

Shire of Al-Sahid Newsletter

Scorpion Tales



Around the Shire

August Shire Meeting and Craft Day

This month's Shire and Craft meeting will be **Sunday August 26 starting at noon** (12 pm) at Sir Killian's and THL Teka's. The craft is polishing site tokens, to be followed by the Shire meeting. This close to War it's vital that everyone make it who possibly can. For address and directions, please email kiltek@earthlink.net.

Fighter Practice

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

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July Officer Reports



Seneschal: We have put in a bid for Crown for Spring 2009 (3/21). Requested dates for our 2008 Ann. are 3/29 or 3/15, and 4/4 for

2009.

Arts & Sciences: Not present.

Castellan: Nothing to report.

Chronicler: Needs submissions as always! Waiting on graphics to mock-up Shire business cards.

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Hesperia Days

Our demo will be at the Hesperia Days parade and fair of September 22.

Highland War

Please see our Seneschal's Corner for more details.

Projects

- Kingdom camp walls – on hold until after Hesperia Days.
- Business Cards – THL Caitlin is waiting on art.
- Dragonwing – The new one arrived! We are now the proud owners of two Dragowings.
- Full inventory for Kingdom Domesday — we need to present a full inventory of non-perishable items to Kingdom by Christmas. Since most of our materials are already inventories in separate lists, it should not be a huge project. Since we were going to clean out the trailer in October anyway, we'll inventory what is left.

Marshal Warranting — The Earl Marshal wants all marshals to be re-warranted by Sept. 1. Her Excellency is not kidding.

"All the world's a
stage,
And all the men
and women merely
players.
They have their
exits and their
entrances,
And one man in his
time plays many
parts,
His acts being
seven ages."

—Shakespeare

Upcoming Kingdom Events and Anniversaries

- 9/8 — Fall Crown in Altavia
- 9/15,16 — Collegium Caidis in Lyondemere. THL Caitlin is teaching "The Dramatic Bard." If any other Shire member is teaching, please let me know so I can publish it in *Scorpion Tales*.
- 9/29 — Angels Anniversary
- 10/2-8 — Great Western War

Happenings Around the Shire

- Congratulations to Lord Davi for receiving his Crescent Sword!
- And another congratulations to Gregory for his Award of Arms!
- Upcoming Craft Days — All with Shire meeting to follow: 1) Token cleaning and polishing in August (8/26), 2) Knowne World geography in September (9/23), 3) Mead Brewing in October along with trailer clean-up (10/23), 4) a persona tea/feast for November.
- Congratulations to Holly and Nathan for their new house!

Notes on the War (Highland, That Is)



Most of July's Shire meeting was dedicated to discussing Highland War. Some of the highlights include:

- **Youth Combat.** Lady Jane is prepared to run both Youth Combat and Youth Heavies, but if there are not enough entrants in Youth Heavies then everyone can fight in Youth Combat.
- **Iron Chef and Brewing.** THL Caitlin will oversee both contests. Iron Chef contestants are THL Illuminata (last year's returning champion) and our own Lady Blase. The brewing is open to multiple entrants.
- **Finalized schedule.** Lady Jane has the revised

(July Officer reports, Continued from page 1)

Constable: Not present.

Exchequer: Not present, reported balance through Lady Jane.

Herald: Not present.

List: Not present.

Marshal: Will repair Marshal staffs

Children's: Planning for Highland War, including a treasure hunt for children.

Presentations: Not present. No presentations since last meeting reported by Lady Jane.

Chirurgeon: Not present.

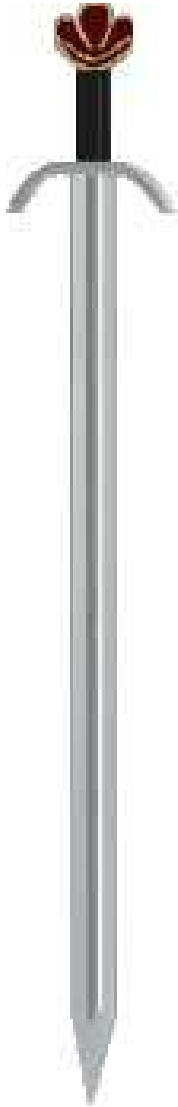
Webwright: Not present.

We encourage all Shire members to attend Shire meetings whenever possible, especially when

schedule. It is very similar to last year's. One of the changes will be an announcement gathering on Sunday evening where we can announce contest winners and give our various thank-you's. There probably will not be Royal Presence.

- **Dog coursing.** Master James of the Lake requested dog coursing. With the understanding that the Guild will run it, they can use the large open space in the middle of the campsite ring.
- **Bardic.** Open Arms Bardic will be open for performances Sat. and Sun. afternoons. THL Caitlin will ask Lady Belas-set if she will open Open Arms Bardic to Lord Felix's "No ****, There I Was... SCA Stories Bardic."
- **Goggles.** Due to the enthusiastic nature of combat archery, marshals are required to wear goggles or safety glasses. The Shire will pony up \$300 to purchase a dozen of the recommended pairs.
- **Hay bales.** Lady Blase will research rent vs. buy alternatives for hay bales.
- **Children's activities.** Lady Marina and Holly are planning a wonderful schedule of children's activities.
- **Everything else.** We are in good shape for War! Everyone be at the August Shire meeting for last-minute planning and token making.
- *On to War!*

Seneschal's Corner



Lady Jane de Sealynn

With Highland War fast upon us I hope everyone is ready to do their part. We are planning to do the meals like last year and if you want to join in please contact myself. I think everything is falling into place.

Hesperia days is September 22. So far we have planed to march in the Parade and just show up 45 minutes before the demo to pitch a pop up, set an Eric and get ready. They are requesting a longer demo so we have been talking about adding dance and rapier. Greg is waiting for an answer from Park and Rec. About what we want to do, should know by the next meeting.

Great Western War is coming up

fast. If you have not made your reservations do it quick or pay full price. Also the pre Reg. helps them with planning the war and all that is needed. We are planning to be there on Tuesday Oct. 2, I need a head count if I am to stake out space for everyone.

Hope summer is treating everyone warmly and you are staying out of the heat.

Jane

13 Good Reasons Why Chocolate Mousse Isn't Medieval.



Lady Jehanne de Huguenin

(Reprinted with permission)

A heavily disguised lesson in some aspects of medieval cuisine

For some reason, if I ask the Herald for suggestions as to what I should make for a potluck, he usually says "Chocolate mousse." To which I invariably answer "It isn't period," or, occasionally, "It's not period, dammit!!" I am sometimes tempted to assume that the Herald's harping on this theme is deliberately unhelpful and designed merely to irritate. However, mature reflection suggests that such a chivalrous and noble individual could never stoop to those depths. He must therefore be sorely afflicted with (a) a liking for chocolate mousse, and (b) ignorance. While I am unable to indulge (a) within the scope of this society, I can certainly address (b), which I do below, at some length.

As an added bonus, at no extra charge, and for purposes of discussion, I reproduce below my favourite Chocolate Mousse recipe. But straitly do I charge all gentles of the Shire to pray remember that it is a bastard and upstart recipe, having no place in our Current Middle Ages; for reasons which I hope I shall be able to demonstrate.

Very Un-medieval Chocolate Mousse

250 ml caster sugar
250 ml cocoa powder
125 ml strong black coffee
4 eggs
250 ml cream
dash of rum or brandy
50g walnuts or pecan nuts

Stir sugar, coffee and cocoa over low heat until well mixed and smooth. Beat egg yolks until pale and thick and beat in chocolate mix. Cool to room temperature. Whip cream to soft peaks and fold into chocolate mixture with nuts and rum/brandy (nuts and alcohol are optional). Beat half of egg whites until stiff and fold into chocolate mixture (also optional). Refrigerate and allow to set.

Other variations on the chocolate mousse concept use chocolate instead of cocoa, or set the mix with gelatine.

This discussion is based on my experience of medieval cookery, which I define for my own purposes as ending somewhere around late 15th century or early 16th. From the 16th century onwards, the development of cooking techniques brings the recipes and concepts much closer to our familiar modern cuisine, and they lose their distinctive medieval character to some extent. Chocolate mousse has perhaps the most in common with an Elizabethan illusion food called "A dysshe of Snowe", but I don't define

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"I am constant as
the northern star,
Of whose true-
fix'd and resting
quality
There is no fellow
in the firmament."

—from *Julius
Caesar*

(Mousse, Continued from page 5)

that as a medieval dish. (I've reproduced it at the end of this article, just for fun).

Chocolate mousse? It's not medieval. Here's why:

1. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "mousse" appeared first in the late 19th century (1892, a recipe for Chestnut Mousse in an Encyclopedia of Cookery). The OED isn't great on cookbooks, and there are probably earlier examples that they haven't found, but not that much earlier: 1892 is very far out of our period indeed. The OED suggests that the word "mousse" developed from "moss", which is "a kind of fine sugar work, made by confectioners, in imitation of moss" (Edward Phillips, *The New World of English Words*, 1706). So we could have a mousse in the 19th century or a moss in the 18th and probably 17th. Still way out of the SCA period.

2. Chocolate. This was discovered in South America by the Spanish explorers of the early sixteenth century; to the best of my (admittedly limited) knowledge chocolate or cocoa do not appear as an ingredient in any cookery books of our period. Cortez and the boys were familiar with it, but it took a while to permeate to the rest of society. In 1604 a dictionary definition describes it as a drink of the South American Indians; it has appeared as a Western confectionary by 1659, at six shillings and sixpence per pound for the best sort. It would have been far too expensive for extensive use as an ingredient in sweet dishes.

3. Cocoa powder. This is the crushed cocoa bean with the fat and moisture removed. When chocolate did start to become known in the West, it was as a drink. The Mayans used

to drink chocolate with boiling water and spices, including chilli; these were added to a crushed paste of the beans. Spanish missionaries added sugar, cream and vanilla to the cocoa bean paste, producing the cocoa drink beloved of the seventeenth and eighteenth century nobility, who drank it in the morning when they woke up. Cocoa powder is a comparatively modern invention, and its original users would not have known it flavoured with sugar.

4. Caster sugar is a modern concept: while finely-ground sugar was undoubtedly known to the medieval cook, any recipe requiring it would specify that it needed to be specially ground and sifted to make it finer. In my experience of medieval cooking, finely-ground sugar is generally used only in later-period or Renaissance recipes for sweets such as sugar plate.

5. There is a lot of sugar in this recipe. In the bulk of medieval recipes, sugar is treated more as a spice than an ingredient; for example, it is one of the components of the spice mix known as *poudre douce* (the Goodman of Paris's version has sugar, ginger, cinnamon, cloves and grains of paradise). Most recipes calling for large quantities of sugar, such as sugar plate, seem to be Renaissance or Elizabethan dishes; these are much closer to modern cuisine, and are not true medieval foods.

6. Coffee. This was known in the West in our period, as a strange concoction drunk by the Turks. It was only in the seventeenth century that it became a fashionable drink. It spread pretty quickly: Samuel Pepys describes frequent trips to coffee houses in his diary of 1664 (in one such visit he records drinking "chocolata" as well as coffee). But coffee does

not appear as an ingredient in any medieval recipe I have ever seen, and even as a beverage its use is much later than our period of interest.

7. Rum or brandy. Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat maintains that distilled spirits were known to the Arabs for centuries before the West caught on; perhaps as early as 450 A.D. She also claims that the eau-de-vie made by the French in the fifteen century was a distilled essence of wine, while the Irish were doing something similar with cereal products. These were not widely drunk, however, and I have certainly never come across a medieval recipe of any sort which calls for a spirit ingredient. I suspect the stuff was too precious.

8. The melting of the cocoa and sugar in the liquid of the coffee is unlike any method I've ever met in medieval cooking, with the exception of some 14th-century Andalusian recipes for lemon or pomegranate syrup (as a beverage). In period dishes of my experience, a heated syrup is far more likely to be honey than a sugar syrup. Also, cocoa beans were roasted and ground and boiling water added to make the seventeenth century beverage; the powder was not heated in the water.

9. Beat the egg yolks until pale and thick Whisk the whites until stiff? This method of introducing air into a mix was apparently unknown to the medieval cook. The most we have is an instruction to pass the egg through a strainer, and this doesn't seem to introduce air at all. The OED records the use of a "whisk" for beating egg whites, but the earliest mention—1666 - was Boyle's *Origine of Formes and Qualities*, a basic physics text rather than a culinary treatise. It's only with Hannah Glass's cookbook in 1747 that we have an injunction to "beat the whites of the eggs up well with a whisk". Not in our period.

10. While egg yolks and whites were often separated, it was usually only in order to use one or the other. There seems to be

no concept of separating the egg only to whisk the white and re-combine them, in the body of medieval recipes.

11. Folding? Most medieval recipes require mixing or beating; they don't ever specify the very careful and specific process of folding an aerated substance back into the mixture so as not to flatten the introduced air. If air is to be introduced into a mixture, it's by prolonged beating of the whole mix, sometimes for hours; not by whisking and folding. (A good example of a beaten mixture is Prince-Bisket (Hugh Plat's *Delights for Ladies*, 1609), a light, aniseed-flavoured cookie with a texture like rather tough and glutinous meringue).

12. Some mousse recipes call for gelatine. While there are jellies described in the medieval recipe books, these are meat jellies, using the natural gelatinised broth of the meat (e.g. Harleian MS. 279 - Gelye de chare, a fancy dish of jellied pork and chicken; there are also several recipes for meat jellies in the 14th century Goodman of Paris). The only jelly-like sweet recipes I know are dishes known as a leach or leche, effectively a milk jelly (e.g. A leche of divers colours, from Murrell's *Daily Exercise for Ladies and Gentlewomen*, 1617). They are set with isinglass, a gelatine made from the bladders of fish (yech), and they are Elizabethan rather than medieval recipes.

13. Chocolate mousse is a dessert. This means it's a light, sweet dish served at the end of a meal, either on its own or with other light, sweet dishes. This was not a characteristic meal order in the Middle Ages. Sweet dishes - fruit tarts, cream custards, etc - tended to be served as part of a meat course. The closest we have to a dessert course is the final course, which usually consisted of spiced wine, nuts, oranges, and wafers (a sort

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The Creation of Al-Sahid



By Miranda

(Miranda wrote this original story for a bardic competition at our last Anniversary. The story is charming, and I wish you could all have heard her delightful delivery!)

Long, long ago there was a wise, old Egyptian nomad man named Ali Zamm Zamm that would travel from place to place to teach and gain knowledge. He would learn the language of every village he visited, and teach them treasured knowledge that would help the villages in more ways than can be counted.

On a day much like this one, unaware of what his future had in store, he ventured into an Arabic village with no name. He thought that this village was going to be just like every other village he visited, but he was wrong. He would have more of an effect on this un-named village than any other that he had visited in the past.

A young depressed child was the first to see this old wise man. It was said that the moment that the child set eyes on him her whole life changed, she was no longer a depressed child, but a bright spirited child. When the child told the rest of the village people about the wise man's gifts, he was instantly accepted into the village.

At first, no one could understand the wise man, but eventually he learned to speak their language. The first thing he said is that he was originally from a saiid (desert) in Egypt. And that's how they knew him....the wise man of Saiid.

He told the village of his secrets and of how he can chant for water, summon wind and

heal wildlife. The magic they were most interested in was learning the chant for water. (On account they already had plenty of the other two.) The only thing they didn't have much of was water. So the wise man told the village people that he would do the chant of the water spirit for the first few months until he was sure that they would be able to do it them selves.

Every afternoon he would set up his sacred circle and do the chant. But the only catch for this chant was that the chant had to be done at a certain time, and if it wasn't, you would not get new water for the next day. But you would still have water; it just won't be flowing high and strong as it did the previous day. Not a problem. Right? For the first few months the village was in paradise, they now had everything.

One afternoon, the wise man was preparing to do the chant, but he heard a noise no louder than a whisper of wind in the corner of his room. He turned to see what it was. It was a dieing scorpion! He knew that if he didn't help the creature now, it would die. So he thought that he would save the scorpion instead of doing the water chant. He knew that tomorrow there would still be water, it just wouldn't be as high and strong as it usually was. He saved the scorpion and went to bed not thinking of what the next day had in store for him.

The next morning, the very same child that saw the wise man for the first time was wandering around the village. It seemed like a normal morning. Wind blowing, birds chirping, and the sound of water flowing. But wait, once the child focused on the water, she noticed something, the water sounded weak! The child turned and looked

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(Story, Continued from page 8)

where the water was and screamed louder than any human being had every heard. In a matter of seconds the whole village surrounded the young child to see why she screamed. It took literally half a second for the whole village to know why she screamed. Once they noticed...they all gasped in horror! The wise man then came out to see what all the commotion was about. As soon as he stepped out of his tent, all of the village people turned and glared at him in the most disgusting looks.

“You! You made our water go weak! Why? Why?” Screamed the child.

“You obviously didn’t do the chant of the water yesterday! You have disappointed us! Why didn’t you do it yesterday?” Screeched a woman.

“When I was preparing to do the chant I heard a noise. I turned and looked to see what is the noise was. It was a dying scorpion that needed help immediately, or it would die. So I helped the scorpion instead of doing the chant. I figured that tomorrow there would still be water; it just would not be flowing high and strong as it was. Which was true... there is still water here.” The wise man said calmly.

“A scorpion? A lousy scorpion? You helped a scorpion instead

of singing the chant? We can’t count on you to do your responsibilities every day.” Yelled a man

Then the village leader came in the center of the argument.

“This man is right. We can’t count on you to sing the chant every day. Therefore, you are banished! Declared the leader.

So the wise man packed his bags and went on his way. What the village people failed to realize is that they had not yet learned the chant of the water, and that they would have to go back to scavenging for water. A few weeks passed and the village was suffering. But the wise man just continued his journey to teach people what he knows about the world. It was no bother to him.

Soon the people realized that they were wrong by banishing the old wise man of Saiid. So they decided to go looking for him in hope that he would forgive them for their poor judgment. The child had the wonderful idea of making a banner with a picture of a scorpion on it in honor of the scorpion the wise man had saved the afternoon he was supposed to do the chant.

After the banner was made the village people went from village to village looking for the wise man. But he was far ahead of them. On

(Continued on page 10)



(Miranda's story, Continued from page 9)

their journey to find the wise man they came upon a few European villages. The European villages would ask the villagers what the name of their village or group is. But the village didn't have a name. All the village said was that they were looking an old Egyptian wise man named Ali Zamm Zamm from Saiid. But none of the Europeans completely understood what they meant. So eventually all the groups that the village visited recognized them with a scorpion banner and as the shire looking for Sahide.

The wise man heard of this new named village and he instantly knew who they were. So the wise man started looking for them as well. One hot day while the village was resting, they heard a heavenly whisper, then heard water flowing, saw trees growing, and animals running. The people instantly looked in the direction of the sound and saw the old wise man from Saiid. They all bounced with joy and shrieked with laughter.

"We are really sorry that we were so mean to you" said the young child.

"We were wrong in banishing you from our village. You have made such a positive impact on our village, and we didn't know it. You have changed our lives. Please accept our apology and teach us your precious secrets." Pleaded the leader.

Then the wise man said softly "I may not understand why you guys were so mean to me, but I do understand that you guys are truly sorry for what you did, and I accept your apology. I will teach you all I know so you will be perfectly content with your living environments."

"In honor of you, we will settle here where you have made this paradise." Said the leader

"Yes, but what will our name be?" Asked the child.

The leader thought for a few seconds then declared "Well, the wise man's name is Ali....so al.....and he is from saiid....so Sahide. Besides everyone knows us as sahid. So we will forever be called the shire of al-Sahid."

The wise man was so touched by this act that he decided to settle down with this new-named shire. And when he announced his new settlement, the shire learned a very important lesson that moment: everyone makes mistakes and no matter how big they are, the ones who love you will always forgive you.

(Mousse, Continued from page 7)

of a cross between a waffle and a biscuit - a sweet or savoury batter cooked on a hot plate to make a thin, crispy biscuit

Sources

- Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, History of Food.
- Madge Lorwin, Dining with William Shakespeare
- The Oxford English Dictionary, second edition.
- The Goodman of Paris (1393), tr. Eileen Power.



Her Majesty gifts Lord Davi with his Crescent Sword scroll



Our newest Lord, Gregory

Shire Birthdays



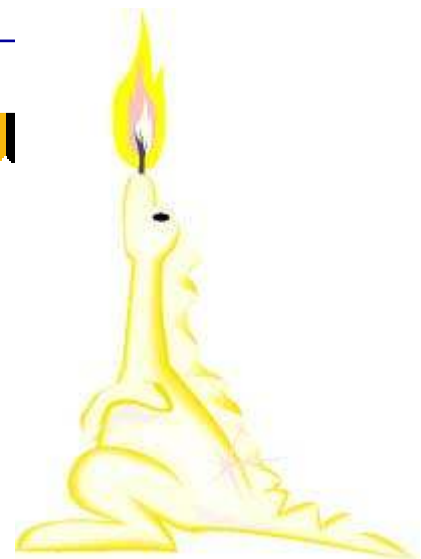
Gregor

8/12

From the Chronicler: quick note on birthdays.

If I've got your birthday wrong or not at all — which is not surprising given my level of organizational skills — PLEASE let me know! You can reach me at chrislynnnet@gmail.com.

Happy birthday!!



Pictures by Lady Marina



Lord Fritz and his lady wife, Lady Miranda



Sir Killian and his lady wife THL Teka



Lady Alexis and Miranda