

Documentation and Research for Arts and Science

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Once someone decides to jump into the A and S realm in the SCA the first questions are usually one of the following:

How do I decide what to make? What should I make? How do I get started?

Where do I find the documentation? What is documentation?

What is research and where do I go to do the research?

This handout is not about getting started in A and S but will hopefully address the last questions: How, what and where are documentation and research?

DOCUMENTATION VS RESEARCH

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary research is the studious inquiry or examination; *especially* : investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws.

Documentation according to Merriam Webster Dictionary is the act or an instance of furnishing or authenticating with documents

Simply put research is the collecting of information about a particular subject and documentation is the subsequent write up.

RESEARCH for the SCA

Research in the SCA is not far different from doing research in the mundane world. We are all after the same thing: answers. What makes it difficult in the SCA to do research is the lack of availability of primary sources, the funding to do in depth investigations and sometimes more importantly finding a unique subject or twist on a subject. With many people doing research into the same things, it becomes a challenge to come up with original research. The key is to find sources that have not been as widely tapped

Getting Started

It can not be stressed enough that reading is the first key and usually the major key to doing research. Start with general knowledge books and articles. Use well known and familiar resources. A good example is the series of books published by the Museum of London, which are well known within the A and S community in the SCA. Once you have general knowledge of your chosen subject its time to begin more in-depth study.

Finding Sources

Sources can be found in many different places: bibliographies in books, citations from other articles, museum catalogs. One source will usually lead to another source. Some of them will be useful; others may just add a small piece of the puzzle. Inter-library loan will be your friend, especially for those hard to find and expensive books.

Primary vs. Secondary Sources

The biggest confusion with any research is Primary vs. Secondary sources. A primary source is an extant item, a first hand account, a painting or manuscript. A secondary source is an interpretation of a primary source, for example a book about Italian clothing. In general it is always best to use primary sources both for documentation and for research. When you use secondary sources you are always using someone else's opinion. They are useful for backing up your own theories.

Keeping track

Each person will have their own way to keep track of their findings. Some keep a notebook, others use index cards. The biggest piece of advice I can give is to make note of the citations, including page numbers. Nothing is worse than trying to backtrack to find a citation.

What to do with the results

Once you have pulled together your information and formulated your theories the next decision is what to do with it. Are you going to try to make an item based around your research? Are you using your research to prove how a certain item was made or a certain way something was used? (Experimental archeology). The end result for the purposes of the A and S community is normally in the form of either a research article or documentation.

DOCUMENTATION

When people in the SCA talk about documentation they are either talking about the ability to prove something or the actual write up, usually for a competition.

In general documentation is rather like a lab report. It has an abstract, introduction, materials list, procedure and conclusion. It needs to be short enough that a judge can read it quickly but detailed enough that it answers any questions the reader may have when they are looking at your item. It gives the background for the work you are displaying, explaining it and making it and your procedures more understandable to the observer.

It is generally accepted (at least in the East Kingdom) that documentation should be around 2 pages of written text (not including pictures and bibliography/citations). It needs to include citations and a bibliography and give credit (if you use other people work to document your particular item).

FURTHER READING

East Kingdom Arts and Science page on Competition and Display Resources
<http://www.eastkingdom.org/artsci/cdr.html>

Mistress Anne Liese's article on Step by Step Documentation
http://www.geocities.com/anne_liese_w/ASComp/ASCompDoc.htm

Master Henry's Article on Documentation for the Arts and Sciences
http://thescholarsgarret.com/opusculi/A_and_S_Docs/

Karen Larsdatter's Article "Documentation is Not a Dirty Word"
http://www.geocities.com/karen_larsdatter/documentation.htm

Karen Larsdatter's Article on Using the Internet for Research and Documentation
http://www.geocities.com/karen_larsdatter/using_the_internet.htm

Guides to Writing Research Papers (including citation information)
<http://academic.bowdoin.edu/WritingGuides/>
<http://webster.comnet.edu/mla/index.shtml>
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/additional.html>
<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/PrimarySources.html>
<http://www.library.yale.edu/ref/err/primsrscs.htm>