

## Shire of Al-Sahid Newsletter

# Scorpion Tales

### May Shire Meeting

This month's Craft and Shire Meeting will be a special event: Drumming led by Lady Magdi starting at noon, and the Shire meeting starting at 3 followed by a BBQ. The location is Schmidt Park where we hold Highland War. For our newcomers the address is Schmidt Park, 13576 Mustang Rd., Victorville. There is a lot of construction around the area so please check the directions on our website before traveling. (Link: <http://www.al-sahid.org/highlandwar>)



[chrislynnet@gmail.com](mailto:chrislynnet@gmail.com).

Thanks!

**Constable:** Not present.

**Exchequer:** Received last of the receipts to close out Anniversary and first Quarter. .

**Herald.** Nothing to report.

**List:** Not present.

**Marshal:** Nothing to report.

**Children's:** Nothing to report.

**Presentations:** Presented to incoming and out going baron and Baroness at Altavia Anni-

### May Meeting Reports

**Seneschal:** Discussed files, other discussions were placed under appropriate headings.

**Arts & Sciences:** Not present. Craft days will be June – Drumming, July – Dance, August – War Prep, September – Pants (Yes, pants.) ;>

**Castellan:** Sent newsletter to Newcomer, possible coming to meeting.

**Chronicler:** Not present, but submissions needed. Please send them to Caitlin at either [christine@ctaylor-co.com](mailto:christine@ctaylor-co.com) or

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versary and Royals

**Chirurgion:** Nothing to report.

**Webwright:** Not present.

Shire Meeting Dates

*Unless otherwise noted, Shire meetings start at 3pm*

June 29 — Schmidt Park (war site); meeting and BBQ

July 20 – Blase & Ryan's

August 17 — Teka & Killian's

September 14 – Jane & Gregor's

A&S Meeting Dates

*Unless otherwise noted, A&S meetings start at noon. They are usually at the same site as the Shire meeting to follow, and we will report any exceptions.*

June 29—Drumming

July – Dancing (date and location to be announced)

August 17 – War prep

September 14 - Pants (I just think that's so funny. Helpful, but funny.)

## Demo

We will participate in the Hesperia Days parade but not the demo. We will plan our entry in the next few months.

## Fighter Practice

Fighter Practice is Monday nights at 6:00 pm to 6:30 pm. at Sir Killian's. For information please email Sir Killian at kiltek@earthlink.net.

Projects

Work continues apace on the painted walls, including painting at fighter practice. No requests as

yet from the fighters for being painted with woad.

## Highland War

The merchant contract was changed to a donation of 2 items per merchant space in lieu of payment.

The prizes for Iron Chef, Brewing, youth combat, and others are done.

Lady Jane will pick up 3 dozen glow sticks and 4 bricks of D Batteries for lanterns.

Tokens are coming out beautifully.

## Around the Shire

Don't miss Coronation and Queen's Champion! Many of our Shire members will be joining the upcoming Royal Court, including THL Teka as a Truly Terrifying Captain of the Guard. .

***We encourage all Shire members to attend Shire meetings whenever possible. Please come in garb.***

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## . Recipe Corner

*What could be better than watermelons for the summer? This is an article on that very large but very sumptuous fruit.*

## Regarding Watermelons

*by Johnnae llyn Lewis, CE*

Questions arise each summer with regard to the origins of Watermelons and if one should serve them at events. Given that they are so deeply associated with the American South, it is felt that they must be New World in origin,

right?

In this case watermelons come originally from Sub-Saharan Africa and were eaten not only by Africans in Central and West Africa but also by the Egyptians, and even by the Romans and Greeks. Andrew Dalby believes the sikyos pepon of the ancient Greeks may indeed be a watermelon. As one might suspect, they came to be grown in and around the Mediterranean Lands by the Turks, the Moors, and even by the Italians. Recipes are few, although the *Kitab Wasf Al-At'ima Al-Mutada* speaks of using watermelon stalks when cooking meat. Giacomo Castelvetro's 1614 manuscript on the fruits and vegetables that he had known in Italy in the later half of the 16th century says of them:

"early in June we have watermelons, which some claim to be another kind of cucumber. They are extremely thirst-quenching, being little more than a pleasant, sweet-tasting juice which fills the mouth and is marvelously refreshing."

Watermelons began to appear in still life paintings in Northern Europe after circa 1450 and can be found in a number of printed herbals, including the *New Kreuterbuch* of 1563. John Gerald writes about muske-melons, millions, melons and pompions as well as gourds in a series of chapters in his *Herball*. Thomas Hill's *The Gardener's Labyrinth* had already included a short section on how one might achieve success in growing melons in the uncertain climate of English gardens in 1577.

As to the deep association with American South, it is felt that watermelon seeds traveled directly to the Americas from Spain and Portugal and also from West Africa with the slave trade, beginning in the 17th century. The fruit proved

easy to grow in the warm climate and was adapted readily. William Weaver writes that



they appear already in accounts from 1629 Massachusetts and notes that they seem to have been growing in and around the Delaware River by the 1640's.

I have not found that garnishing melons in the fashions employed today was done prior to 1600, but again it seems the decorative, inexpensive, and festive thing to do. It's also fun and relatively easy, if one has the proper garnishing knives and saws. (It's something else to do with those pumpkin carving kits.) Rest assured that they can indeed be served at events and as Castelvetro noted, they can be marvelously refreshing on a hot day.

Selective Sources include:

Rodinson, Arberry, and Perry. *Medieval*

Arab Cookery, 2001.

Andrew Dalby. *Siren Feasts*, 1996. Giacomo Castelvetro (trans. Gillian Riley) *The Fruit, Herbs & Vegetables of Italy*, 1989.

Thomas Hill. *The Gardener's Labyrinth*, 1577, 1987.

William Woy Weaver. *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening*, 1997. Alan Davidson. *The Oxford Companion to Food*, 1999.

*"Regarding Watermelons" appeared in the August 2006 P.A.L.E., in the late Winter 2006 Artes Draconis; and Mead Meat and More in June 2006.*

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## A Few Practical Notes on the Construction of Rapier Armour

*by Mistress Nicolaa de Bracton of Leicester, O.L.*

I've been making protective clothing for the rapier arts for nearly three years now, in that time outfitting nearly every fencer in my area, as well as doing loaner tunics; I'm currently sewing my fourth set of gear (by now, it's just a matter of fashion, rather than dissatisfaction with construction). I've even entered my rapier armour in our regional A&S (using the new Middle Kingdom rapier armour criteria), receiving a first for one piece and a second for another. I write this article in hopes of saving those of you contemplating making your first set of armour (or whoever's going to do it for you) a few headaches.

### How does rapier armour differ from regular garb?

This is a loaded question. Looks-wise, the

best rapier gear I've seen is indistinguishable from regular garb--until it is taken off. One of the wonderful advantages of our art is that we can still dress to the nines on the field, if this is our thing. However, precautions must be taken so that the gear still does what it's supposed to--protect the fencer--as well as being comfortable and durable.

### Choice of fabric:

Think carefully on this one. The regulations specify four layers of middle/heavyweight fabric (or "trigger", if they use that name in your part of the world). This is a guideline--not an absolute--it's not meant to restrict your choices of fabric. What I'd recommend is making up a "trigger test patch" of four layers of this fabric about six inches square, but only sewn on one edge. Take it with you into the fabric store. When you run across a promising fabric, you'll be able to compare it instantly with the standard. A lot of upholstery fabrics which make lovely armour may actually end up being equivalent to two layers of trigger; likewise, if you run across some cheap remnants in the remainder bin, you should instantly be able to figure out how much you'll need. But also pay attention to the properties of the fabric itself. For instance, not all upholstery materials are equal. Some are loosely woven and tend to ravel at the edges; others are tight as a drum and wouldn't unravel if a tactical nuclear missile exploded in them. For obvious reasons, the second makes more durable armour. Watch out for Scotch-guarding in these fabrics. You certainly don't need it, unless you plan to wear your gear during the monsoon season, and it does interfere somewhat with the way the fabric breathes.

You also need to keep an eye out on the strength of the fabric itself. I have seen seemingly strong, heavy fabrics tear to shreds after only a couple of wearings. Velveteens and corderoys are the most prone to this; if there's a problem, it'll usually show up after the first washing--which makes pre-washing vital. Be wary of anything on the bargain table, especially anything labelled "100% unknown fibres". Besides having the potential to be extremely uncomfortable if these fibres turn out to be synthetic, many "bargain table" fabrics are of inferior quality and may have odd quirks (one batch I bought had an odd, petroleum-like smell). However, if you've seen the fabric on the shelf in the store before at a regular price, and it appears to have been moved there because it's the end of the season or the colour is ugly, go for it.

Fibre choice is another important factor. Generally, cotton or a cotton blend is best, not only in terms of durability and comfort, but in terms of cost. Remember that all layers need not be of the same material. Also take into consideration where the gear will be worn, and how heavily. Rapier armour usually gets sweated in a lot, so you'll want something that's easy to wash and that will hold up under this kind of treatment. It's not a bad idea to consider making two sets of gear--one of basic, durable materials for practices and another for indoor tournaments and "dress" occasions.

### Patterns

While Tudor, Spanish, Italian, Elizabethan, and Cavalier doublets and pants conform best with fencing's historical milieu, you can certainly make other styles as well (I've made a fencing cotehardie for a gentleman of my acquaintance). If you are

on a budget, or want something to use until you figure out what you "really" want, you might try a tunic. Somewhat fancier, but very easy to make and very comfortable is a long (knee-length or longer) Eastern European or "Cossack" coat (a style which is actually contemporary with the fencing era). Just about any male style (and some female styles) can be adapted to fencing.

### Construction modifications

How do you turn a regular pattern into one for rapier gear? The first is the most basic--make sure to take into consideration the extra layers. This means you should probably add a little extra room along all the seams; it's especially important to make the armholes and wrist opening larger if they are close-fitting. Also take into consideration the effect heavier materials will have on the way the garment fits and moves. Most fencers I have talked to do not like to fence in tight-fitting sleeves--they especially need mobility around the shoulder joint. Tight sleeves which are fine for a regular-wear doublet may tear out quickly in one for fencing. Furthermore, tight sleeves are quite uncomfortable in hot, humid weather. Loose fitting sleeves are a Good Thing. Recently, I attempted to authorize in schlager wearing my splendid new Cavalier garb. I'd noticed the garb--more specifically, the fairly tight-fitting arms-- forced a few adjustments to my epee style, but nothing I couldn't work around. I'd never tried to fence schlager in the new garb. To my surprise and consternation, the garb was so restrictive in the upper arm area that it hindered me from handling the weapon effectively and was actually

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wearing me out. I was unsuccessful in my attempt. Two weeks later, I gave it a try in my usual Cos-sack coat and had no problems at all. The moral of the story? You should not sacrifice style for comfort --but if you plan ahead, you should not need to.

If you're making a doublet, check the waistline of your pattern. Many doublets have high waistlines because originally the breeches or slops were tied right into them; if you do not compensate for this somehow, you may end up with dangerously under-protected areas when you raise your arms. You can compensate by lowering the waistline somewhat, by adding skirting to the doublet, or by doing the historical thing and tying the two garments together. Remember also to make the neckhole bigger, so that a hood may be tucked in

underneath.

Your next concern is the closures. It is perfectly possible to make regular button closures down the front--but don't forget to add a placket in behind them. Stitch down the placket so that if a sword should slip between two buttons, it will be stopped by a solid seam. Place your velcro or zipper or whatever on the other side. You can also adapt patterns

so that the two front pieces overlap enough to be safe, or you can even make "underwear armour" which is designed to be worn under other clothing, so that it looks like you're fencing in a shirt and light jerkin.

Now, for the actual sewing. ALWAYS double-seam all seams for rapier gear, and it's not a bad idea to triple-seam in areas that are under stress, like the arm-screens. Make sure when you seam that all layers are included in the seam. Sergers are terrific for rapier armour--but I'd still recommend straight-seaming after you've done your serging for extra strength. ALWAYS use good quality thread for rapier armour (not the 4/\$1 cheap stuff--resist the temptation! It's worth it!) If your fabric is fraying a lot, invest in some Fraycheck. When it comes time to add any ornamentation, make sure it's tacked down solidly. (A warning: braid trim, unless it's actually braided like a pig-tail, has a tendency to unravel after a few pokes with a sword). If you're creative, you can produce fake slashes and such for doublets, but always take care to insure that there are no little holes where a blade could slip in.

While you're at it, take some scraps and make up a test swatch of the fabrics in the body of your garment. Might come in handy if someone ever wants to test your armour with a broken foil...

### **An addendum: Making an effective cloak for rapier**

When making a cloak for the art of

defence, you are trying to do two things at once: to make an attractive clothing accessory and to make an effective off-hand parrying device. Of these two goals, the second is most important. A fencing cloak which does not flow well or is either too light or too heavy is useless. Not all fabrics are suitable for a fencing cloak. After a fair bit of experimentation, I have found that the best combination for me is one layer of middleweight upholstery material (not too stiff) backed with a layer of middleweight cotton or bengalene. Along the circular outer edge, I attach upholstery cording--the nice fairly thick kind--for added weight; it also looks nice and makes the cloak flow well. I have found that the optimum length for a fencing cloak is about the length of the arm or slightly longer

(which also makes it look nice if you actually wear it). Now, this combination might not work for you--but my cloak seems to get borrowed a lot! If you are able to, test drive potential cloak materials in the fabric store by giving them a shake or a swirl. Some fabrics just do not "flow" well. Remember also that if you've got your heart set on a particular fabric that's too light, you can always add a middle layer between the outer layer and the backing. A good cloak makes fencing this style a lot easier and a lot more effective, but everyone has different preferences. Be willing to experiment and find what works for you.

Good Luck!



*Some desperados from Festival of the Rose*