

On regions, administrative districts, and tradition

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Dear friends, good people all, who sometimes find themselves hurt in situations that seem most mundane. From Gareth. If you are offended by the length of this post, I do apologize. The matter seemed weighty enough, and hurtful enough, to require the caution of the cushion of many words.

The reasons for this writing

It does grieve me to see good people hurt, for whatever reason. And when good people are hurt unnecessarily, it is even more an occasion for unhappy wonder. I have seen the region issue consume good people in other lands, and at other times, and so I timidly offer up one small opinion, in the honest hope that some of the hurt may be assuaged away through a better understanding of the perspectives of those who hold different opinions. It is my fervent hope and belief that in this issue, a better understanding may serve as antidote for some of the pain. Please forgive me, dear readers, if you find my words arrogant or hurtful. I can only assure you that they come from a heavy, not a heated heart.

The legitimacy of the Power of our Crown

To even address such a topic would be inconceivable in much of the middle ages. Those who ruled, ruled because God decreed it. If they ruled well, all the cows would calve. If they ruled poorly, the land and its people suffered. Yet even if plague swept the land, to rise up against your lawful king was to rebel against God and Nature. Men (a gendered term used intentionally) did not rule because they were the most gifted or popular rulers, they ruled because it was God's will. We know it is God's will, because it has happened.

We have created in this Society a structure that is somewhat medieval in its flavor, if not its details. I need not describe any of the particulars in which our attempts fall short of any or all of the social structures of ancient days, you all could do a better job than I, of making such a list. Yet for all of the details in which our shot fails to hit the mark, we nonetheless can stand back and say "what we create feels like something other than what we see around us in the rest of our lives." At the heart of this creation is the Crown.

I believe our Crowns could be selected by nearly any arbitrary means: There is nothing in the winning of a particular tournament that demonstrates an ability to rule wisely. Yet this is the point: Dear friends, in historic times, kingdoms oft survived their kings, even when they were entirely unfit to rule, and turned on their kings, even when the Crown was just and righteous. We need not turn any further than Scripture to see examples of kings most incompetent, as well as skillful. The point is not that one or another person is more qualified than another to serve, for should we find such qualifications and follow them, our beloved Society would begin to look more modern and more mundane for it.

We do not recreate the modern telling of Camelot, in which shortcomings in a single person bring down an entire kingdom. Instead we recreate a society in which a plethora of structures overlap and confuse one another and are bound together in the Crown, not because it makes sense to do so, but because it is not a meritocracy. The most competent servants, the most able politicians, the most powerful figures, the most gifted artisans do not rise to become the managers of others. Even when we do pledge our hearts and hands to the most able Crown possible in our kingdom, there is nothing we can do to retain that person as Crown for more than six months or so. Further, because of our method of selection, it is likely that any one person will be able or willing to continue to win year after year for a lifetime.

Yet, we retain our Crowns' real power: Not much power over material goods, for we live in a modern society of rules. Rather, our Crowns rule over significant aspects of our social and normative selves. Our Crowns hold the power to govern, within necessary restraints, our positions within our Society.

Structures which support and check this power

Certain structures have been created in order to facilitate this control (as well as to silently check excess). These include Corpora, Kingdom tradition, baronies and principalities, officers and peerage orders. Each of these exist beyond the limits of any given reign, and retain rights and recognition that extend across kingdom lines (some more obvious than others). Meanwhile, some rights have been granted exclusively to the Crown, so that no kingdom can slip into a modern themed hobby club, governed by elected officers and modern sensibilities.

Among the many rights reserved to the Crown are the right to grant all awards, and the right to directly rule all official sub-groups within the kingdom. Because of the check of Corpora, a Crown may neither unilaterally create nor dissolve the basic SCA group, the shire. Rightly or wrongly, this guarantees that groups, the primary point of contact with the massive majority of the members of the organization, will be stable entities. There are other historical (and sometimes painful) organizational reasons for the independence of shires. Yet once these groups decide to create larger structures, they must do so under the authority of the Crown. Usually this is accompanied by the appointment of a personage who is in direct fealty to the Crown, and who is therefore answerable to the Crown for the actions of the larger group. Thus baronies (which may encompass numerous groups) have barons and baronesses, principalities have princes and princesses, and so on. The lone exception is the rare "province," which may not create awards but may govern as a barony.

Peerage orders which extend beyond a single kingdom's borders (i.e., Pelican, Laurel, Chivalry and usually Rose) may not add members apart from the direct action of the Crown. One check is that the Crown may not add members to an order in secret. That is, they must consult the members of the order before they may add a member. Corpora II.A.2.a.4 "The Crown may elevate subjects to the Peerage by granting membership in one of the Orders conferring a Patent of Arms, after consultation with the members of the Order, and in accordance with the laws and customs of the kingdom. . ."

The law thing is clear, but the Corpora specifically names "customs" as separate, and equal to, kingdom law. This curiosity encourages the development of rich traditions within each kingdom; traditions which, in some important respects, carry all of the force of written law. Therefore, even though Crowns in one kingdom may elevate peers upon consulting the order through a written, mailed poll, and Crowns in another kingdom may rely upon the written reports of an order's principal, The Crown of An Tir must elevate in accord with the customs of An Tir. Of course, these customs may change over time, but it is safe to assume that no such custom could change within the course of a single reign.

Therefore, the Crown of An Tir could not consider the conversation with one or two members of the order as adequate consultation with the order for purposes of elevation. In fact, in the history of the Society, Crowns have been disciplined for violating this part of Corpora.

It makes sense for officers administering an organization the size of An Tir to appoint deputies to assist. These deputies, while sanctioned in Corpora, may be appointed by the kingdom officer and warranted by the Crown, or may act unofficially as aides. But no deputy or assistant to a kingdom officer may take official action without receiving warrant from the Crown. While no Crown may unilaterally revoke the status of an official group, they may place a group into crisis by

revoking their warrant of the group's officer. No structure in the Kingdom operates in an official capacity without an official lineage to the Crown.

So what about regions? Regions often make sense. Regions often are quite useful as structures to help regional officers perform their duties, promote the arts and sciences in an area, and facilitate the coordination and cooperation of local groups. These are all good things. However, regions are not official structures of the SCA, and thus must accept some limitations. These include:

1. Because all officers in a kingdom must trace their dual lineage to both kingdom office and Royal warrant, regions may not select officers of their own. That is, a seneschal, for example, who is serving the Rising Tide region as deputy to the kingdom seneschal, may happen to be referred to as the "Rising Tide regional officer" but in this case, "Rising Tide" serves as a descriptive adjective, not as an official title. This seneschal serves the Kingdom seneschal as deputy, and serves at the pleasure of the Crown and the Kingdom deputy. No representatives of the region could unilaterally appoint or remove this officer.
2. Because all officers in a kingdom derive the binding force of law on their actions through their appointment by their appropriate kingdom officer and by warranting of the Crown, the Rising Tide region may not create new offices and endow them with official, binding responsibilities.
3. Because all regional officers serve their kingdom superiors as deputies, any kingdom officer may choose to "split up" the territory of the kingdom any way they choose, after recognizing the principalities, which are officially recognized groups. The Kingdom Marshal, for example, might choose to appoint one deputy to cover all non-principality groups west of the Cascade Range in the US, one to serve all such groups in Canada, and a third to cover all groups located east of the Cascades; the Kingdom Herald may choose to evenly distribute the non-principality population of the kingdom and create boundaries to evenly distribute the population among five deputies; while the Minister of the Exchequer might choose one deputy per US state or Canadian province. Assuming that the Crown warranted these officers, no given region should assume that only one marshal will be appointed to serve the groups within their desired boundaries.
4. Because all awards in the kingdom come from the hand of the Crown, or because of their special fealty, from the hand of the landed baron or baroness as from the Crown, no region may create or bestow awards. I may choose to create "Gareth's favor" as a token which I hand out to people who have magnificent beards (or an appropriate appreciation of magnificent beards), Gareth's favor will not show up in the An Tir order of precedence. Further, I would be walking perilously close to appropriating the authority of the Crown if I should pretend that it conveyed any such precedence. Thus it would be unwise for any region to come up with any token of appreciation which could reasonably be mistaken for an official award. Wise people simply wouldn't do such a thing, for the risk of misunderstanding would be great.
5. Because our tax exempt status is awarded by the U.S. government to a corporation named "Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc." each officially recognized group within the society can take advantage of this status. Each group can open checking accounts, receive money, write checks and must file reports as required by the Society Treasurer (ultimately) so that the corporation's annual report may be filed with the U.S. government. Many nations have different laws, but most who offer tax exempt status (or allow for taxes paid to other governments) require a legally identified individual (person or corporation) to be named as custodian of the rights and bearer of the responsibilities of the designation. Thus, in that our regions are not officially recognized groups (being neither baronies, principalities, nor provinces) any accounts they open must be opened in the name of an individual person, and any monies received must be declared as personal income by that individual as if it were

- a business. Of course, the establishment of a for-profit business using the intellectual property of the SCA, Inc. would likely not be approved by the board of directors.
6. Because regions are not official groups, their activities would not be covered as sanctioned events under the SCA, Inc.'s insurance policy.
 7. Because regions are not official groups, they may not create laws or official organizing documents that are binding upon SCA members. All laws and official rules must be signed by the crown and approved by the Kingdom (or principality) Seneschal.
 8. Because the region is not an official entity within the SCA, there can be no "regional protector" or "champion" who serves in any official manner. Likewise, if there is an event within the region, and there is a tournament at the event, the region may not tell SCA members who reside out of their claimed regional boundaries that they cannot participate. Therefore, a "regional champion" may live in another region. The same may be said for the arts and sciences, except if the Kingdom Arts and Sciences officer(s) set up a series of regional competitions as try-outs for kingdom competition. Regions may not hold such contests on their own.
 9. Because they are not officially recognized groups, regions may not sponsor events. Any established branch may sponsor an event on behalf of someone else, but each event must be sponsored by an officially recognized branch.

Having gone through the exercise of being painfully pedantic in listing out these restrictions on regions, please allow me to reiterate the value of regions done well.

Many of us are part of our beloved Society so that we may join with likeminded souls in appreciating the middle ages, exploring forgotten arts and sciences, and reveling in the company of fellow travelers. Each of us has different desires and needs for attachment, and for some, the region is the best fit. My local group may feel too small for me to lose myself in the mystique of the middle ages, and for many of us, the kingdom is too large to feel truly needed. I would imagine that few, if any people, could wander through a Crown tournament or 12th night event and be able to name more than half of those attending. This is not a bad thing in itself, but it does offer a qualitatively different experience than attending a regional event where most of the people who would consider themselves to be deeply involved know most of those attending by name, and perhaps even by group.

Therefore, some sort of regional identity can be a very useful tool for a Crown to help meet the needs of the kingdom. And it would be an unwise Crown indeed, who did not care for the welfare of the people.

Further, regions can serve as breeding grounds for future principalities. As I have written elsewhere, the successful creation of a principality is a Herculean task which ought to be carefully considered. Many of the needs which might drive honest folk toward creating principalities with inadequate preparation or leadership bases might be satisfied with carefully crafted regions. Thus, much of the pain of unsuccessful principalities might be avoided with careful use of regions.

Thus, my advice to any Crown is to look kindly upon regions, and use a gentle hand when corrections become necessary. Education can be such a gentle teacher. The wise Crown may accomplish all that is needed by quietly asking a few carefully crafted questions of some key leaders in a regional area.

As with anything of great value in our Society, good hearts and hard-working hands have labored to build our regions. Please consider carefully the ways in which necessarily unofficial regional structures might serve the people well. It must hurt to see something at which I have labored hard swept away as so much dust. The Crown of An Tir grants to individuals the ability to hurt well intentioned people.

Yet to maintain a well ordered kingdom, the laws of the Society must be obeyed. It is among the weights upon the heads of the Crown to ensure the kingdom is well ordered.

In Summary, regions that are allowed to grow—especially through inattention—into a structure that appears to be official runs the risk of diminishing the power of the throne. Thus it is the primary responsibility of the Crown to correct such situations. Yet the most appropriate corrections are sometimes the gentlest, and especially within regions, it is often tomorrow's kingdom officers who offer their hearts and hands to build something that is beautiful in their sight. It is unlikely that a successful region has been built by subjects who intend to slight the Crown. Yet they may react strongly when confronted.

The best path might be the gentle answer, to engage the kingdom's leaders to help the region's leaders see how they might accomplish the desires of their hearts without casting a shadow on the Throne of An Tir. This is not an easy path, but it is likely to be worth the investment. Some principalities whose paths to kingdom have been strewn with tears and broken dreams took their first steps from the best path as inappropriate regions. The resentments likely from a reaction perceived as heartless are likely to grow for years to come.

It is always wise to foreknow—a little more than is comfortable—the implications of the acts of the Crown. If it were an easy job, there would be no need for advisors, and no penalty for following poor advice.