

Dox Borealis

My Circus Edition



*Supplemental Newsletter for the Kingdom of Ealdormere,
September 2023 Anno Societatis LVIII*

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From the Chronicler

Greetings Readers

I would like to welcome our new Seneschal, Magistra Lucia de Moranza, who may have said something along “my circus my monkeys” inspiring this issue. Welcome to the Circus & Monkeys issue of the Vox Borealis. The issue is full of magic and wonder, for you to enjoy.



When I first joined the SCA I thought I would have a alternate persona called “Pity the Fool” which I didn’t use more than a handful of times. Sometimes it is fun to be foolish.

I would also like to announce that I have a new Vox Borealis Deputy, Baroness Catherine Townson. She is gathering articles about different aspects of Ealdormere and its people and will provide content for vox. I’m excited to work with her.

Have a short story, news, or a research article that you would like to share? A topic relating to Ealdormere’s unique culture you would like to see? The Vox Borealis has room for submissions! To submit, please email ealdormere.kchronicler@gmail.com and include your SCA name with your submission.

Please register events at <https://ealdormere.ca/how-to-register-your-event-the-kingdom-of-ealdormere/>

Cheerfully yours
Lucia de Enzinas
Kingdom Chronicler of Ealdormere



Court Herald as Ring Master by Brand Thorwaldsen

Ever feel like this is your circus, and you are their monkey? That's what being a court herald is like, sometimes.

A perfect court is well orchestrated, planned out in advanced, difficult parts rehearsed, and everyone knows their part. But that's a perfect court, and it doesn't always happen.

Here's some advice on what to do when the court turns into a circus, and how to be a Ringmaster, juggler, and clown when needed.

The royalty forgot a line, or skipped a part of the ceremony, or went completely off script? Roll with it! Pretend no mistakes were made, pick up as best you can – no one has a copy of a ceremony or scroll script but you and the royalty, no one will ever know. Now if the mistake is huge, and things get off track, just apologize – make the royalty look good, by saying it was your mistake, and just get back on track however you can.

Some well-meaning person comes into court, as a speaker in a ceremony, or is presenting a gift to the royalty, and it takes WAY too much time? Not a lot you can do without making the speaker look bad, but if it's a person known to be, well, verbose, call them into court with a prompt to be brief – 'Their Majesties invite forth Countess Aimer of Eoforwic to provide a brief word on the candidate'. If you can coach people in advance, or set expectations, that helps too – sometimes folks don't know they are taking up to much 'air time'.

Royalty forgot their place? Lean in and whisper what's going on, and what they need to do. Don't tell them their lines word for word, just say something like 'Your Majesties, the medalion can be bestowed', or 'Your Majesties, say something about service'. If they are completely stuck or frozen, go ahead and speak as the Crown's voice, but keep it so the royalty have the authority and are the main point of attention, such as 'Their Majesties are well pleased wit the service of Thomas Beckett, and publicly commend him'.

People getting rowdy at the back of court? Likely because the bar is back there? Speak directly to them when doing an item of business, or pause everything and wait for it to die down, or send a retainer behind the throne to shush them. Worst case, you can always stop court with an 'OYEZ! Their Majesties would appreciate the attention of the realm when conducting their business, thank you'

Misplaced a scroll? Make something up! Don't be fancy, make it simple, like 'Let all know that Fred and Wilma, King and Queen of Ealdormere do bestow upon Thomas the Rhymer an Award of the Orion for his bardic talents, done this 1st day of August, in the Canton of der Welfengau'. If you want to embellish, of course feel free.

Being a court herald is part stage manager, part human vocal projecting machine, part entertainer, and part public speaker. Managing yourself, along with royalty, incoming speakers, gifts, props, and more. Just take a deep breath, soldier on, and if things go terribly awry, make a self depreciating joke like ‘My apologies Your Majesty, I seem to have caught a case of bumblemouth, but I’m sure it’s not contagious’, and hang in there.

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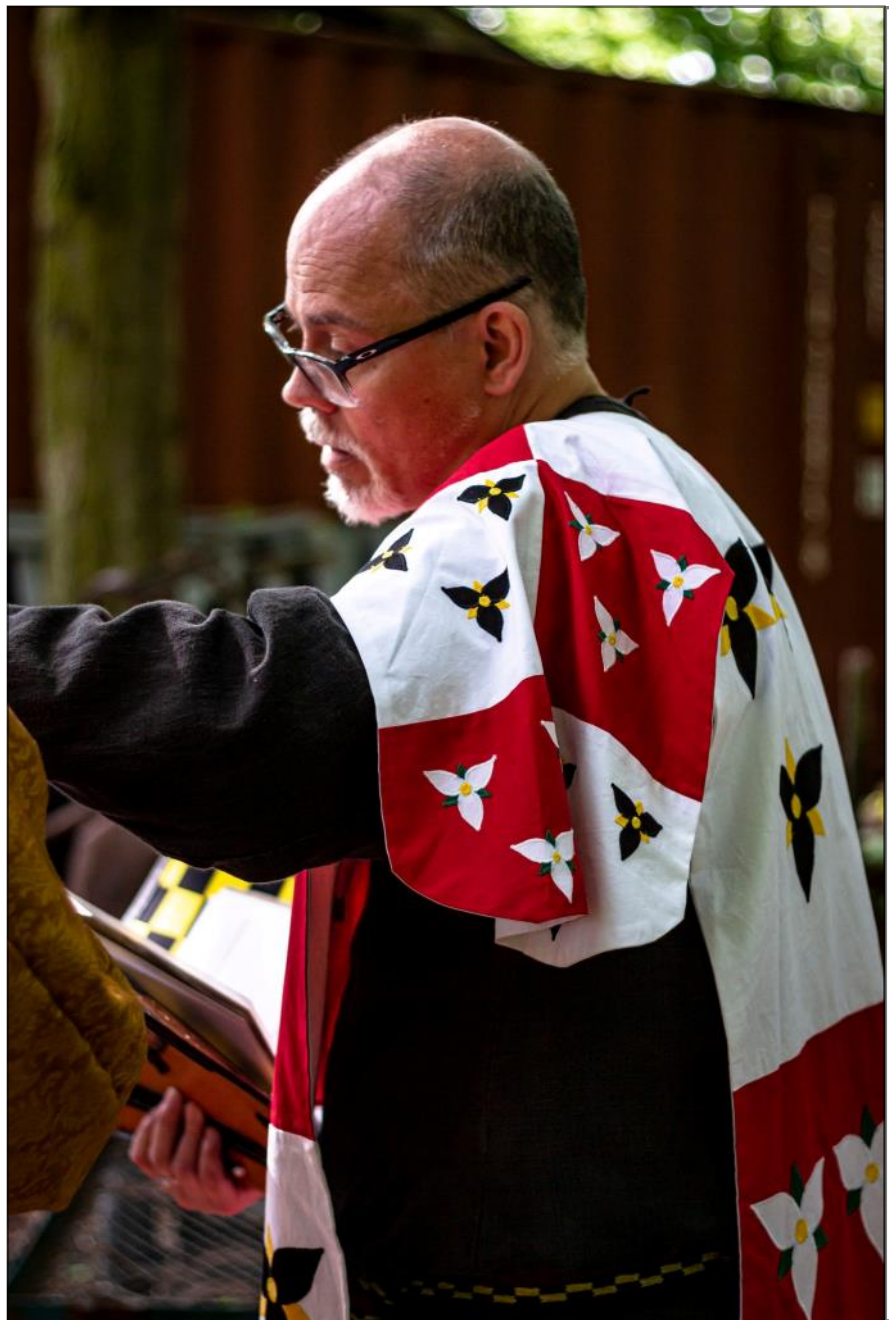


Photo by Fisher of Ben Dunfirth

The Pompous Title:
*"A very brief overview of the intricate and
bawdy fusion of puns and art in medieval
literature"*

The Everyday Title:
"Using puns in Ealdormerian scrolls"

By Avelyn Wexcombe of Great Bedwyn

If you're an astute reader, you'll have noticed that I included two perfectly acceptable but very different titles for this piece. Now, you may wonder, why would a nice Avelyn like her do this? To confuse us? To be impressively verbose? Nay, goode readers, neither is my aim. Instead, I'm trying my best to capture an important point – which is not all styles of scroll are appropriate for all situations and people.

Some people prefer very authentic stylings based on extant literature and documents for scrolls. Others are delighted to receive a lovely little scroll that lends itself to a good laugh and doesn't take itself too seriously.

I write of scrolls liberally scattered with a smattering of good puns. Some argue that a pun is a very base kind of humour. Not only are clever puns entirely authentic and in period, but they form a poetic and entertaining way to acknowledge achievements in the crowd-pleasing theatre that is our courts.

Writing light and punny scroll texts is a favourite style of mine. They are generally fit for introductory/armigerous level awards such as Awards of Arms, youth awards or for baronial scrolls. The trick of course is to personalize the puns to the feats and personality of the recipient as much as possible.

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One of my favourite punny scrolls was given to a person in recognition of their mead-making. Naturally, all the puns were about bees, honey, brewing and were of course worded sweetly as well. It became a personal challenge as a writer to pack in as many thematic puns as possible. The groans and laughs of the recipient, and the buzz from the audience, were the bee's knees. Nobody knew I had just winged it.

Is it possible to use too many puns per square inch of scroll? Probably. Have I pushed that limit in the past? Absolutely! I just try not to cross that fine line between pun and punishment of the audience. See what I did there? Bit of word play. It's easy, isn't it?

If you are thinking about lending your hand and quill to the wording of scrolls, then adopting the path of puns is one I highly recommend for beginners. If you're a witty sort of person, the puns may come very naturally without a lot of deep reflection. Your mileage may vary.

Now for the history bit, for aficionados: Modern scholars agree that during the Middle Ages, like today, folks of all status levels, languages and cultural centers generally enjoyed their comedy. Often the bawdier, the better. Shakespeare's comedies are a very mainstream example¹. I'm not an authority of medieval literature by any means, but I also believe Chaucer occasionally wrote some funny things. An Italian scholar Bracciolini (1380-1459) published a work called "Facetiae" that contained elements of classic humour. It's clear that comedic written scripts can be sourced back many centuries indeed. If you aspire to become a maven of medieval comedy, I encourage you to review the many books and articles² available on the topic. I'll spare you from prattling on with other erudite facts. Perhaps it's enough to take my word for it – puns are pervasively period! Well, that was alliteration but you get my gist.

1. Medievalists.net: ["15 Medieval Jokes that are actually pretty funny!"](#)

2. Here's some examples: [Etymology and Wordplay in Medieval Literature](#), edited by Mikael Males.

Magic in the SCA – THL Beathán MacFinnon

I cannot believe it took me 14 years in the SCA to consider bringing my 33 years experience as an amateur magician into our society. When I joined the SCA in 2008, I already had some calligraphy under my belt, but I did not know that I could be creative. From a need of basic furniture came a love of woodworking, and eventually leather working, too. The SCA has given me so much in self-discovery.

As we recovered from the plague, I realized that I could bring some considerable experience with close-up magic to Ealdormere. I haven't seen many people performing magic in the SCA. I had heard of Dr. Henry Best and taken his class at Pennsic (2014), but it was Aslak the Awful's recent laurelling for performance of magic that has inspired me to explore performing magic in the society as a bardic art, as well as a science for A&S events.

My most recent effort was a classic of magic – the cups and balls. John Mulholland asserted that “Houdini once told me that he considered no [one] to be a magician until [they were] able skillfully to perform the cups and balls.” It has been a litmus test of sorts for generations.

The oldest reference to the cups and balls is by Seneca the Younger (advisor to Nero) in his 45th epistle to Lucilius, On Sophistical Argumentation.

Sic ista sine noxa decipiunt quomodo praestigatorum acetabula et calculi, in quibus me fallacia ipsa delectat. Effice ut quomodo fiat intellegam: perdidit lusum.

Such quibbles are just as harmlessly deceptive as the juggler's cup and dice, in which it is the very trickery that pleases me. But show me how the trick is done, and I have lost my interest therein.

Note that the text translates to cup (singular) and dice, not cup and ball. However, the word calculi means pebble, like what was used with a counting board. This is why I believe he is not referring to a one-cup one-die gambling game, but something along the lines of the pea & shell game or cups & balls or something modernly called a chop cup. These balls would likely have been small white pebbles, too small to palm, but able to be concealed in the hand in other ways. The cups were made of clay and were likely general-purpose cups like side dishes or small bowls rather than drinking cups – think the finger cleaning bowls they used to serve at Swiss Chalet. There are other magical texts referring to these items in other languages (Greek, French, German) that support this theory in etymology, but this is not an essay on the history of the cups and balls.

Hocus Pocus Junior (1634) is really the first published stand-alone magic book that I can find. We cannot prove who the author is, but many believe that it is based on William Vincent, who performed under the name of Hocus Pocus. The material consists of no mystical arts, just tricks and illusions. This is unlike Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), which is primarily a text arguing that there are no real witches, that witchcraft is merely science and tricks, and that it is sinful to condemn people for witchcraft without concrete proof (a fascinating read even today). The tricks don't start until page 321!

I enjoyed learning a completely new routine for this year's Kingdom Arts & Science Tournament. It was challenging, but built on the same techniques developed hundreds of years ago. I hope to find more magicians in Ealdormere, and perhaps we could pool our knowledge and entertain our populace.

Image 1 – Title page of first edition of The Discoverie of Witchcraft by Reginald Scot

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Discoverie_of_Witchcraft#/media/File:Reginald_Scott,_The_Discoverie_of_Witchcraft_\(1584\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Discoverie_of_Witchcraft#/media/File:Reginald_Scott,_The_Discoverie_of_Witchcraft_(1584).jpg)

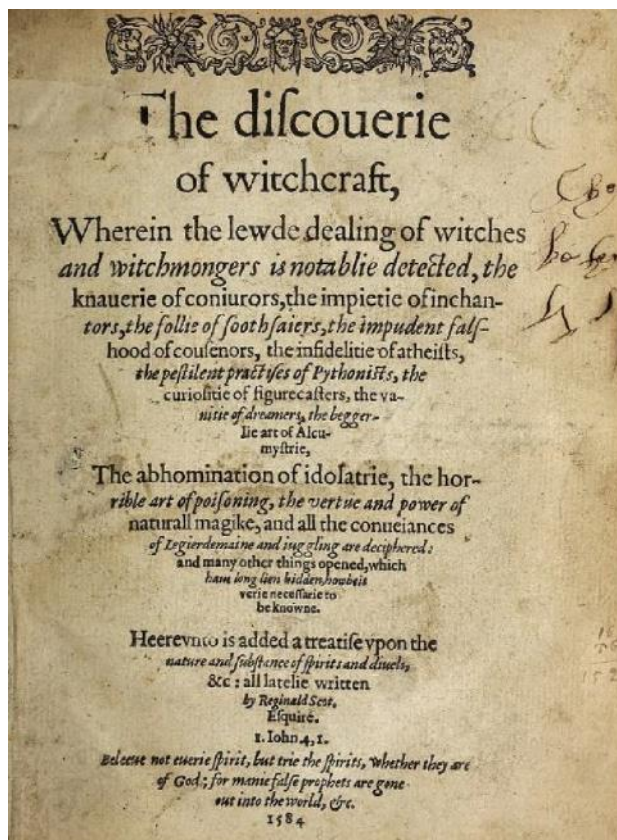
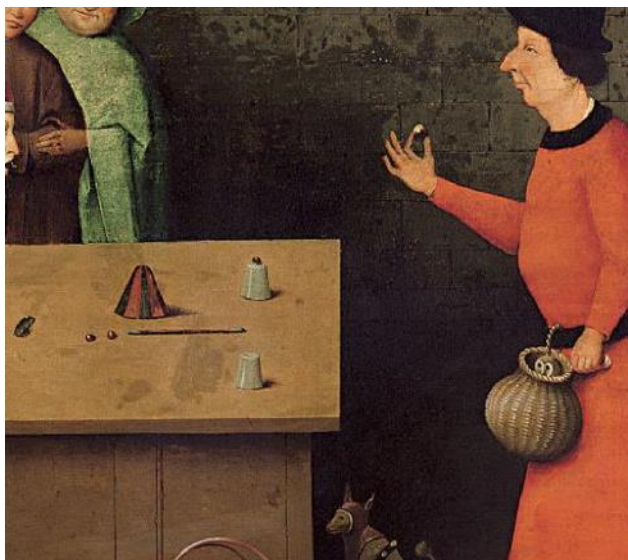


Image 2 – cropped from Hieronymus Bosch – The Conjuror

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Conjuror_\(painting\)#/media/File:Hieronymus_Bosch_051.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Conjuror_(painting)#/media/File:Hieronymus_Bosch_051.jpg)



Walk like an Egyptian...Shadow Puppet by Dafydd ap Alan

Ever since early humans first stood between a fire and a cave wall and noticed their shadows, people have likely used shadows to play, and to entertain. It is one of the first things we do as children, discover the shapes our hands can project on the wall from a light source.

But humans are nothing if not inventive with tools, so of course over the centuries, artforms have developed using tools to help project these shapes.

Shadow puppets can be found throughout Asia and the Middle East, with earliest references going back to at least the 6th Century. However, as with many oral cultures, it is entirely possible that the art form predates even that early date in these cultures.

The earliest Middle Eastern references can be found in Mamluk Egypt. Early references are from stories mentioning that individuals witnessed “shadow plays”. In his 1940 paper, Paul Kahle argues that references suggest that shadow theatre and shadow puppets were known from at least the 12th century (Kahle, p.21).

Puppets were often made from rawhide from various animals. This technique is still used in many areas of Asia to this day. They could be one piece, but sometimes had moving arms, legs or other parts. They were quite large, anywhere from 60 centimeters tall to half the size of a person.

The puppets were filled with intricate cutwork patterns to allow light to shine through and create complex shadow figures. These cutwork gaps were also sometimes filled with coloured materials, probably thinner rawhide that had been dyed. This provided a stained-glass effect when the light shone through it.

The only known surviving examples of Mamluk-style puppets were a collection of approximately 80 pieces found and purchased by Kahle in 1909 in Egypt. Part of this collection has since been donated to various museums in Germany, including the puppets that inspired this research from the German Leather Museum.

Kahle dated these artefacts to sometime between 1250-1517, however a later researcher named Marcus Milwright suggests they are more likely a 17th C re-enactor doing the same thing we do today - recreating a period style artefact for a modern audience.

Whether these specific examples are from our period or slightly later recreations, there's no doubt that shadow plays were an important form of entertainment in many parts of the medieval world.

They would also make a great addition to the period entertainment at many SCA events.

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(Google Translate was used to translate the resources that were in other languages)



Shadow puppets at the German Leather Museum - taken by David Gotlieb/Dafydd ap Alan

Fools by Meisterin Siglinde Harfnerstochter



Fool, buffoon, clown, jongleur, jogleor, jocular, sot, stultor, scurra, fou, fol, truhan, mimus, histrio, morio, Narr.

These terms could refer to amusing hangers-on or to comic actors and entertainers. The Renaissance author Rabelais described the fool as "Irreverent, libertine, self-indulgent, witty, clever, roguish, he is the fool as court jester, the fool as companion, the fool as goad to the wise and challenge to the virtuous, the fool as critic of the world."

In Russia, the older the fool or she-fool was, the droller they were supposed and expected to be.

That being the case, these folks from the Parade of Fools at Pennsic XX must be absolutely hilarious.

Cartoon circus themed marginalia and colouring page by Augusta Wayfare, send any pages you colour to Lucia de Enzinas so she can put them on her fridge.





Cover Art

The photo of the borealis by his excellency Sir Saheed. Cover art by Marguerite Gingraix

THE TIDINGS THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR THE KINGDOM OF

A few things we're required to say...

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