette*

Nominations for interviews for *Voices of the
Realm*
Thoughts on inclusion & diversity for *The Open
Table*

Feature ideas or big projects for *Swanlight*
Shout-outs or youth highlights for *Kids in
Kingdom*

Submissions from ***all ages are welcome***,
especially from our youth! To share your ideas,
your work or just to ask questions, write to
penfeathers@meridies.org

Before You Submit!

We love sharing the creativity of our Kingdom,
and we just need **ONE SMALL STEP FIRST.**
All submissions require a completed SCA
publication release form so we have permission to
print your work.

Forms and details can be found on the Meridies
Kingdom Chronicler page:

[https://meridies.org/home/royaltyandofficers/
chronicler/](https://meridies.org/home/royaltyandofficers/chronicler/)

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On the cover: *Philosophia et septem artes liberales* (Philosophy and the Seven Liberal Arts), as illustrated in the *Hortus deliciarum*, dating back to 1180 CE. This image is circa 1818, being a coloured copy from an original, which was destroyed. Herrad of Landsberg was abbess of the convent Hohenburg on Mount St. Odile in Alsace. She was the author of the *Hortus deliciarum*, a massive illuminated manuscript that distilled "the nectar of the various flowers plucked from Holy Scripture and philosophical works," compiled for the edification of the nuns and others at the abbey. The 324-folio volume contained more than 600 illustrations. It was destroyed during the bombing of Strasbourg in 1870, but by then many copies had been made. Learn more: <https://www.plosin.com/work/HortusDetails.html> and see our Swanlight section for a **deep dive** into the Seven Liberal Arts.



Pen's Pense

Letter from the Editor



A Return to the Page

Good gentles of Meridies,

Once upon a time, Penfeathers took wing across our Kingdom, carrying the voices, curiosities, and creativity of our youth. For a while, that quill lay still. But as with so many things in the SCA, what rests is not always lost — sometimes it is simply waiting.

This issue marks the return of Penfeathers, the youth newsletter of Meridies. It returns with hope, with care, and with the belief that our young people have stories worth telling, skills worth sharing, and a place at the heart of our Kingdom's life. May this be the first of many pages yet to come.

What You'll Find Within These Pages

The Quill & Compass offers age-appropriate journeys into medieval and classical learning.

Nest of Riddles brings puzzles, games, and playful challenges to stretch the mind.

Tales of the Past and Present shares stories — historical, adapted, and original.

The Feathered Palette showcases youth artwork, crafts, and hands-on tutorials.

Voices of the Realm introduces members of the Society and the passions that inspire them.

Swanlight shines a spotlight on a special topic, project, or theme each quarter.

The Open Table explores the diversity that shaped the medieval world and our SCA.

Kids in Kingdom celebrates youth achievements, events, and moments worth recognising.

Each section is a doorway. We hope you'll step through.

Why Penfeathers Exists

The aim of Penfeathers is simple, and deeply important: to see our youth, to hear them, and to help them grow.

Our children and teens are not merely "the future of the SCA." They are participants now — artists, fighters, scholars, storytellers, helpers, dreamers. This newsletter exists to celebrate their efforts, encourage their learning, and invite them more fully into the life of the Society.

Through creativity, curiosity, and community, Penfeathers seeks to help young members of Meridies find their voices, develop their skills, and know that the Kingdom is paying attention — and cheering them on.

A Call to Quills

Penfeathers cannot fly on one wing alone.

We are actively seeking submissions from our youth — stories, drawings, puzzles, photographs, reflections, questions, and ideas. We want to know what you are doing in your corner of the SCA. What are you learning? What are you building? What are you proud of?

We also invite parents, mentors, and especially local Ministers of Youth to reach out, share contact information, and help connect young voices to these pages. If something wonderful is happening in your group, we want to hear about it.

This newsletter belongs to the youth of Meridies — but it takes a Kingdom to lift it into the air.

Yours in service,

Pen



Kids in Kingdom

Announcements & Recognitions



Spot the Shining Stars!

All across Meridies, young people are doing amazing things – helping in camp, learning new arts, cheering on fighters, volunteering at events, uplifting their friends, and showing the spirit of our Kingdom in a hundred small ways.

We want to celebrate them!

If you see a youth (or a whole group!) going above and beyond – showing kindness, creativity, service, bravery, or plain old awesome enthusiasm – let us know. Snap a photo, jot down their name and what they did, and send it our way.

penfeathers@meridies.org

Tell the Crown all about it!

Let's make sure every bright star gets the recognition they deserve. If you know a young person (or an adult!) who works really hard with Youth Activities, or who inspires you to by their skill or service, let the Crown know by taking a few minutes to send an Award Recommendation on their behalf.

<https://meridies.org/home/recognition/>







Kids in Kingdom

Award Recognitions



A basic description of what awards are, and how they are accompanied by scrolls and regalia that often have heraldic imagery, called a badge, which has both a design (called an emblazon) and a description (called a blazon)

Award	Description	Emblazon	Blazon
Order of the Rising Swan	The Crown may induct into this order those minors (age 17 and under) who through outstanding service and achievement have gone above and beyond that of the Order of the Cygnet.		(Fieldless) A swan rousant within and conjoined to an annulet argent.
Order of the Cygnet	The Crown may induct into this order those children who have shown courtly behavior and rendered honorable service.		Per bend sable and argent, two swans naiant and a bordure counterchanged.
Order of the Cygnet's Nest	The Crown may induct into this order those subjects who work tirelessly on behalf of the children.		(Fieldless) A swan argent sitting in a nest proper within and issuant from an annulet argent.
Order of the Duvant Cross	The Crown may induct into this order those subjects who have exhibited exceptional skill, courtesy, and honor on the field of Youth Combat.		Sable, a cross formy argent, between in bend two mullets of five points argent.
Order of the Sable Cygnet	The Crown may induct into this order those children who show promise and skill in the Arts and Sciences.		Sable, on a cross nowy argent, a swan close sable.



Kids in Kingdom

Announcements & Recognitions

Gulf Wars XXXIV

March 14-22, 2026



As we prepare for another Gulf Wars, I would like to share information for parents and first-time participants regarding Gulf Wars Page School. This program is designed to introduce our young members to the many arts, skills, and experiences the SCA has to offer, while maintaining a safe and structured environment.

Page School operates daily from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Parents and guardians are asked to be prompt for both check-in and check-out, as these times are essential for ensuring that all youth are properly accounted for and that activities begin and end on schedule. Each Kingdom is responsible for organizing one day of instruction; Meridies will be leading Page School on Thursday.

I would like to emphasize that while Page School provides supervision during program hours, it is not a babysitting service. Our goal is to support, educate, and inspire the youth of the SCA, not to provide childcare. Parents are encouraged to volunteer time at page school especially with younger children. They also remain responsible for their children outside the established program window.

All Ministers of Youth are fully background-checked and dedicated to offering a positive learning experience. We are still finalizing this year's class list and field trip schedule, but past years give an excellent sense of what to expect. Previous field trips have included visits to the Early Period Life encampment, where youth receive instruction and explore what a historical camp may have looked like. Other Kingdoms frequently lead trips to see the Equestrian area, hounds, and additional specialty areas around the site.

Class offerings in prior years have ranged from Herbalism 101, lantern making, and scroll creation to medieval games, dancing, and mock courts. These projects and lessons are intended to spark curiosity while encouraging each child to discover their own place within the SCA.

I hope this information helps families prepare for Page School and understand what they can expect from the program. Should parents have questions or need clarification, or if anyone would like to teach a class feel free to contact me.

In service,
Mistress Jane Wolfdén
Kingdom Minister of Youth, Meridies
Moy@meridies.org



Kids in Kingdom

Announcements & Recognitions



Crows Nest

At Gulf Wars XXXIV

Discover the Crows Nest at Gulf Wars!

A Teen-Led Space for Connection, Creativity, and Community

The Crows Nest is a welcoming, flexible hangout space at War where young people can relax, make friends, and explore shared interests, all in a supportive environment built *by teens for teens*. A core team of older teens helps run the Nest throughout the week, giving them hands-on experience in planning, organizing, and managing an SCA department. Their leadership shapes the schedule, the activities, and the energy of the space, creating a place where youth participation *truly* matters.

The Nest operates out of an open-sided tent so everything inside is visible, helping keep the atmosphere relaxed, safe, and community-supported.

Background-checked adults are present during evenings and during any structured activities or classes, while older teens help oversee the space at other times. Last year, attendance averaged an impressive 32–40 teens *each day*, with a constantly shifting schedule based on what the youth wanted: games, classes, crafts,

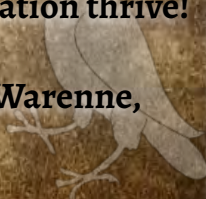
conversations, or simply a place to unwind.

Each day, teens sign in and receive “daily loot,” with extra rewards for participating in activities or cheering on others around the War. At week’s end, they can trade their collected loot at the *Crow Market*, a special shop filled with items that help them build their first adult SCA kits: feast gear, garb, belts, baskets, pouches, armor pieces, shoes, and more. Donations for the Crow Market are deeply appreciated and always needed.

Looking ahead, plans are forming for a companion area for young families with babies and small children, an inviting space to support our newest parents and tiniest future SCAdians. More information will be shared as details take shape.

The Crows Nest is more than a tent: it’s a home base, a learning space, and a community hub for the all youth and their families. Come join the fun, support our teens, and help the next generation thrive!

Contact: Baroness Majory de Warrenne,
aka “Mama Crow”
crowsnest@gulfwars.org





The Quill & Compass

Explorations in Classical Learning



Logic

The King's Banquet

The King is hosting a grand banquet with 8 places set at High Table. Everyone has specific seating requirements based on medieval hierarchy and personal rivalries. Your job is to determine the correct seating arrangement at the table. Use logical **deduction** and the facts to place each guest correctly!

8. The Knight refuses to be separated from the Lady

5

1. The King always sits at the head of the table in Seat 1

3

7

7. The Queen always sits directly to the King's right.

2. The Bishop cannot sit next to the Knight or the Court Jester

1

1

8

8

6. The Lady must sit to the right of the Bishop or the Knight

3. The Court Jester will only sit directly across from the Queen

2

6

5. The Merchant refuses to sit next to the Blacksmith or the Court Jester

4

4. The Blacksmith insists on sitting at the opposite end of the table from the King



The Quill & Compass

Explorations in Classical Learning



Logic

Of Truth and Lies

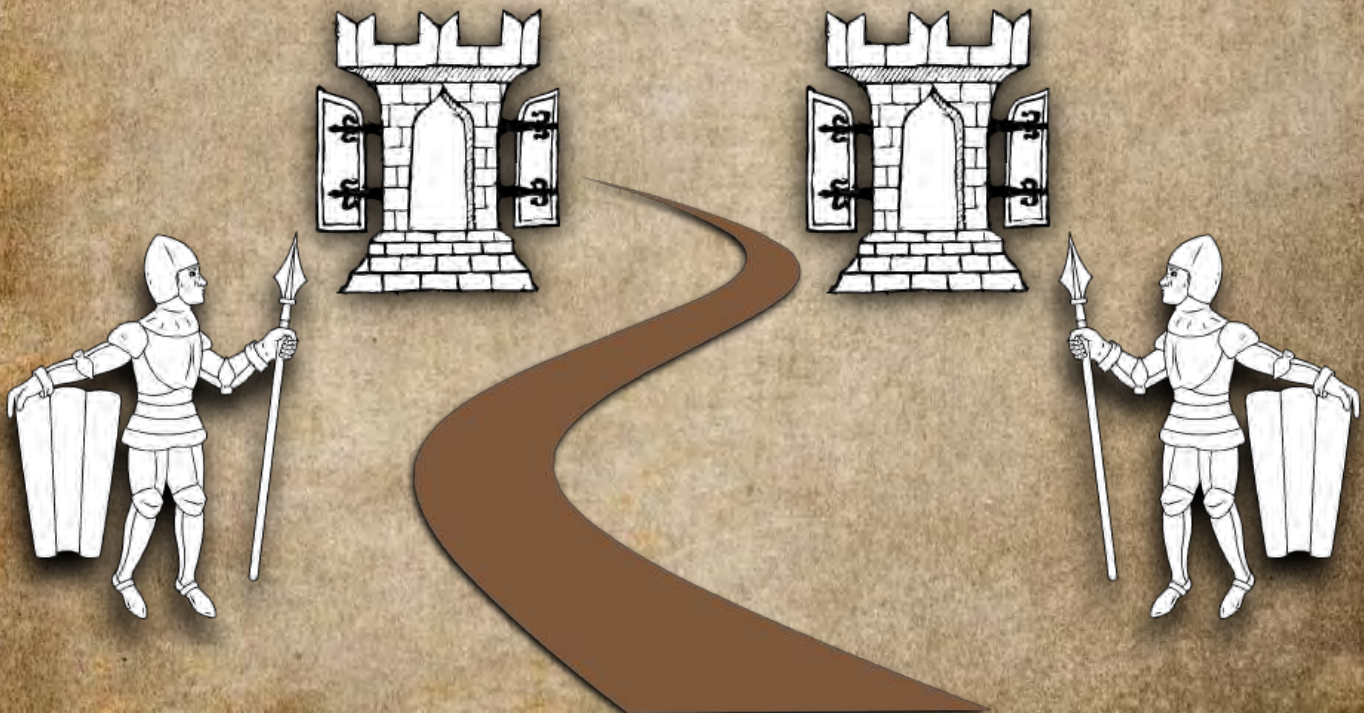
In a time long past, a wandering knight found themselves at a crossroads deep within an enchanted forest. At the center of the clearing stood two towering gates, each guarded by a stern-faced sentinel clad in shining mail. The knight knew their quest hinged on choosing the correct path, for one gate led to the castle where their true purpose awaited, while the other led to ruin and despair.

As the knight approached, one of the guards raised his hand and spoke:

"Traveler, heed my words: ***One of us speaks only truth, while the other speaks only lies.*** You may ask but a single question to discern which gate leads to your salvation."

The knight paused, their brow furrowed in thought. After a moment, they stepped forward and addressed one of the guards.

What question did the knight ask, and of whom did they ask it?





Nest of Riddles

Games and Puzzles



Language Games

Try your hand at these authentic period riddles,
drawn from sources like the famous Exeter Book.
You can find more here –

<https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/exeter-book-riddles/>

I

I'm alive without breath,
I'm as cold as death;
I'm never thirsty, but I always drink,
Clad in mail, but I never clink.

II

I'm full of eyes,
I often cry,
But I cannot see.

V

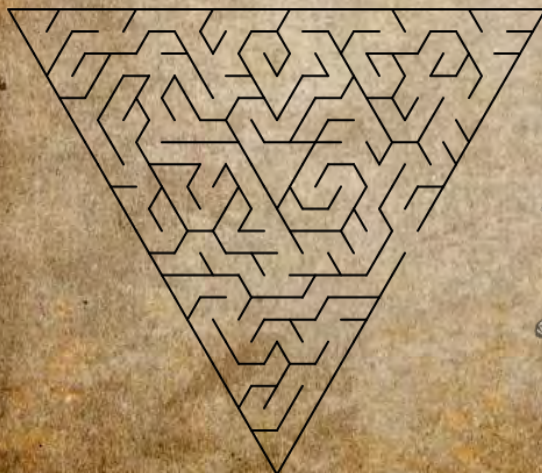
A man rode into a village on Friday.
He stayed for three days and left on
Friday.
How is this possible?

III

At night they come without being fetched,
And by day they are lost without being stolen.

IV

A wonder on the wave—
Water becomes bone.



What Am I?

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

X M A I Z B V V C U K V T V Q W U Z Z U

X A S C A D D Z B C M A K C B Z Z U

F G F G X R V

A K Q W Z C X K Z I Z B R B V Y

Stumped by the riddles? Take a break, unscramble your mind and these common medieval terms!

A **cryptogram** is a type of puzzle that consists of a short piece of encrypted text. **Encryption** is the process of converting the original information, known as plaintext, into an alternative form, known as ciphertext. The **cipher** is the code used to encrypt a message. **Decryption** is the process of solving the cryptogram by determining the cipher.

WRNAED

SSRQUIE

STEFA

LROSLC

SUTJO



EPYSTRAT

SALHRED

BRDAS

RKAEMT

EAGRSSEL

Tales of the Past and Present

Original Stories and Historical Adaptations

“Androcles and the Lion”

From: *Fables of Aesop*
by Joseph Jacobs
Macmillan & Co. & New York, 1894.

Read more at:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/28/pg28-images.html>



From: *Europa's Fairy Book*
by Joseph Jacobs
New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.
[ca. 1916]

<https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/androcles-lion/>

A slave named Androcles once escaped from his master and fled to the forest. As he was wandering about there he came upon a Lion lying down moaning and groaning. At first he turned to flee, but finding that the Lion did not pursue him, he turned back and went up to him. As he came near, the Lion put out his paw, which was all swollen and bleeding, and Androcles found that a huge thorn had got into it, and was causing all the pain. He pulled out the thorn and bound up the paw of the Lion, who was soon able to rise and lick the hand of Androcles like a dog. Then the Lion took Androcles to his cave, and every day used to bring him meat from which to live. But shortly afterwards both Androcles and the Lion were captured, and the slave was sentenced to be thrown to the Lion, after the latter had been kept without food for several days. The Emperor and all his Court came to see the spectacle, and Androcles was led out into the middle of the arena. Soon the Lion was let loose from his den, and rushed bounding and roaring towards his victim. But as soon as he came near to Androcles he recognised his friend, and fawned upon him, and licked his hands like a friendly dog. The Emperor, surprised at this, summoned Androcles to him, who told him the whole story. Whereupon the slave was pardoned and freed, and the Lion let loose to his native forest.

Moral of the story:

Gratitude is the sign of noble souls

Tales of the Past and Present

Original Stories and Historical Adaptations

“Of Theseus and the Thread”

Hear now a tale from long ago, when heroes walked the world and wisdom was as mighty as strength.

In the land of Crete there stood a great palace, and beneath it lay a winding maze of stone called the Labyrinth. So cunningly was it made that none who entered could find the way out again.

Within the maze dwelt the Minotaur, a strange creature, half bull and half man. He did not leave the Labyrinth, and the Labyrinth did not release him.

Each year, young people were sent from Athens into the maze, and great sorrow fell upon that city.

Then rose Theseus, a prince of Athens, brave of heart and steady of hand.

"I will go," he said, "and I will bring this sorrow to an end."

When Theseus came to Crete, he met Ariadne, the king's daughter. Seeing his courage, she gave him a gift not of gold, but of wisdom: a simple thread.

"Bind it at the gate, she told him, "and let it lead you home."

Into the Labyrinth went Theseus, unwinding the thread as he walked. Deep within, he met the Minotaur, and by strength and cleverness he overcame the danger.

Then Theseus turned, and following the thread came again into the sunlight.

Thus the maze was broken, and no more children were lost within its walls. And all learned that a wise mind may guide a strong arm, and that even a small gift may save a great life.

So ends the tale.



Can you solve the maze and defeat the Minotaur?



FUN FACT:

Although the ancient Greek minotaur was a bull-headed man, this interpretation mutated during the medieval period to be something more like a centaur.

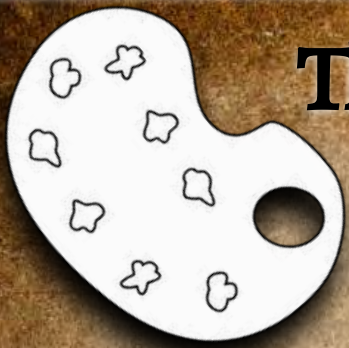
What Would You Have Done? (Think and Talk Together)

Would you rather be *strong* or *clever* if you were a hero? Why?

Why do you think Ariadne gave Theseus a *thread* instead of a *weapon*?

What might have happened if Theseus had *forgotten* to bring the thread?

Can you think of a time when *help from a friend* made something hard *easier*?



The Feathered Palette

A Showcase for Youth Art



Have you ever wondered what an
EMPTY CANVAS looks like?



THIS is what an
empty canvas looks like!



WHAT WOULD BOB ROSS SAY?

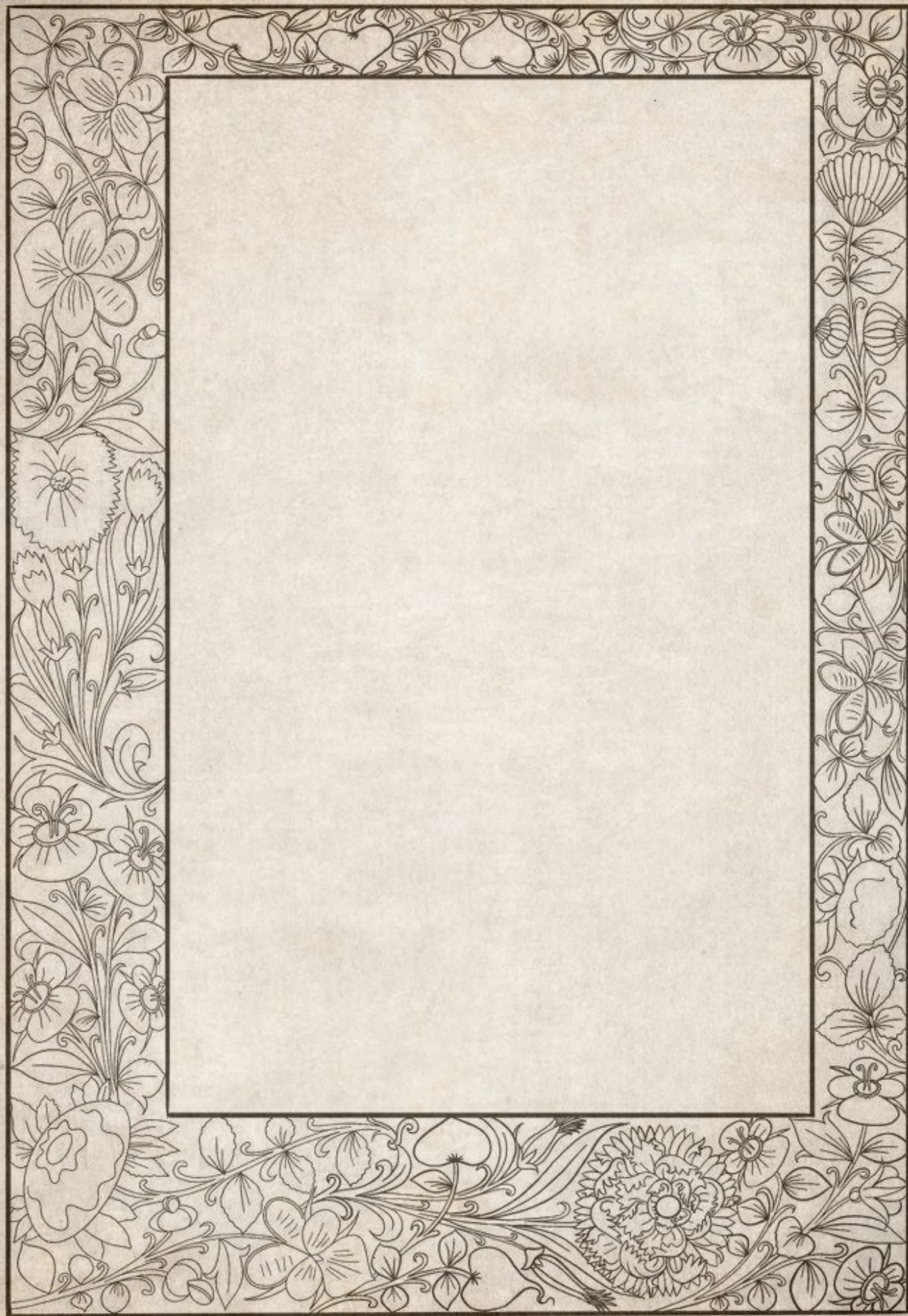
“This is your world. You’re the creator. Find freedom on this canvas. Believe that you can do it, cuz you can do it. You can do it.”

“There are no mistakes, only happy accidents.”

“Let’s get crazy.”

penfeathers@meridies.org







Voices of the Realm



Up Close Interviews

Mistress Jane Wolfdan – Kingdom Minister of Youth

Pen: What first inspired you to join the SCA?

Jane: A book, actually. I was reading a story where the protagonist planned to travel back in time, and she joined the SCA to prepare herself. I remember thinking, that makes perfect sense — and the idea stayed with me until I finally took that step myself.

What do you enjoy most about events in Meridies?

Seeing my friends and chosen family. For many of us, the SCA is the only place our paths regularly cross. Events are where I get to reconnect with people I deeply care about but rarely see in the mundane world.

If you could describe your SCA journey in three words, what would they be?

Fast, hyper-focused, and deeply loved.

What's one hobby or interest most people don't know you have?

Playing cards. It's actually what led me into the study of paper in the first place — one curiosity quietly blossomed into another.

What's your favourite thing to see young people doing at events?

Watching them discover something that truly sparks their passion. One of my favorite moments is at parent pick-up, when kids excitedly show off what they made or learned. Their pride is contagious, and I find myself just as excited as they are.

What does the Kingdom Minister of Youth actually do?

At its heart, the role is about introducing the magic of the SCA to our youth and helping them discover what parts of the hobby speak to them most.



How do you help ensure youth and families have a great experience in Meridies?

I work very intentionally to make sure youth activities are available and meaningful. I strive to ensure that classes go beyond simple crafts. I want children to learn real foundational skills — to walk away feeling like they truly participated in an Arts & Sciences class, not just a time-filler.

What's something you wish more people understood about youth activities?

Youth activities are Arts & Sciences. They are not babysitting, and they're not just playtime. Ministers of Youth are educators who are passionate about introducing the breadth of the hobby. In many cases, MOYs possess a wider range of foundational skills.

than the average Scadian because they must be able to teach so many different disciplines.

How can local groups best support their Ministers of Youth?

Offer to teach a class. Volunteer your skills. We need teachers and helpers to make youth programming thrive.

What's a youth initiative you're especially excited about this year?

Helping MOYs find their voice. My role isn't only about supporting the children — it's also about supporting the Ministers of Youth themselves. Watching them gain confidence, share ideas, and collaborate more has been incredibly rewarding, and it's something that truly excites me.

What is your persona's culture, time period, or occupation?

My persona is English, set around 1559, when Queen Elizabeth I had just taken the throne.

What drew you to that persona?

The clothing, without question — I adore the fashion of the period. Beyond that, I'm endlessly fascinated by the political intrigue and personal drama of Elizabethan England.

How does your persona's background influence your activities in the SCA?

I tend to dress as a solidly middle-class individual so that I can work comfortably. After all, it's hard to run youth activities in full court garb!

What would a young person in your persona's time and place do for fun?

Games were everywhere. Board games such as Fox and Geese, Nine Men's Morris, Tables, and the Game of the Goose were incredibly popular, as were card games. Play was an important part of daily life for all ages.

If you could take the youth of Meridies on a time-travel visit to your persona's world, what would you show them first?

A fair day — so they could see it come to life and then compare it to a painting by Pieter Bruegel.

What do you hope the youth of Meridies carry with them as they grow in the SCA?

Fond memories — and perhaps one of the cat masks I make. Even if they don't remember me specifically, I hope they remember feeling happy, capable, and proud of what they learned.

What skills or values do you think the SCA helps develop in young people?

Honesty and a strong moral compass.

How would you like to see youth participation grow in the next five years?

I'd love to see youth more actively involved in helping run events — and someday, I'd love to see an event created entirely for children. We were very close to making that happen just before COVID.



What dream project would you love to create for the youth of Meridies if anything were possible?

A children's event — entirely for them. The feastocrats and autocrats would be youth, heralds would have youth assistants, and the entire event would focus on Arts & Sciences and youth combat.

What message would you like to give to every young person reading Penfeathers?

You belong here. This Society is yours as much as anyone else's. Try new things, ask questions, and don't be afraid to fall in love with something unexpected. The joy and skills you find here can stay with you far longer than you might imagine.

Favourite period food?

Sixteenth-century honey cake.

Most essential thing in your event bag?

Chapstick, a solar-powered phone charger, and dice.

Best SCA moment with youth?

Teaching a class on herbs and watching the children completely immerse themselves in the experience. As they smelled the herbs and mixed their face-washing waters, you could see them transform into little apothecaries.

Goose quill or metal nib?

Metal nib.

Period board game or outdoor game?

Board games — Fox and Geese or the Game of the Goose.

Do YOU know someone who has a great story to tell? Someone who inspires you to be a better person, in the SCA and outside it? Someone who displays not only talents and skills, but also virtues and graces? Most importantly, someone who you think could be an example to our youth in pursuing excellence and education in the SCA?

Send us your nominations for the next Voice of the Realm, and let us handle to rest!



Mistress Jane Wolfdon

Sable, on an open book Or a wolf dormant sable.



penfeathers@meridies.org

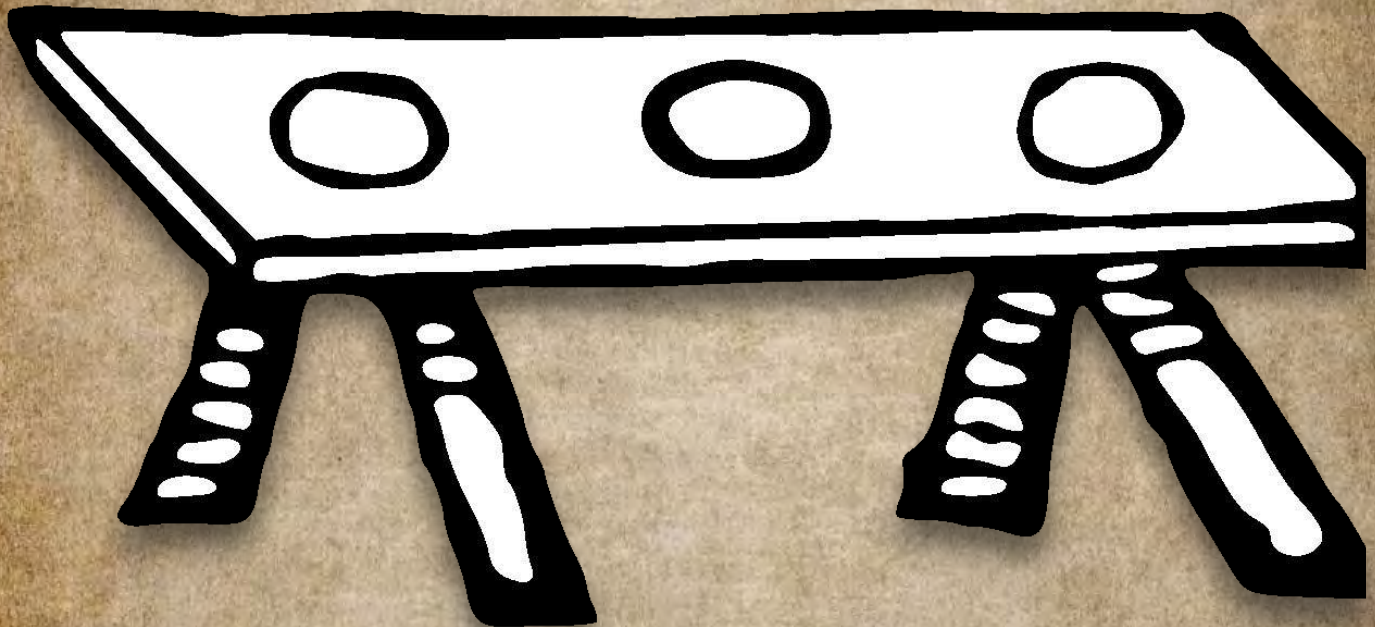


The Open Table



Historical & Modern Experiences
In Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

**You know the expression,
“What do you bring to the table?”**



**This is an OPEN table – this open
table needs YOU to bring
something to it.**

**Bring us your best on diversity,
equity, and inclusion**

penfeathers@meridies.org



The Open Table



Historical & Modern Experiences In Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the SCA: A Tradition of Chivalry, Courtesy, and Honour

(written as part of the 2025 SMASH challenge)

The SCA is built on the ideals of chivalry, courtesy, and honour, values that guide not only our historical reenactment but also our interactions as a community. As the SCA has grown, so too has its recognition of the importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in fostering a welcoming and enriching environment for all participants. Far from being a modern imposition on medieval traditions, DEI aligns naturally with the SCA's core principles, ensuring that our organisation remains a space where all people can fully engage in the dream of recreating the Middle Ages "as they should have been."

Chivalry, one of the SCA's foundational ideals, is not merely about prowess in combat; it's about upholding justice and protecting the vulnerable. In a modern context, this means standing against exclusion and discrimination, advocating for equitable access to events, leadership, and recognition. Just as a chivalric knight was expected to act with integrity and defend those in need, so too does DEI call upon us to see that everyone, regardless of race, gender, ability, or background, can participate fully and fairly in the SCA.

Courtesy, another hallmark of SCA culture, is the virtue of treating all individuals with respect and kindness. It encompasses the way we greet newcomers, the way we engage in discussions, and the way we resolve conflicts. DEI initiatives reinforce this tradition by encouraging education, cultural awareness, and thoughtful dialogue, ensuring that all members feel valued and respected. A culture of courtesy is one where differences are celebrated rather than seen as barriers, making the SCA a more inclusive and dynamic organization.

Finally, the concept of honour binds the ideals of chivalry and courtesy together, demanding integrity in both word and deed. Honour in the SCA is more than just personal reputation; it extends to the collective responsibility of making sure that our society reflects the best of medieval ideals rather than the exclusionary practices of the past. Upholding DEI is itself an act of honour, demonstrating a commitment to fairness, justice, and the continued growth of the SCA as a community where all participants can contribute and thrive.

Ultimately, DEI is not at odds with the SCA's traditions; it is a fulfillment of many of them. By embracing diversity, fostering equity, and safeguarding inclusion, we uphold the very values that have defined the SCA from its inception. In doing so, we ensure that our organisation remains a vibrant, welcoming space where the dream of history lives on for all who seek it.

~ Óengus mac Gilla Dubain,
Sable Baron of Meridies



Swanlight

Deep Dive Features Section



The Seven Liberal Arts & the Well-Ordered Learner

The Order of the Seven Liberal Arts

In the Middle Ages, students were educated through a group of subjects known as the Seven Liberal Arts. These arts were not "liberal" in the modern political sense. The word liberal comes from the Latin *liber*, meaning "free," and referred to the kind of learning thought appropriate for a free person—someone expected to reason well, speak clearly, and participate responsibly in society. The Seven Liberal Arts formed the core of medieval education, shaping how people learned to think, communicate, and understand the world.

A common question about the Seven Liberal Arts is whether there was a strict order in which they had to be learned. The short answer is yes—but not in the sense of a rigid checklist. The order was natural rather than mechanical, a distinction very much in keeping with the ancient and medieval worldviews and the modern worldview. Much like learning everyday skills, students did not need to master every detail of one art before beginning another. However, certain skills naturally came before others, because later studies depended on earlier ones for comprehension.

The Two Groups of the Seven Arts

The Seven Liberal Arts were traditionally divided into two groups: the Trivium and the Quadrivium. Each group focused on a different kind of knowledge and trained different intellectual skills.

The Trivium consisted of the arts of language and thought. Grammar taught students how a language works and how meaning is conveyed through words. Reasoning, often called Logic, or Dialectic, trained students to think clearly and recognise sound arguments. Rhetoric taught students how to speak and write persuasively, shaping language for effective communication.

The Quadrivium focused on number and measurement. Arithmetic studied number itself, considered the most basic form of quantity. Music examined number in harmony and proportion, exploring how numerical relationships produce order and beauty. Geometry dealt with number in space, measuring magnitude and form. Astronomy studied number in motion, observing the orderly movements of the heavens. Together, these arts reflected the medieval belief that understanding reality required mastery of both words and numbers.

Is There an Order?

There is an order to the Seven Liberal Arts, but it is based on how ideas depend on one another rather than on rigid completion rules. Some studies must come first because later ones assume prior knowledge. For example, a student must understand how words function before engaging in serious argument, and must grasp basic numerical concepts before measuring space or studying the stars.

At the same time, medieval students often studied multiple arts

simultaneously, progressing at different depths. Grammar, reasoning, and even arithmetic were revisited repeatedly as students encountered more advanced material. Education was seen as layered and cumulative, not linear and rushed.

Why Grammar Comes First

Grammar stands first in the Trivium because it teaches how language works. Before a student can reason well or persuade others, they must understand how words form meaning, how sentences are constructed, and how communication functions. Grammar provides the foundation for all other studies because every art relies on language for instruction and explanation.

Grammar was never treated as a subject completed once and set aside. Medieval students returned to it continually, refining their understanding as they encountered more complex texts. Each time a student learned a new language—whether Latin, Greek, or a vernacular—they began the study of grammar again, deepening their mastery of communication.

The Four Parts of Grammar

Medieval teachers traditionally divided grammar into four parts, each building upon the previous one. The first was orthography, which focused on letters and sounds. Students learned the alphabet, pronunciation, reading, and writing, laying the groundwork for literacy. This is similar to our modern phonics.

The second part, etymology, taught students about words and parts of speech. Here they learned how nouns, verbs, and other word types function, and how words change form. This stage revealed the internal structure of language and helped students understand meaning more precisely. Today, we would likely call this vocabulary, since *etymology* has come to mean the study of word origins.

Syntax followed, teaching how words are arranged into sentences. Students learned how to express complete thoughts clearly and correctly, much as bricks must be arranged properly to build a stable wall. Syntax transformed vocabulary into coherent expression.

The final part, prosody, addressed rhythm, meter, and style. This was the artistic side of grammar, encompassing poetry, expressive speech, and elegant language. Prosody connected grammar to rhetoric and performance, skills highly valued by medieval poets, storytellers, and heralds.

So What's the Big Idea?

Grammar comes first because clear thought and effective communication depend on understanding language. Without grammar, reasoning becomes confused and persuasion falls flat. Yet medieval education never demanded that students finish all of grammar before exploring other arts. Instead,

skills developed gradually, reinforcing one another over time. The goal was not speed, but growth—learning through steady practice and increasing depth. This approach mirrors the values celebrated in the SCA: learning by doing, engaging deeply with the past, and patiently mastering the arts that shaped medieval life.

Reasoning: Learning How Ideas Fit Together

After studying Grammar, medieval students moved to the second art of the Trivium. Reasoning teaches how to think clearly and carefully, especially how to tell whether ideas truly follow from one another or merely appear to do so. This art trained students to recognise valid arguments, avoid confusion, and pursue truth through disciplined thought.

Rather than using modern logic textbooks, though, medieval teachers relied on the works of the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, especially a collection known as the *Organon*. Each book in the *Organon* explored a different aspect of reasoning, together forming a complete training in how the human mind moves from words to knowledge.

The Parts of Reasoning

Just as Grammar was divided into parts, Reasoning was also studied in stages, each building on the previous one.

Categories – Words and Ideas

The first work in the *Organon*, called the *Categories*, taught students how words relate to ideas and how ideas relate to reality. Students learned how different kinds of things are grouped and distinguished, which helped prevent confusion later. Clear thinking begins with clear meanings, and this foundational study ensured that students understood what they were actually talking about before attempting more complex arguments.

On Interpretation – Statements That Can Be True or False

The second book, *On Interpretation*, introduced students to propositions—statements that can be either true or false. Only these kinds of statements can be used in reasoning. Commands, wishes, and questions may express thoughts or emotions, but they cannot be logically tested for truth. For example, "Sit down!" and "May I have a drink of water?" cannot be true or false. By learning to recognise propositions, students discovered that reasoning depends on forming clear, simple statements such as "All humans are mortal" or "This sword is iron."

This stage also reveals an important feature of medieval education: students did not need to complete all of Grammar before beginning Reasoning. They needed only enough language skill to read carefully, understand meaning, and form accurate statements.

In case you're wondering, this typically occurs between the ages of seven and nine years old.

Prior Analytics – Arguments and Syllogisms

In the *Prior Analytics*, students learned how arguments are constructed. Aristotle explained how two statements can be joined together to produce a third statement that must logically follow. This structure is called a syllogism, and it lies at the heart of logical reasoning. By mastering syllogisms, students learned how to draw necessary conclusions rather than relying on guesswork or opinion.

Posterior Analytics – Demonstration and Certain Knowledge

The *Posterior Analytics* explored demonstrative reasoning, the form of reasoning used to produce certain knowledge. This kind of reasoning begins with truths that are self-evident or already proven and proceeds step by

step to establish new conclusions. Medieval scholars considered this one of Aristotle's greatest contributions, because it explained how genuine sciences—such as natural philosophy—are built upon firm foundations rather than speculation.

Topics – Reasoning from What Is Probable

In the *Topics*, Aristotle introduced dialectical reasoning, which begins not from certainty but from commonly accepted opinions. This method reasons from what people already agree to and explores the consequences of those beliefs. Dialectical reasoning was famously used by the Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates as presented in writings -- called dialogues -- of his student Plato (who just happens to have been Aristotle's teacher). While dialectical reasoning does not always produce certainty, it sharpens the intellect and prepares students for discussion, debate, and inquiry.

Sophistical Refutations – Spotting Bad Arguments

The final work in the *Organon* taught students how to recognise false arguments that appear convincing but are actually flawed. These misleading arguments, known as fallacies, can deceive the unwary. By learning to identify them, medieval students were trained to argue honestly, avoid being misled, and seek truth rather than merely winning debates.

How Reasoning Fits After Grammar

Reasoning naturally follows Grammar. Students needed enough grammatical skill to read attentively, understand propositions, and follow arguments. As they studied Reasoning, they often continued developing their grammatical knowledge at the same time.

Rhetoric: Using Thought and Language Together

The third art of the Trivium is Rhetoric, the art of persuasive speech and writing. Rhetoric builds directly on both Grammar and Reasoning. Clear language provides the tools, and clear thought provides the structure. When Aristotle begins his book the *Rhetoric*, he assumes that students already understand dialectical reasoning, which is why Reasoning naturally comes before Rhetoric in the educational sequence.

Rhetoric taught students how to persuade audiences, appeal to both reason and emotion, and communicate effectively in public life. It transformed private understanding into public action.

The Natural Order of the Trivium

The Trivium follows a natural order rather than a rigid checklist. Grammar teaches how language works, Reasoning teaches how ideas connect, and Rhetoric teaches how to communicate those ideas wisely and persuasively. Medieval students did not "finish" one art and leave it behind forever. Instead, they grew into each art over time, returning to earlier studies as their understanding deepened.

The Quadrivium: Number, Space, Music, and the Stars

After mastering the arts of language in the Trivium, medieval students moved on to the Quadrivium, the four mathematical arts. The word Quadrivium means "four roads," and each road explores quantity—number and measurement—from a different perspective. Medieval thinkers believed mathematics was not merely about calculation or utility, but a way of discovering the deep order built into the world itself. To study number was to study how the world was structured.

The Four Mathematical Arts

Medieval teachers understood quantity in two primary ways: multitude, which answers the question "how many," and magnitude, which answers the question "how big." Each of these categories divides further, producing the four mathematical arts that make up the Quadrivium.

Arithmetic – Number Itself

Arithmetic studies number as number, without reference to physical objects or measurements. Before students could compare quantities, measure space, or observe the heavens, they first needed to understand what numbers are and how they behave. For this reason, Arithmetic always came first in the Quadrivium. Students were not expected to master the entire science of number, which can become very complex, but they did need to understand basic counting, whole numbers, and fundamental numerical principles. Just as Grammar teaches the foundations of language, Arithmetic teaches the foundations of number.

Music – Number in Ratio

In medieval education, Music was not primarily about performance or entertainment. Instead, it studied number in ratio, examining harmony, proportion, and numerical relationships. Musical intervals were understood as mathematical ratios between numbers, revealing order and balance. Because a ratio is a relationship between numbers, and numbers themselves must be understood first, Music naturally follows Arithmetic in the order of study.

Geometry – Number in Space

Geometry studies magnitude at rest, including lines, shapes, surfaces, and solid bodies. The study of Geometry begins very simply, with definitions, postulates, and axioms. Anyone who has opened Euclid's Elements will recognise this structure: first the meanings of terms, then self-evident truths, and finally carefully reasoned proofs. Geometry is a practical application of demonstrative reasoning—the same logical method students learned in the Trivium—applied to space and form.

Astronomy – Number in Motion

Astronomy studies magnitude in motion, observing the orderly movement of the stars and planets through space. Because these bodies move, Astronomy depends on Geometry to understand space and on Arithmetic to understand number. Motion is more complex than rest, since it involves change over time, and for this reason Astronomy always came last in the Quadrivium. It brought together everything students had already learned about number and magnitude. Imagine, the peak of learning is understanding the heavens above!

The Order of the Quadrivium

The Quadrivium follows a clear and natural order. Arithmetic comes first as the study of number itself. Music and Geometry follow, exploring number in ratio and in space, often studied side by side. Astronomy comes last, examining number in motion. This order was not treated as a rigid checklist. Medieval students often studied more than one art at the same time, but they could not skip the foundational principles that later studies depended upon.

How the Trivium and Quadrivium Work Together

None of the mathematical arts stood alone. To study Arithmetic or Geometry, students needed Grammar in order to read and understand texts, and Reasoning in order to follow demonstrations and proofs. This is why medieval education functioned as a connected system rather than a

collection of separate subjects. Each art supported and reinforced the others.

Why Grammar Was the Gateway

Medieval schools were often called grammar schools because Grammar opened the door to all learning. Without strong reading and language skills, students could not study philosophy, understand mathematics, or follow astronomical tables. Grammar was not merely preparation for later studies; it was the key that made every other art accessible.

A Living Order, Not a Rigid Ladder

The Seven Liberal Arts were never meant to function as age-based stages or modern grade levels. They were arts – skills learned gradually, revisited often, and deepened over time. Students advanced when they were ready, not according to a fixed schedule. Learning was understood as a lifelong process rather than a race.

Why This Matters in the SCA

The SCA celebrates the medieval world not only through armour, craft, and pageantry, but also through learning as medieval people learned. The Trivium and Quadrivium remind us that knowledge has structure, that skills build upon one another, and that true mastery requires patience and practice. Whether you are studying music, astronomy, calligraphy, geometry, or rhetoric, you are walking the same intellectual roads medieval students once traveled.

[The preceding is a draft version of a possible Page School or RUM class on the Trivium and the Quadrivium. All errors are the author's, who welcomes feedback and correction.]

Given the focus here on the Seven Liberal Arts, it's worthwhile to examine one of the best representations of the integrated nature of medieval education. The following description is taken directly from <https://www.plosin.com/work/HortusDetails.html>. Ed.]

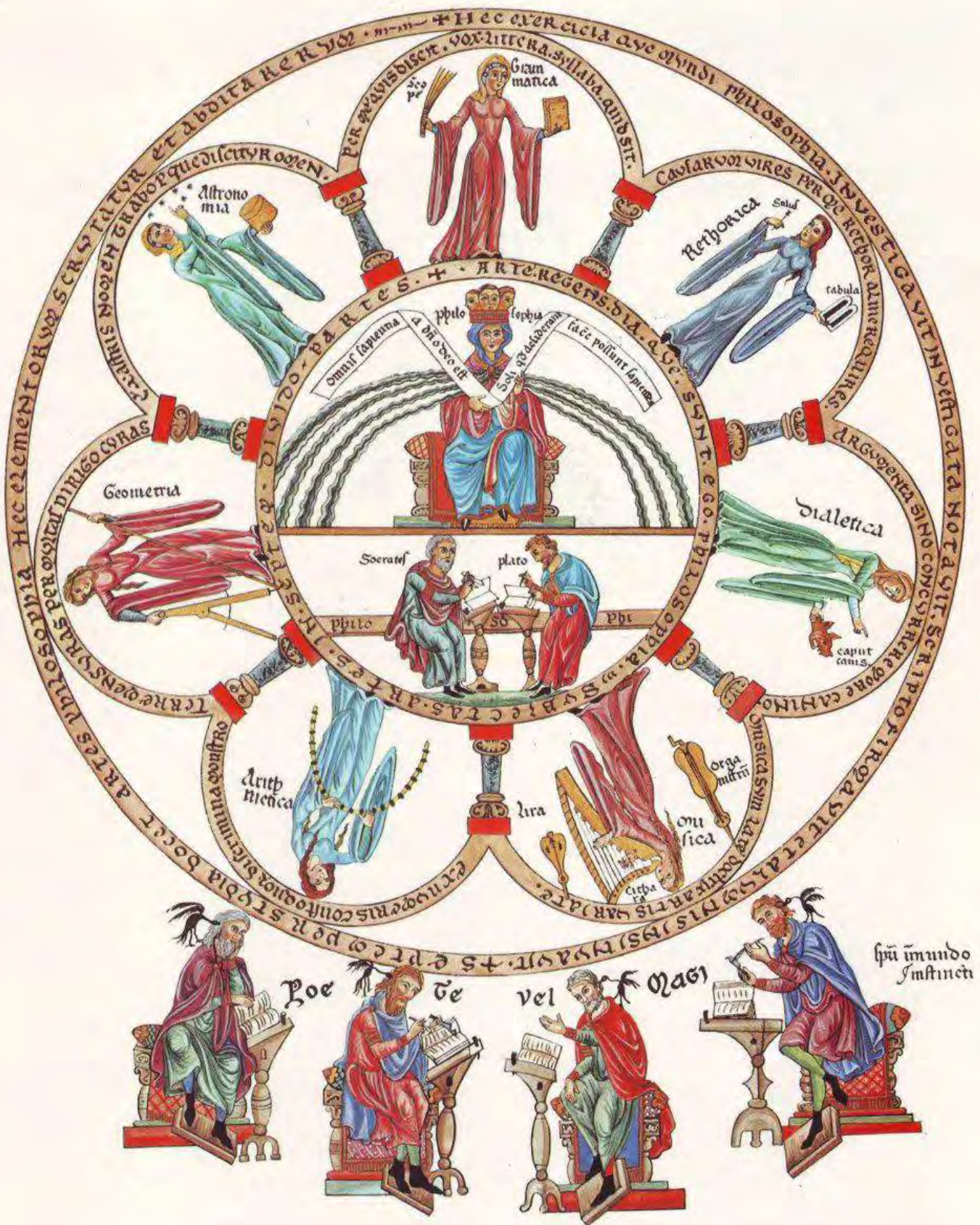
The *Hortus deliciarum* (see image, next page)

Herrad of Landsberg was abbess of the convent Hohenburg on Mount St. Odile in Alsace. She was the author of the *Hortus deliciarum*, a massive illuminated manuscript that distilled "the nectar of the various flowers plucked from Holy Scripture and philosophical works," compiled for the edification of the nuns and others at the abbey. The 324-folio volume contained more than 600 illustrations. It was destroyed during the bombing of Strasbourg in 1870, but by then many copies had been made.

Philosophy, the Queen, sits in the center of the circle. She wears a crown with three heads labeled *ethica*, *logica*, and *physica* (a traditional Platonic division of philosophy that was common in the early Middle Ages). The scroll she holds reads, "All wisdom comes from the Lord God; the wise alone achieve what they desire." To Philosophy's right is an inscription which says that "seven streams of wisdom, called the Liberal Arts, flow from Philosophy." To her left the inscription asserts that the Holy Spirit inspired seven liberal arts: *grammatica*, *rethorica* [sic], *dialectica*, *musica*, *arithmetica*, *geometria*, and *astronomia*. The legend on the inner circle tells us "I, Godlike Philosophy lay out seven arts which are subordinate to me; by them I control all things with wisdom."

Below Philosophy, seated at desks, are Socrates and Plato, identified as those scholars of the Gentiles and sages of the world who first taught ethics, natural philosophy, and rhetoric.

From Philosophy emerge seven streams, three on her left and four on her right. These are the seven liberal arts, inspired by the Holy Spirit: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy.



Philosophia et septem artes liberales (Philosophy and the Seven Liberal Arts), as illustrated in the *Hortus deliciarum*, dating back to 1180 CE. This image is circa 1818, being a coloured copy from an original, which was destroyed)

Arrayed around the circle are the liberal arts. Three correspond to the rivers which emerge from Philosophy's left and are concerned with language and letters: grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic. Together they constitute the *trivium*. The four others, which emerge on Philosophy's right, form the *quadrivium*, arts which are concerned with the various kinds of harmony: music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. Each of the seven arts holds something symbolic, and each is accompanied by a text displayed on the arch above it.

Grammar (at 12 o'clock) holds a book and a whip. The text reads: Through me all can learn what are the words, the syllables, and the letters.

Rhetoric (at 2 o'clock) holds a tablet and stylus. The text reads: Thanks to me, proud speaker, your speeches will be able to take strength.

Dialectic (at 4 o'clock) points with a one hand and holds a barking dog's head in the other. The text reads: I allow arguments to join, dog-like, in battle.

Music (at 5 o'clock) holds a harp, and other instruments are nearby. The text reads: I teach my art using a variety of instruments.

Arithmetic (at 7 o'clock) holds a cord with threaded beads, like a rudimentary abacus. The text reads: I base myself on the numbers and show the proportions between them.

Geometry (at 9 o'clock) holds a staff and compass. The text reads: It is with exactness that I survey the ground.

Astronomy (at 11 o'clock) points heavenward and holds in hand a magnifying lens or mirror. The text reads: I hold the names of the celestial bodies and predict the future.

The large ring around the whole scene contains four aphorisms and the stages through which Philosophy works (investigation, writing, and teaching): What it discovers is remembered; Philosophy investigates the secrets of the elements and all things; Philosophy teaches arts by seven branches; It puts it in writing, in order to convey it to the students.

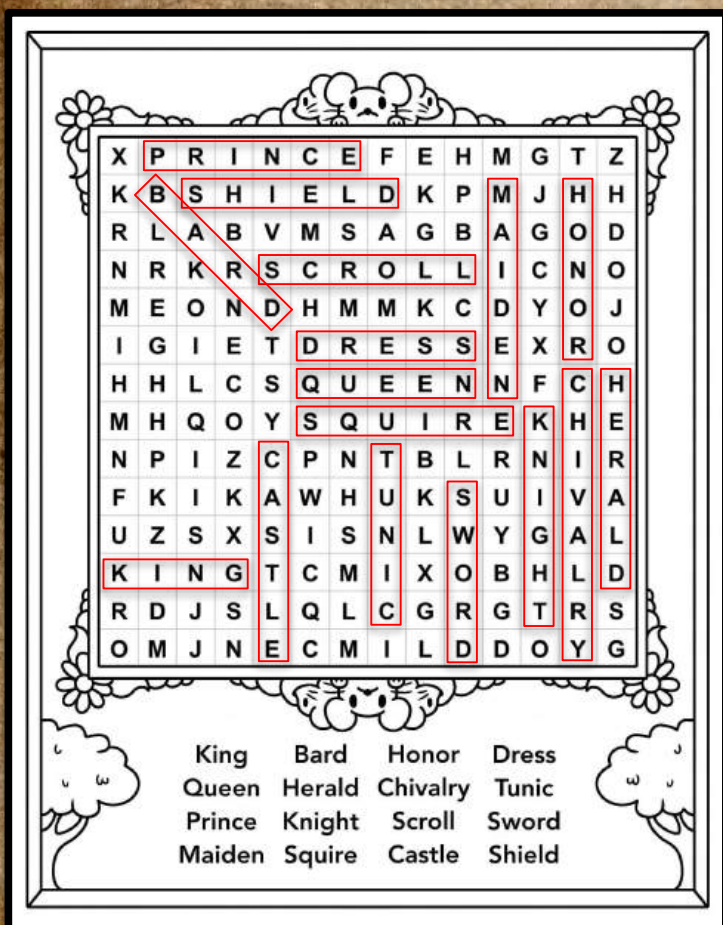
Below the circle are four men seated at desks -- poets or magicians, outside the pale and beyond the influence of Philosophy. According to the text they are guided and taught by impure spirits and they produce is only tales or fables, frivolous poetry, or magic spells. Notice the black birds speaking to them (the antithesis of the white dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit).

Do YOU have a subject that you're passionate about? Something that you would be willing to share with others in written form? Something that you think could be an example to our youth in pursuing excellence and education in the SCA?

Send us your suggestions for the next Swanlight, and let us help you to help the youth!

penfeathers@meridies.org

Solutions



Cryptogram:

I have roots nobody sees,
I am taller than trees.
Up, up I go,
And yet I never grow.

What Am I?
A mountain

Riddles:

I – A fish
II – A sieve
III – Stars
IV – Ice
V – Friday is a horse

Scramble:

warden
squires
feast
scroll
joust
tapestry
heralds
bards
market
largesse

King's Banquet:

1. The King is at Seat 1 (given)
2. The Queen is at Seat 2 (facts 1 & 7; Seat 2 is directly to the right of Seat 1)
3. The Court Jester is at Seat 3 (facts 7 & 3; Seat 3 is directly across from Seat 2)
4. The Blacksmith is at Seat 8 (facts 1 & 4; Seat 8 is opposite side of table from Seat 1)
5. The Merchant is at Seat 4 (facts 3 & 4, plus fact 5; Seats 4, 5, 6, & 7 possible; 5 is next to Seat 3; Seats 6 & 7 are next to Seat 8)
6. The Lady is at Seat 5 (fact 5; Seats 5, 6, & 7 possible; 6 has no open seats adjacent; 7 has no seat to the left)
7. The Knight is at Seat 7 (6 above, plus fact 8)
8. The Bishop is at Seat 6 (7 above, by elimination)

Of Truth and Lies:

The knight should ask either guard: "If I were to ask the other guard which gate leads to the castle, which gate would they point to?" Whatever the answer, the knight should take the **opposite** gate.

Explanation: The knight doesn't know who is truthful and who a liar. If the knight asks the truthful guard, the truthful guard knows the liar would point to the wrong gate, so the truthful guard points to the wrong gate as well. On the other hand, if the knight asks the liar, the liar knows the truthful guard would point to the correct gate—but, being a liar, they point to the wrong gate instead.

Conclusion: In both cases, the guard points to the incorrect gate, so the knight must take the opposite path.