Research and Documentation

Kinehild le Librari (mka Claire Knudsen-Latta)
cynehild@westkingdom.org

Goal

The goal of this class is to introduce the student to the skills necessary to produce well-researched and well-documented entries in Arts and Sciences Competitions within the Society for Creative Anachronism.

An Important Caveat

There are no rules in the SCA about how "period" or not your impression is, it is only asked that you make an attempt. If you hate research, then there is a place for you here (though this may not be the class for you). Conversely, if your gig is to do all the research then there is a place for you here too. The SCA is a big tent and that's why it works. However, I would strongly encourage you to not represent as authentic that which you have not researched yourself or seen discussed in the reliable research of others.

Research

Mmm… Research.

Types of Sources

In researching a subject, you will find MANY different types of sources, which can be broadly categorized as Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary.

PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TERTIARY
Letter from King Henry II to Pope Alexander III	Journal Article on the Letter and its impact	Book on the death of Thomas Becket
Herjolfsnes № 63	Woven Into the Earth	Encyclopedia of Extant Garments

Primary Sources

Primary sources are original materials. They are from the time period involved and have not been filtered through interpretation or evaluation. Primary sources are original materials on which other research is based. They are usually the first formal appearance of results in physical, print or electronic format. They present original thinking, report a discovery, or share new information. (https://subjectguides.esc.edu/researchskillstutorial/primary, this website also discusses secondary and tertiary sources)

- Artifacts (e.g. coins, plant specimens, fossils, furniture, tools, clothing, all from the time under study);
- Personal Diaries and letters;
- Original Documents (i.e. birth certificate, will, marriage license, trial transcript);
- Proceedings of Meetings, conferences and symposia;
- Records of organizations, government agencies (e.g. annual report, treaty, constitution, government document);
- Works of art, architecture, literature, and music (e.g., paintings, sculptures, musical scores, buildings, novels, poems).

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are less easily defined than primary sources. Generally, they are accounts written after the fact with the benefit of hindsight. They are interpretations and evaluations of primary sources. Secondary sources are not evidence, but rather commentary on and discussion of evidence. However, what some define as a secondary source, others define as a tertiary source. Context is everything.

- Bibliographies (also considered tertiary);
- Biographical works;
- Commentaries, criticisms;
- Dictionaries, Encyclopedias (also considered tertiary);
- Histories;
- Journal articles (depending on the disciple can be primary);
- Magazine and newspaper articles (this distinction varies by discipline);
- Monographs, other than fiction and autobiography;
- Textbooks (also considered tertiary);
- Web site (also considered primary).

Tertiary Sources

Tertiary sources consist of information which is a distillation and collection of primary and secondary sources.

- Almanacs;
- Bibliographies (also considered secondary);
- Chronologies;
- Dictionaries and Encyclopedias (also considered secondary);
- Directories;
- Fact books;
- Guidebooks;
- Indexes, abstracts, bibliographies used to locate primary and secondary sources;
- Manuals;
- Textbooks (also be secondary).

Where to Find Sources

Alaska is a difficult place to be a medievalist, our libraries are not particularly resplendent with the appropriate literature. However, I encourage you to make use of what there is. When using a Library of Congress system, try the D101-D243 section for general medieval history (DA140-199 is my favorite). If you've got a Dewey system, try 940.1 and 940.2 to start. If you can't find a particular source in your local library, be aware that you may have access to an Inter Library Loan (ILL) program (God's gift to the researcher). Anchorage Library's ILL program is discussed on the library's website: http://libguides.anchoragelibrary.org/. Wasilla also has an ILL program (http://www.cityofwasilla.com/departments-divisions/library) as does Fairbanks (http://fnsblibrary.org/). I was unable to determine if Palmer has an ILL program, but Palmer residents should have access to the Wasilla program through the Mat-Su Library Partnership. Members of the SCA are also a good resource for books. Be aware, however, that failure to return borrowed books, or damage to books, may result in pain and dismemberment. Holders of Anchorage Public Library cards have access to the mighty EBSCOHost, a search engine for peer-reviewed journals which includes full pdf documents from a number of medieval and early modern history-related journals. Your other option is to go online and that can present problems if you don't evaluate your sources carefully.

Helpful Websites
This is a **_VERY_** short list.

Good Websites

Digitized Text Websites
These websites are a great resource for off-copyright books and similar scanned sources. Searching can be a pain, but there are some real gems out there.

Archive.org - http://www.archive.org
Project Gutenberg - http://www.gutenberg.org/
Google Books - http://books.google.com/

Text Archives
Unlike the sources above, these websites don't provide complete copies of books, but instead archive snippets on many topics. These snippets include translated primary sources. The ORB has a great section on urban history.

Internet Medieval Sourcebook – http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.asp
The ORB – http://the-orb.net (Be aware that this page is no longer being updated and you may run across broken links.)

Image Archives
These websites contain images or links to images of primary sources, including artifacts and manuscripts.

Digitalised Image Collection from the Bodleian Libraries Special Collections – http://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/
Early Manuscripts at Oxford University – http://image.ox.ac.uk/
Bildindex – http://www.bildindex.de/#|home
Larsdatter's Linkpages – http://www.larsdatter.com/sitemap.htm

There are many, *many* more good websites out there. We'll talk about evaluating sources here in a minute.

*Websites to Use with _Caution_*

Wikipedia – OMG! I'm really putting *Wikipedia* on here?! And I call myself academic… Here's the thing though, Wikipedia has done some growing up and is no longer the wild west of the research world. Don't use it as a foundational source and don't trust it to always be right, but if you need a quick introduction to a topic, or a bibliography to mine to get you started, it's usually got your back. *Usually*.
http://www.wikipedia.en

Pinterest – Like Wikipedia, Pinterest can be a great source of inspiration and a good organizational tool that allows you to collect images found around the web in one place. HOWEVER, just because something *looks* medieval, doesn't mean it is and Pinterest users are notorious for attributing images to the wrong time and place. Still, there are many pretty pictures…
http://www.pinterest.com

Evaluating Sources

Just as there are good dogs and bad dogs, there are good sources and bad sources; the trick for the researcher is to learn how to determine which is which.

A good place to start is to ask yourself a series of questions, bear in mind that you may not be able to answer them all for each source 'type'.

1. Who produced the piece?
2. What are the author/artist's credentials?
3. Is the author/artist reputable?
4. Can you determine the author/artist's bias?
5. What is the piece about?
6. How does the subject relate to the author/artist (e.g. are they a patron, an enemy, a revered holy figure, & c.)?
7. Who is the piece being produced for?
8. What is the context of the piece's production?

Questions below relate mostly to secondary sources, but can apply to certain primary sources.

9. Who published the piece?
10. Is the publisher reputable?
11. Can the information be confirmed (i.e. did they cite their sources)?
12. How current is the research or when was the research most recently revised?
13. What type of information is presented (e.g. fact, opinion, propaganda, & c.)?
14. Is the research logical (i.e. do the conclusions follow from the facts presented)?
15. Does the research fit in with other current research?

If the majority of the questions cannot be answered in a way that engenders trust in the source, then the source may not be good and you may not want to base your conclusions on it. If you do include the source, I encourage you to discuss, in your documentation, your concerns and how they affected your conclusions.

How I Approach My Research

I like to start my research with a question. For example: What was the life of women like in the medieval period?

Step 1: Evaluate the question.
Is this a question that can be answered reliably? Some things we just won't ever know, and it's better to acknowledge that from the outset then spend a lifetime (or week) in futile searching. However, the life of women seems pretty safe, so let's proceed.[1]

Step 2: Narrow the question.
The lives of medieval women is an extremely broad topic. Even if we exclude the early modern period from the medieval definition, we are still talking about around 500-800 years of history and an entire continent of geography. So let's narrow the scope to a question that could be reasonably answered in a 5-7 page paper: What was the life of women like in late Anglo-Saxon Mercia?

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[1] My first idea for a sample question was on Medieval skis. Guess what *isn't* an easy question to research?

Step 3: Speak to the Google (or [insert other search engine here])
The Google is my friend, especially the Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com/). Start with a broad search, for example "Women Mercia". This should turn up a few hits to get you started (in this case, "Political women in Mercia, eighth to early tenth centuries"), but it will also turn up things that are of no use to you (e.g. "Human papillomavirus and penile cancers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: HPV typing and clinical features"). So, take note of the best hits from the first few pages, narrow your search and go again (adding "Anglo-Saxon" will, in this case, do the trick).

Step 4: Evaluate my sources
Once I've collected a few sources (anywhere between three and ten), I'll start evaluating what I've found and weeding out what is useless to me. It's important not to automatically exclude a good source that presents a conclusion different from what you were hoping for. The ability to synthases various viewpoints is the mark of a good research. As I'm evaluating, I am usually also continuing to look for more information, because more is usually better.

Step 5: Firm up my thesis
So, you start with a question, you do ~~lots of~~ some light reading, a bit more reading, a bit more digging, and then, based on your evidence, develop a thesis that you can support. For example, "Elite women in Anglo-Saxon England were active in political life."

Step 6: WRITE
You've got your thesis, you've got your research, now comes my favorite part – WRITING! Start by clearly stating your thesis, then support it, then write your essay. A good way to organize your paper is to use the classic five paragraph essay.

1. Introduction
    a. Opening salvo
    b. Background
    c. Thesis
2. Body Paragraph 1
    a. Topic sentence supporting your thesis
    b. Supporting details for topic sentence
    c. Linking language
3. Body Paragraph 2
    a. Topic sentence supporting your thesis
    b. Supporting details for topic sentence
    c. Linking language
4. Body Paragraph 3
    a. Topic sentence supporting your thesis
    b. Supporting details for topic sentence
    c. Linking language
5. Conclusion
    a. Restate your thesis
    b. Concluding remarks

The Three Source Rule
In general, when I'm looking at an item I wish to recreate, especially if it's from a manuscript, I try to ensure that I can find at least two other similar examples from the same period. For example, if I find a picture from a fourteenth century French illumination of a dress with puffs at the shoulders and wide bell sleeves in Manuscript A I will look in other manuscripts from a similar time period and location (let's call them Manuscript B [early 15th C. French] and Manuscript C [14th C. Flemish]) for a similar garment. If I can't find it, or something similar enough that I'm comfortable with it, then I usually either add it to the fantasy pile or ditch the idea.

A Pet Peeve
It is often the habit of members of the SCA to apply terms more broadly than might be appropriate. For example, we often use 'Viking' to refer to all Scandinavians from approximately 600 – 1000 CE, and 'Anglo-Saxon' to refer to the Germanic inhabitants of England before 1066. The problem with this type of terminology is that often it leads to confusion later down the line. For example, when someone says "Pieces A and B are both Viking" what is heard is that the two pieces are historically and aesthetically compatible, when in reality Piece A is 9th century Swedish and Piece B is 11th century Icelandic (and therefore not really compatible). Worse still is when Piece A is 5th century Kentish and Piece B is 10th Century Mercian. Consider the visual dissonance that would be created if you wore a 19th century shirtwaist with 20th century Hammer pants.

Documentation
Read the judging sheets ahead of time and answer the questions they ask.

How to Write (Documentation)

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px;">

An Caucasian Caftan, c. 8th-10th C. CE
Cynehild Cynesigesdohtor

Imagine a picture here...

Description
A Caucasian caftan dating to the 8th-10th centuries CE. While the original was of silk, linen, and fur, this reproduction is made of wool, faux fur, and rayon/poly blend.

Describe in a few sentences what you've made.

History
The caftan is believed to originate from the Moschevaja Balka complex in the north Caucasus region, in modern-day Georgia.[2] This region was inhabited by both Alans and Khazars, making specific cultural identification difficult. Blah, blah more here.

Describe the historical context of the item here. Paint the picture in which your project will be set.

Materials
Describe the materials you used here and relate them to what would have been used. Explain your substitutions where appropriate.

Process
This caftan was manufactured according to the measurements provided in Nobuko Kajitani study of the garment for the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[3]

Describe your process in this section. This is when it's appropriate to use first person pronouns.

Conclusions
This caftan works great for cold weather and archery! Hurrah!

Include in this paragraph conclusions about your work. How did the project go? Are you happy with the results? Would you do it again? What would you change? & C.

Sources
If you didn't do footnotes, Include your source list here.

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[2] Elfriede Regina Knauer "A Man's Caftan and Leggings from the North Caucasus of the Eighth to Tenth century: A Genealogical Study." Metropolitan Museum Journal, Vol. 36 (2001), at 125.

[3] Nobuko Kajitani "A Man's Caftan and Leggings from the North Caucasus of the Eighth to Tenth century: A Conservator's Report." Metropolitan Museum Journal, Vol. 36 (2001), at 96.

Cite your Sources

No evidence is useful unless it can be verified. If you think of documentation, or any research, as a jenga tower with citations as bricks – you will find that the more bricks you have, the more stable your tower.

Chicago Citation Examples

I have provided Chicago examples below because it's my favorite style. You don't have to use it though, I understand. But when you cite your sources, whether you use an official manual style or not, be consistent. Chicago citation forms are taken from the Online Writing Lab at Purdue University: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/03/. A note, these examples are for footnote citations. For examples of inline citations and endnote citations, see the OWL website.

Book by one author

> 1. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 271.

Book by multiple authors

> 2. Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs & Space* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 241-51.

Journal Article

> 4. Susan Peck MacDonald, "The Erasure of Language," *College Composition and Communication* 58, no. 4 (2007): 619.

Electronic Journal Article

> 5. Henry E. Bent, "Professionalization of the Ph.D. Degree,"*College Composition and Communication* 58, no. 4 (2007): 141, accessed December 5, 2008, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1978286.

Electronic Books and Books Consulted Online

Note: Stable page numbers are not always available in electronic formats; therefore, you may, instead, include the number of chapter, section, or other easily recognizable locator.

> 6. Grant Ian Thrall, *Land Use and Urban Form* (New York: Methuen, 1987), http://www.rri.wvu.edu/WebBook/Thrallbook/Land%20Use%20and%20Urban%20Form.pdf.

Web Page with Known Author and Date

> 7. Mister Jalopy, "Effulgence of the North: Storefront Arctic Panorama in Los Angeles," *Dinosaurs and Robots*, last modified January 30, 2009, http://www.dinosaursandrobots.com/2009/01/effulgence-of-north-storefront-arctic.html.

Web Page with Unknown Publication Date and Author

> 8. "Band," *Casa de Calexico,* accessed January 30, 2009, http://www.casadecalexico.com/band.