The Transformation of a Shire: Local Negotiation in the Society for Creative Anachronism

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF A SHIRE: LOCAL NEGOTIATION IN THE SOCIETY FOR CREATIVE ANACHRONISM

A Thesis
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The Faculty of the Department of Folklore and Anthropology
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By Suzanne Barber
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THE TRANSFORMATION OF A SHIRE: LOCAL NEGOTIATION IN THE SOCIETY FOR
CREATIVE ANACHRONISM

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In this thesis, I am examining how a small branch of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Loch an Fhraoich, whose values and identity center around camaraderie and narrative and aesthetic coherence, attempts to balance these two often contradictory principles. To better illustrate the negotiations taking place, I have used ethnographic fieldwork to focus on the areas of material culture, ethno-kinetics, persona, knowledge, and events. These areas are tightly interwoven, and almost never operate independently, but the exercise of isolating them is useful in seeing the complexities of choices that members must make to navigate the social world of the Society for Creative Anachronism.

The Society for Creative Anachronism is a large, international non-profit organization and is often depicted and discussed as a large homogeneous organization. Instead, in this work I have analyzed the smaller group within the larger organization. I have focused on the smaller group in order to bring to light new details of how this group and the individual members operate within a self-selected international organization in a network of personal connections. These groups attain a feeling of distinctness within this
large organization by creating an identity for themselves, which expresses their values within the larger SCA framework. Sometimes these values contradict each other or subvert the larger overriding SCA ethos, and members will mediate their participation in order to avoid breaking from the SCA framework entirely while still protecting their group identity.

This can be examined in light of narrative construction and maintenance. The Society for Creative Anachronism supports an official homogenous metanarrative. It is this narrative that is most often heard and examined by outsiders. Despite the initial perceived dominance, this metanarrative acts as a frame or matrix narrative, and contained within are multiple hyponarratives and little narratives. As one allows their view to slip further towards the idio and unicultural level, these hyponarratives increase in number while decreasing in scope. They go from representing a kingdom, to principality, to a barony, to a shire, to a group of friends within that shire to an individual member.

At every level these narratives connect the individual and group to others, creating a network of relationships and shared narratives that help create a sense of unity and prevent a fracturing of voices and thus support the overriding metanarrative. In order to prevent this system from collapsing inward or fracturing apart, a certain amount of playful transgressive metalepsis and edgeplay must be allowed. The negotiation of this edgeplay is debated, and the style and amount tolerated is often a distinguishing mark between groups. Some key contestations that I have focussed on where this debate occurs include the levels and types of anachronism allowed, the types of partying and practical
jokes encouraged or discouraged, gender, media influence, and the understanding of honor and chivalry.
Introduction
I don’t remember how I first heard about, or when I first saw the Society for Creative Anachronism, a worldwide medieval re-creation group also known simply as the SCA. I do, however, remember the first time I experienced the Society for Creative Anachronism. The sky was darkening into a bruised purple, with only the last flickering of light occasionally flashing between buildings as the sun set over the San Francisco Bay. This lighting framed, highlighted even, the surreal juxtaposition that awaited me underneath the massive concrete overhang of the Rockridge BART Station. Parked cars, lawn chairs, and knights in armor seemed suspended by the reverberating cacophony of the metallic and wooden thunk of covered rattan swords, and wood and aluminum shields, as bodies collided repeatedly in a riot of color, sound, smell and force that you could feel from the sidelines. It made no sense—it was messy, disorienting, and yet, highly attractive.

Now several years later, after half a year of participation in the San Francisco Bay Area, and almost two years of intensive fieldwork in Bowling Green, Kentucky (with several years separating the two), I can make some sense of that initial intoxicating chaos. I recognize now that those people fighting were not all knights, that their incessant colliding was actually punctuated by calls, holds, and discussions. The colors, sounds, smells, tastes, and other corporeal sensations I experienced now have labels, things, people, places and ideas attached to them. They do not stand fractured as discrete memories of experiences as they once did, but instead are contextualized with knowledge and narratives. Despite this, the Society for Creative Anachronism, like culture everywhere, remains messy. Therein, I would argue, lies the interest.
Almost forty-three years after the founding of the Society for Creative Anachronism, the organization has expanded to include approximately 30,000 paying members and around 60,000 more non-paying but active participants. It has spread to have representation on every continent. These continents are broken up into nineteen kingdoms, and the “known world” is still expanding (SCA n.d.a). As it expands, so do the opportunities presented to members and participants to experience their created anachronized medieval world. Within this world, individuals and groups aspire to enact their own identities separate from the overriding framework and metanarrative of the Society for Creative Anachronism (Lyotard 1979).

Richard Handler and William Saxon discuss that “an outstanding feature of the historical worlds created by living history is that they have narrative coherence; that is, they are emplotted or constituted as stories” (1988:251). While considering the Society for Creative Anachronism “living history” is not fully agreed upon among participants and outsiders, and my informants vehemently denied that the Society for Creative Anachronism was “living history,” they nevertheless expressed this desire for narrative coherence. This inclination was often visibly expressed and verbally explained as an aspiration to achieve a kind of aesthetic coherence in their material objects and persona. That is, the totality of their visual self when viewed together or as individual items, presented a cohesive front that agreed with and even bolstered the verbal narrative being told by the individual. This idea can be expanded outward to encompass groups of people and their environment that are striving for a particular “feel” or “look.” So an individual wishing to achieve aesthetic and narrative coherence would not use a Viking name or
story for their persona and then dress as a Turkish woman. Similarly a household\(^1\) based upon a 14th century German model would strive for all the members of the group to dress the part, their campsite, including their tents and other visible accessories, would be correct for the time and place— the visual experience of the group would match the narrative.

In this thesis, I am examining how a small branch of the Society for Creative Anachronism, whose values and identity center around camaraderie and narrative and aesthetic coherence, attempts to balance these two often contradictory principles. To better illustrate the negotiations taking place, I have focused on the areas of material culture, ethno-kinetics, persona, knowledge, and events. These areas are tightly interwoven, and almost never operate independently, but the exercise of isolating them is useful in order to see the complexities of choices that members must make to navigate the social world of the Society for Creative Anachronism.

The Society for Creative Anachronism has lent itself to both popular and scholarly writings. These works, while offering much to the study of the SCA, do not tend to focus on a localized aspect of the Society for Creative Anachronism and instead examine this group as a homogenous and large-scale organization. Many of them also romanticize the Society for Creative Anachronism and ignore or dampen the inner contestations that occur. If they do focus on conflict, it is often explained in terms of the Society of Creative Anachronism's acceptance, or lack of acceptance, by academics. I feel that while this is a worthy and important thing to consider, by ignoring internal conflict, the Society for Creative Anachronism

\(^1\) A household is an unofficial group that is organized around shared interests and camaraderie and can be used to express personal values, goals, and the level of one’s commitment to the SCA. For more information see chapter two.
Creative Anachronism is portrayed as a large homogenous organization, when in fact it “oikotypifies” itself as it spreads (von Sydow 1999).

The Society for Creative Anachronism is better understood with the idea of “slippage,” requiring “a fluctuation of focus” (Dorst 1999:132), to view some of the finer areas of dissonance. This view can and should slip from the local to the “larger than local” (Shuman 1993). It is my hope that with this close-up view of an individual shire, some new details of how an individual and group *in situ* operates in a self-selected international organization in a network of personal connections (Noyes 2003).

During my research, I even came across an Australian SCA wiki known as “Cunnan” that had an entry for “Interkingdom Anthropology” or “IKA” as a turn of phrase or disclaimer used when discussing potential differences in Society for Creative Anachronism culture. This entry included examples such as whether you bow to a throne even when it is empty, the order of precedence for baronies and so on. It also states that “many traditions, known in one place to be The One True Way, are actually IKA” (Cunnan 2010).

One of the most recent dissertations examining the SCA, which came out in 2010 from Oregon State University’s Cultural Anthropology Department, is Althea Turner’s “Honored Values and Valued Objects: The Society for Creative Anachronism.” Turner looks at the symbolic value of the material culture in the Society for Creative Anachronism, but focuses in on the Knights of the SCA and their regalia around the world rather than examining this process within a localized setting.
“Singing the Dream: The Bardic Arts of the Society for Creative Anachronism,” (2009) by Sarah Lash from Indiana University, centers around the creative bardic performances that occur in the Society for Creative Anachronism. Lash studied the songs and stories of the SCA as a modern example of dynamic tradition. As such, her data came from multiple groups and individuals with the SCA rather than from a single group and geographic location.

“Tourneys, Wars, and Dancing Men: Re-creation as Performance in the Society for Creative Anachronism” by Michael Allen Cramer for City University of New York (2005) looks at the performative aspects of the Society for Creative Anachronism from the perspective of theatre studies. This dissertation does spend some time on the different contestations that arise in the Society for Creative Anachronism, but ultimately the main point that Cramer is making is that some of the performative acts of the Society for Creative Anachronism may have historical roots. Cramer, as a long time member of the Society for Creative Anachronism, provides a valuable and thorough historical overview of the Society for Creative Anachronism.

One of the only works to deal with the Society for Creative Anachronism on a smaller scale was “A Spatial Analysis of Membership and Success in the Kingdom of Ansteorra” by April Lynn Gillilan for the Oklahoma State University Geography Department (2004). This work focuses on quantitative, rather than qualitative research, and despite being more localized, it doesn’t do much to forward the study of how the Society for Creative Anachronism works on a small level. Older dissertations frequently focused on the anti-modern reasons for participation in the Society for Creative
Anachronism. The topic of motivations or reasons to be in the Society for Creative Anachronism has been covered extensively, and as such it will not be my primary focus. I will delve into this topic only when it is relevant.

In addition to these longer works, some articles written for the collection *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture* edited by Stephanie Trigg (2005) address how differing aspects of “medievalism” operate in contemporary Australian society. In particular, these articles focus a great deal on the aforementioned contestation between academics and SCA members, and different ways of knowing and understanding “medieval.” On the lighter side, the popular satiric paper and website *The Onion*, in a 1999 article, “Society for Creative Anachronism Seizes Control of Russia” plays with the notion that the SCA’s medieval combat skills would be enough to overrun Russia, and that the economic system and unique goods would bring financial security.

The Society for Creative Anachronism produces a vast array of “paraethnographic” texts (Westbrook 2008:43-44). These include formalized published books, web published how-to guides, short stories, YouTube videos, forums, listservs and so on. While the majority of these works are not scholarly in nature, they do present an insiders’ perspective on the Society for Creative Anachronism, as well as offering a wealth of information on the various traditions of the SCA.

*Methodology*

My fieldwork consisted of a combination of informal, unrecorded interviews during participant observation, and recorded formal interviews to observe and document the Bowling Green, Kentucky, branch of the Society for Creative Anachronism known as
the Shire of Loch an Fhraoich. Although the majority of the members live within Bowling Green, this branch also encompasses the counties of Warren, Barren, Allen, Simpson, and Logan. I spent many Sundays observing Loch an Fhraoich’s fighter practice at both Spero Kereiakes Park in Bowling Green and at Franklin Simpson’s Park in Franklin, Kentucky. I spent additional hours observing business meetings and the resulting crafting session that followed, and further weekend hours at Arts and Sciences meetings at an informant’s house in Bowling Green. I used the observations from these sessions to assist me in formulating questions for my recorded interviews with Jeff Chandler Sr. and Thomas Young, and Bryan Dockery. To stay up to date with Loch an Fhraoich, I also participated in the group’s listserv.

Figure 1: Map of the shire of Loch an Fhraoich. Map by Suzanne Barber

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2 An Arts and Science meeting is a meeting where crafts are taught and carried out. For more information see Chapter Three, “Negotiations in the Society for Creative Anachronism” under the section “events.”
In my experience, an average of seven people came to the different practices and meetings of Loch an Fhraoich. Officially, Loch an Fhraoich has more members, and during important business meetings or right before a big event a good majority of them would attend. While I met a variety of people, there was a core of eight people who I interacted with the majority of the time. In some cases, I know both their real name and their Society for Creative Anachronism persona, and in others I was only given part of their real name or their persona. In this thesis, I will present as much information as I have and will then continue to use the names that I and other members of Loch an Fhraoich called each other.

The first person in Loch an Fhraoich I spoke with, and thus my main contact, was Gloria Dockery, known in the Society for Creative Anachronism as Umm al-Mundhir 'Inan bint Sufian or simply Inan. Inan has been in the Society for Creative Anachronism for approximately fourteen years and is currently the Seneschal of Loch an Fhraoich. She portrays a Turkish woman, and is active in garb and tent making as well as belly dancing. She learned about the Society for Creative Anachronism from her son, Bryan Dockery.

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3 A Seneschal acts as the head of the shire and is in charge of the administration duties. For more information, see chapter two, “Contestation and Structure in the Society for Creative Anachronism and Loch an Fhraoich.”
Bryan has also been in the Society for Creative Anachronism for fourteen years, and uses the name Conrad Vom Schwarzwald.

I went to my first fighter practice in 1996, so fourteen years ago. It was here, at Lampkin Park in Bowling Green. A friend’s of mine’s brother was involved in it. They told me about it and brought me up here, and showed me. The first time I saw it I was hooked. As soon as I saw it I was hooked. Of course, I had been kind of a history buff all my life. I was always interested in the medieval thing. The minute I saw this, it was, ‘this is where I belong.’ [interview, June 5, 2010]

Conrad, although beginning his Society for Creative Anachronism career with Loch an Fhraoich, moved around for school and jobs and as a result has experienced different southern Society for Creative Anachronism groups, “When I was at college, of course in Southern Miss [University of Southern Mississippi] I was involved with the group locally there⁴. Then in Florida the group there,⁵ and this past summer while I was living in Alabama I was involved with the Barony of the Iron Mountain in

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⁴ The shire of Dragoun’s Weal in the kingdom of Gleann Abhann.
⁵ In the Kingdom of Trimaris.
Birmingham⁶” (interview, June 5, 2010). Conrad is an active fighter and does sand-castings in addition to basic armor construction and care.

Martin and Shannon Hickey, known respectively as Syr Wulfhere von Mannteuffel and Lady Hildegund von Bieber, have been involved both with the Society for Creative Anachronism as well as Revolutionary War historical reenactment groups. Shannon is well known within this group for her love of historical cooking and costume making. Martin is known for his homemade mead and honey and, although a Knight, is the only man within this group whom I have never seen nor heard reference fighting. They rarely attended pure fighter practices, but were almost always in attendance if it were either an Arts and Science or business meeting. Shannon was also active in helping to plan events.

Badon, a knight in the Society for Creative Anachronism, recently moved to Bowling Green from the kingdom of Ansteorra⁷ but has been a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism for twenty years. He spent the majority of this time playing with the Kingdom of Meridies. A lot of tension within the group seems to be directed towards Badon, whose style does not always “fit” well within Loch an Fhraoich.

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⁶ In the Kingdom of Meridies.
⁷ The Kingdom of Ansterra is comprised of Oklahoma and most of Texas (SCA n.d.d).
Brenda Farinelli was my informant with the least amount of experience in the Society for Creative Anachronism and has only been participating for about two years. Brenda is one of several women fighters within Loch an Fhraoich, but the only one who attends practices with regularity. In fact, I have never seen the other women fighters in armor and fighting at a fighter practice. Brenda is currently dating Badon, who has taken over the role of teaching Brenda how to fight and sew period clothing.

The two longest standing members are Jeff Chandler Sr. and Thomas Young, known respectively as Lord Eirik Van Aandrud and Harald Lacklander. Both of them have been in the Society for Creative Anachronism since the 1980’s. Thomas was a founding member of this group. Eirik, currently the herald\(^8\) of the group, joined shortly after. “I was first introduced to the SCA in college in 1980, but I didn’t really get around to joining it until 1985. Actually hired on with the Xerox corporation and one of the persons working there was in the SCA and led me to the local group”

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\(^8\) In addition to secretarial duties, he is in charge of helping members register and find names as well as create devices. For more information see chapter two “Contestation and Structure in the Society for Creative Anachronism and Loch an Fhraoich.”
Eirik technically lives in Tennessee, outside of Loch an Fhraoich’s territory, but he prefers to play with this group. “Loch an Fhraoich, and that has been a really, really, good group. I mean technically I’m supposed to play down in Nashville, which is supposedly a big group etc., etc., etc. But I come up here because the people are great. I love the folks up here, and I don’t guess I’d ever play anywhere else” (interview, November 9, 2009). Recently, Thomas has brought several of the founding members of Loch an Fhraoich to fighter practice. This appeared to cause considerable tension with some of the newer members, a fact related to Loch an Fhraoich’s changing values, as I will discuss.

Loch an Fhraoich, as will be discussed further in this work, is primarily a male oriented group. Despite this, three of my core informants are women. These three women were extremely busy during my fieldwork and were each involved with challenging personal transitions. As such, I was unable to get formal recorded interviews with them. Still, I spent a majority of my fieldwork time speaking to them and asking questions during fighter practices and other meetings. In particular, Inan and Shannon were patient and persistent in showing me construction techniques while sharing their experience in the SCA.
Before beginning my research with Loch an Fhraoich I had experience with the Society for Creative Anachronism on the west coast in the Berkeley area. This allowed me to have an already fleshed out insider knowledge of the basic workings of the Society for Creative Anachronism and led me to see how the Society for Creative Anachronism in Bowling Green, Kentucky, manifested itself in a sometimes vastly different form. In addition to how this affected my own understandings and actions when participating and interviewing Loch an Fhraoiach, it also no doubt, had an effect on how I was treated by the participants themselves. Often, because they knew of my past history they would ask me as many questions on how things are done in the “motherland”\(^9\) as I would about Loch an Fhraoiach. An advantage to this was that by noticing what they did not feel the need to explain, I was able to determine what they felt was common knowledge, and in reverse, what was explained without prompting was an indication of things that were considered wide-spread enough within the Society for Creative Anachronism to be “common knowledge.”

In Chapter One, “History of the Society for Creative Anachronism and Loch an Fhraoiach,” I give a brief, overview of the history of the Society for Creative Anachronism, beginning with the first event to its current state. In this chapter, I will start to explore some of the contradictions of the different narratives of the history of the Society for Creative Anachronism and how these sets up the later contradictions that I have seen within Loch an Fhraoiach. In this chapter, I also present the history of Loch an Fhraoiach as explained to me by the members. It shows how this group has drastically

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\(^9\) My informants often referred to the Berkeley area as the “motherland” in reference to where the Society for Creative Anachronism originated.
changed since 1979 and how this has lead to two sometimes contradictory values within this group, camaraderie and narrative/aesthetic coherence.

In Chapter Two, “Contestation and Structure in the Society for Creative Anachronism and Loch an Fhraich,” I will explain the structure of the Society for Creative Anachronism, in both physical and social terms beginning with its large international organization and how it is broken down into small official groups. In addition to these small groups, there are the unofficial guilds and households from the extremely large, multi-nation all the way to the local. I explain what these groups are and examine how these unofficial and official groups complicate the structure and hierarchy of the Society for Creative Anachronism. After looking at the structure, I will examine a few areas of contestation among members of the Society for Creative Anachronism, specifically focusing on issues that members of Loch an Fhraich have experienced. This includes the accepted level and forms of anachronism, gender issues, the level of partying and types of practical jokes that are acceptable, media influences on the SCA, and differing ideas of honor and chivalry.

Chapter Three, “Negotiations in the Society for Creative Anachronism” begins by examining the SCA through the analytic frames of material culture, ethno-kinetics, knowledge, persona, and events. I then give examples of how these personal negotiations take place within Loch an Fhraioch in order to establish their desired identity.
Chapter One: History of the Society for Creative Anachronism and Loch an Fhraoich
The Society for Creative Anachronism, should not be examined as a homogenous group, but rather, should be understood to be comprised of numerous groups and layers, each with their own unique history and culture that can, at times, clash with the Society for Creative Anachronism’s metanarrative (Lyotard 1979). Many of the contestations and strands I will be examining can be traced back, at least partially, to the structure that developed semi-organically as the organization expanded. To better appreciate how the Society for Creative Anachronism developed, and the interrelationship between the structure and contestations present in this organization, it is helpful to ground the study with a cursory knowledge of the history of the Society for Creative Anachronism

*Literary Beginnings*

The Society for Creative Anachronism has far-reaching literary roots that trace back to the founding members and their literary circle known as “Greyhaven,” an allusion to J.R. R. Tolkien’s work (Cramer 2005:46). At the time of the formation of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Diana Paxson, now a fantasy author, was studying medieval history at the University of California, Berkeley. After watching two of her friends, Ken de Maiffe and David Thewlis, attempting to recreate medieval armed combat in her backyard, She decided to hold her own themed party (Paxson 2010:11). In 1966 on the first of May, in Berkeley, California, a “Tournament of Chivalry” was held, inspired by the “Last Tournament” held in 1839 at Eglinton, Scotland. Marion Zimmer Bradley, her brother Paul Edwin Zimmer, and the family of Poul Anderson, all of whom would go on to become prominent fantasy and science fiction authors were in attendance (Cramer 2005:49). The featured event of the themed party was a tournament, heavily influenced
by Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819), where a knight would fight to win the chance to crown his lady “fairest.” Although it was intended to be a mediaeval party, the costumes and armor worn varied greatly and even included a Roman soldier, Napoleonic officer, a hobbit, and even the head (at that time) of Mills College English Department in her full academic regalia (Paxson 2010:11-12). It is interesting to note here that at this first tournament, and other early events there were no female fighters (Cramer 2005:46-49). The party eventually culminated in a procession down Telegraph Avenue in a protest of the 20th century (Hamilton 2005:211).

Even at this early stage, several important Society for Creative Anachronism conventions were developed, including the counting of May 1 as the beginning of the Society for Creative Anachronism year, known as “Anno Societatis 1” in Society for Creative Anachronism documents (Hanna 2010:7). In addition, the habit and manner of calling shots, not using a limb that has been taken and/or dropping to one’s knees if a leg is “lost” during a fight or battle, and the dictation of what is or is not a killing blow developed\(^\text{10}\) (Paxson 2010:12). The order of the Knighthood was also established when, at the end of the day, David Breen (the only fighter to not use the title “sir” on the field) was knighted (Cramer 2005:49-50).

Satisfied with the success of the first party the group decided to give it a second go, and this time, in order to incorporate more people, they chose to hold it at a local park. To reserve a space with the Berkeley Parks Department the group needed a name to register. Marion Zimmer Bradley proposed the name Society for Creative Anachronism

\(^{10}\) See chapter two for more details.
because Berkeley, as the setting for the Middle Ages, was an anachronism and creativity was a main focus (Hamilton 2005:211). These early Society for Creative Anachronism events were announced via flyers posted on Telegraph Avenue and other areas of Berkeley as well as in the dormitories of the University of California, Berkeley, San Anselmo and Berkeley Theological Seminaries, San Francisco State, and Mills College (Cramer 2005:47).

_Early Growth_

The year 1968 was an important point in the formation and history of the Society for Creative Anachronism. That year Society for Creative Anachronism co-founder and fantasy author Marion Zimmer Bradley moved to New York and there founded her own branch of the Society for Creative Anachronism. This branch held a tournament to crown its own King, and in the hot July sun on Staten Island, Bruce of Cloves was crowned by an emissary from the Berkeley branch, which from that point forward was known as the West Kingdom while New York was known as the East Kingdom.

Later that year in September, The World Conference of Science-fiction and Fantasy took place at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley. The West Kingdom held a tournament at the convention and also sold a book, *A Handbook for the (Current) Middle Ages*, which became a manual for others to start their own Society for Creative Anachronism chapters (Cramer 3005:51). Even this early within the SCA’s history we can begin to see fracturing within the Society for Creative Anachronism when, reportedly, Bruce of Cloves asked to be under the guidance of the West Kingdom, greatly angering the founders of the East Kingdom by placing the East Kingdom beneath the West.
Even more strife followed that year when in October, the Society for Creative Anachronism became a not-for-profit corporation in the state of California. Purportedly, members were not polled as to whether they wanted to be incorporated nor were they asked who they wanted on the board of directors. Instead, this decision was made by a small group lead by Jon Studebaker (Diana Paxson’s husband). As a consequence of being incorporated in California, by law, only the directors voted on the board members, effectively preventing the members of the Society for Creative Anachronism from having a say in who governs the Society for Creative Anachronism.

This turn of events created an interesting schism between kingdoms founded prior to this 1968 incorporation and those founded afterwards. For later kingdoms and groups, *The Corpora and By-laws of the SCA* and the aforementioned *The Handbook for the (Current) Middle Ages* became the main source of information on how things are run, whereas the West and East Kingdom relied more on oral history and tradition going back to the first members and tournament (Cramer 2005:52). This split of ideologies played out the next year in the founding of the third kingdom, known as the Middle kingdom or Midrealm when both the board of directors and the East Kingdom founded a chapter. Although these two chapters merged together, it set the stage for the basic question of who rules and runs what (Cramer 2005:53-54).

The board of directors then established the official protocol by which a new kingdom could be formed. This protocol is still in place today and helped to shape the modern Society for Creative Anachronism structure. When enough local branches wish to become a kingdom they petition to form a principality. This principality must hold a
tournament to elect their prince and princess and establish its own officers. After awhile, and with enough growth, they may petition the board of directors to become a kingdom. As such, each kingdom and branch since the founding of the Middle Kingdom can trace its lineage back to the West, East or Middle Kingdom. With these new regulations in place, the Society for Creative Anachronism began to expand to its current size (Cramer 2005:54).

Loch an Fhraoich

Loch an Fhraoich, as a small shire in Southern Kentucky, does not play much of a role in the history of the Society for Creative Anachronism as an official organization. Yet this groups history illustrates the great diversity of styles and ideas that this early formation of the SCA fostered. The Shire of Loch an Fhraoich consists primarily of working adults and currently encompasses the counties of Warren, Barren, Allen, Simpson, and Logan in Kentucky. Despite their small size and desire for growth, including an ambition to become a barony, the shire articulated an unwillingness to find new members from Western Kentucky University. They explained to me that college students were too unpredictable with their involvement, that they would often disappear for long periods of time without notice and didn’t take things seriously. I consider this an important point to understanding the current changing values and identity of Loch an Fhraoich and so will return to this later.

This shire has gone through numerous stages and changes over the years and, like many things in the Society for Creative Anachronism, events and facts are disputed and presented in different lights. I believe that Loch an Fhraoich is currently in a period of
transition, from one type of shire with a set value to another, but before I am able to discuss this in depth, the histories of Loch an Fhraoich must first be understood. It is important to understand that a set single-stranded historical narrative does not exist.

“...The word ‘histories’ emphasizes that there is more than one story to be told, more than one series of events unfolding from the past—that, indeed, the past is made up of a multiplicity of events which defies, neat, uniform categorization” (Zumwalt 1988:xii).

The history of Loch an Fhraoich is made of multiple, personal histories that are often contradictory. The importance in these histories does not lie in which one is necessarily the most correct; these narratives are not about being objectively correct, but rather about finding a social truth. These narratives then, say more about the image they wish to represent than any single strand of history (Schrager 1999).

The Founding of Loch an Fhraoich

When the Shire of Loch an Fhraoich was first formed in November of 1979 or 198011, many of the kingdoms now a part of the SCA were yet to be formed. Somewhat ironically when contrasted to their current feelings towards university students, Loch an Fhraoich was started by a group of Western Kentucky University students. Thomas shared with me his first memory of finding out about the Society for Creative

Anachronism:

A bunch of guys on a Saturday down at Howard’s Bicycle shop in the basement playing military miniatures and one of the guys came in and screamed “They’re fighting in armor down at Vanderbilt, let’s go!” It’s all been downhill since. We ran down there and seen them picking up armor and we went “wow.” Got invited to our first feast, and “wow.” It’s been an

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11 None of my informants were able to remember if the founding date was 1979 or 1980. I was unable to find any records that gave the founding date.
adventure since then.

... I went to my first event, was a war they had at Jamestown. I had no garb or nothing. So it was my first time. I was told by the people who ‘said come on down we’ll have garb for you,’ so I basically walked in in street clothes. It was very cool actually because I got to come-up over a hill and you had to park down by a restaurant in mundanea, and as you came-up over the hill you could pick up the music, the flute music and, the drums and everything. You suddenly started to encounter people dressed in medieval garb. It was really cool. It was like walking back into time. And pretty much from that moment forward, I think a week later, I had a suit of armor hammered out of some stuff, used carpet. So yeah, started fighting and jumped right in with both feet. [interview, November 9, 2009]

The group, which at the time had eight to ten members, was formed primarily from Western Kentucky University students, and it was debated in front of me several times as to whether it was an official university club. It was originally called Vowing Glenn, pronounced “bowing glenn” in an obvious allusion to Bowling Green. It is interesting to note here that despite their early history and close association with the University, Vowing Glenn was not considered a “college”\(^\text{12}\) but a shire.

Although Loch an Fhraioch is now located in the Kingdom of Meridies, it has not always been considered part of this kingdom, nor is the story of how Meridies ultimately ended up with Loch an Fhraoich consistent. Thomas, one of the founding members of both Vowing Glenn and Loch an Fhraoich relayed this version to me:

The problem was with this group was that we were situated halfway, more or less, between Nashville and Louisville. Louisville being from the Midrealm, Nashville being from Meridies. We wanted to be Meridien, but Midrealm wanted to keep their little dragony\(^\text{13}\) scales on us. So we ended up going back and forth, back and forth, for several years between the kingdoms and finally falling semi-defunct as many places do when the

\(^{12}\) A type of SCA chapter, see chapter two.

\(^{13}\) The crest for the Kingdom of Midrealm includes a green dragon passant similar to the Welsh flag.
kids get out of college and go on. [interview, November 9, 2009]

True to Loch an Fhraoich’s current worries about student participation, Vowing Glenn fell to the wayside as the members’ lives changed upon graduation. The now defunct Vowing Glenn was resurrected a few years later when Thomas, after his first divorce, felt the need to get into a new hobby and rebuild a group of friends. Thomas was able to locate some old members along with some new acquaintances in time to attend another event; the group has been going ever since.

Bowling Green came from the Middle Realm to Meridies. . . We came up with a new name, ‘Lots of Freaks.’ Which is basically how they said it: “we’ve come up with a name ‘Loch an Fhraoich’ but the way it kind of spells looks a lot like ‘lots of freaks.’” [Eirik interview, November 9, 2009]

Thomas’ account of Loch an Fhraoich’s history is one of natural growth, decay, and rebirth according to the cycles of the lives of its participants. Thomas emphasized that the original participants wanted to be part of Meridies but were forced into Midrealm, and only after Vowing Glenn went defunct and was resurrected as Loch an Fhraoich were they able to achieve their goal of being part of the Kingdom of Meridies. Another, younger informant, Conrad, explained events differently.

Bowling Green for a long time was those crazy kids that no one would claim. We’ve actually, this group has been part of two different kingdoms on four different occasions. We started out as a Midrealm group. We had one of our more active members early on who was playing more south of here, and messed around and won a crown list in an opposite kingdom of the group he played with. And low and behold, we found ourselves as a group part of the other kingdom [Meridies] redrawing the lines.

Well then that person moved and was no longer part of this group and the majority of the people who were here were playing north of here so the lines were redrawn again. Well then some things happened that nobody is really proud of and they decided they didn’t want us and they redrew the
lines and told the other kingdom that we were theirs. And that’s where we’ve been. [interview, June 5, 2010]

In Conrad’s version of the history of Loch an Fhraioch, there is no mention of personal lives, but considering that the majority of these events occurred before he joined the group this is understandable. Instead, whereas the only strife mentioned in Thomas’ version occurred between themselves and Midrealm, Conrad’s version emphasized many years of early problems in the group. These early issues hinted at in Conrad’s version of the story were frequently referenced, though never with any detail.14 It is these early problems and resulting reputation that the group is actively working to change.

To Thomas, as an early member who values camaraderie, it is imperative that founding narratives not contradict this value too much, and so to avoid destabilizing his narrative he focuses this early stress on a rivalry between kingdoms, a rivalry that Loch an Fhraioch ultimately wins. It is difficult to say if Eirik, who was present during the interview, agreed entirely with Thomas’ version of the story. During our interview he gave few facts of his own, and although he did not disagree with anything, it is unlikely he would have done so while I was there. If Eirik were to actively disagree with Thomas in front of me, an outsider, he would have destabilized Thomas’ narrative coherence and risked damaging the camaraderie between themselves.

Regardless of which version one chooses to believe, Loch an Fhraioch was now officially the northern-most shire of the Kingdom of Meridies and was referred to as a border-shire with the implication that their participation wasn’t expected to amount to

14 The few times I inquired for more details about these events the question was put off either by claim of not knowing the full or true story, or in insisting it no longer matters because the members involved have left. Out of respect for my informants obvious reluctance to talk about these events in any detail I too have left out any specific details that I have learned.
much. They quickly established a reputation as the “party” shire, receiving several complaints each year about their nighttime parties that some felt got out of hand.

Figure 7: Loch an Fhraoich as it currently exists. Map by Suzanne Barber
Conrad described the history of Loch an Fhraoich (and the Society for Creative Anachronism in general) as cyclical.

The group here goes through cycles. It’ll be strong for two years, then it will kind of drop off for about a year, or actually that same cycle where there will be a lot of people playing for awhile in then just this core group of about eight or nine people who come around through everything thick and thin. But then of course being in a college town we’ll sometimes pick up a few people and they’ll be here a few years, and then they’re gone. And I see that same thing in every SCA group that also has one or two major colleges near by. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Loch an Fhraoich continued to develop over the years and with new members joining and old ones leaving it began to consciously construct a new identity for itself. The majority of the participants were now working adults with a varied interest in both time and place within the medieval world.

Many of the members set themselves to learn as much as they could about constructing their persona and material culture surrounding it. In other words, they were now actively seeking narrative coherence. Handler and Saxton “suggest that living historians seek to re-experience history because they expect thereby to gain access to lives and experiences characterized by the wholeness that historical narratives can provide [emphasis theirs]” (1988:243).

Participants seek narrative coherence through appropriating the past because to them it provides wholeness, rightness, an authenticity that the modern world lacks. As Handler and Saxton discuss in their work “Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in ‘Living History”’: “that practitioners are almost pathologically
doomed to failure in this enterprise…results from the fact that their approach to lives that
would have been lived prereflexively or unself-consciously is bound to a necessarily
reflexive operation.” This reflexive operation divides the experience into an episodic one,
destroying the sense of wholeness that one is attempting to achieve through narrative

The Loch an Fhraoich participants, like other Society for Creative Anachronism
members, are not directly appropriating a historical figure and instead are using the
historical framework as a support for their own creativity through which they construct
and anchor their own narrative. Like the slash authors that P. J. Falzone writes about, the
shire participants are actually engaging in “narrative edgeplay” (2005:253) as a way to
break free from the inherent reflexivity problems that Handler and Saxton suggest “living
history” participants face (1988:251). The Society for Creative Anachronism participants
instead transgress “the borders of a parent narrative through the construction of an
aberrant metatext that both ascribes to the central rule of the metatext…while refusing to
break free from the parent and form its own discreet mythos” (Falzone 2005:253).
Falzone suggests that by engaging in this narrative edgeplay, slash-authors are able to
imagine new queer possibilities in an otherwise heterosexual framework. Thus slash
writers participate in narrative edgeplay as a way to escape the parent narrative.

Loch an Fhraoich, while operating with the Society for Creative Anachronism
framework, allows a certain amount of anachronism within the ascribed historical
framework in order to stabilize their own personal narrative within the parent narrative.
Similar to how slash authors’ edgeplay allows “the characters-or what is essential about
the characters-[to] remain as the primacy of their context fades” (2005:253) The Society for Creative Anachronism members retain what is essential about the idea of “medievalness.” This allows the multiple historically impossible collection of narratives of the SCA to coexist in a single time and place. In other words, the official homogenous metanarrative of the Society for Creative Anachronism acts as a frame or matrix narrative. Contained within this narrative are multiple hyponarratives or little narratives (Lyotard 1979, Jahn 2005). As ones view slips from the “larger than local” (Shuman 1993) to the local the hyponarratives increase in number as the number of people sharing the narrative decreases all the way to the idio and unicultural level (Dorst 1999:132, Fine 1979, Primiano 1995). In order to stabilize and support so many narrative strands, a certain level of playful and transgressive metalepsis must be allowed (Jahn 2005).

That this is absolutely central to the Loch an Fhraoich identity as a whole, and to the individual participants (indeed that this process is central to their very idea of what identity even is) can be understood by examining Roger D. Abrahams’ discussion of identity. He suggests that from an American liberal democratic perspective, identity “has replaced both pride of place and of station as a civic duty” (2003:211). In other words, “we have a duty to have an identity and to be happy with it, or at least to feel fulfilled by it” (2003:211). As Abrahams, Handler and Saxon (1988), and Falzone (2005) to just name a few, have pointed out, the modern American society often disrupts this process of achieving narrative coherence, and in turn gaining an identity that fulfills one’s self. “Being unhappy or feeling unfulfilled becomes the bugbear of contemporary existence; a sense that not achieving these elevated states means that somehow we have individually
and collectively lost our way. Thus the need to step out of life from time to time to ‘find oneself’” (Abrahams 2003:211).

It is exactly this need to “step out” of life that my informants spoke to me about when they talked of “discovering” the Society for Creative Anachronism in a time of personal turmoil or disillusionment. The Society for Creative Anachronism events created and attended by Loch an Fhraioch constituted a liminal period in which the participants could “play” (Turner 1969:95). Here metacommunication allows for the frame “this is play” to be enacted (Bateson 1955:48). It is exactly in these zones of play, Abrahams tells us, that “new rules, new roles, new ways of articulating time and space emerge in these moments. . . . in this area of free exchange, that identities are most subject to being tested and changed or reconfirmed” (2003:214). In this festival atmosphere, where masking occurs (Turner 1969:172, Ware 225:2001), their modern identity is obscured by their identity within Loch an Fhraioch. An identity that is intrinsically tied to feelings of camaraderie, brotherhood as one informant described it, within the group, feelings that overpower the other ethos within the Society for Creative Anachronism as a whole and
force the participants of this shire to negotiate between these feelings of camaraderie and their desire for narrative and aesthetic coherence in order to support their identity.

Loch an Fhraioch’s main activity is fighting, and it is primarily around fighting that the group operates and interacts.

Fighting is the main focus in this group, but there is a small but strong interest in some of the other things. So like Hildigan, Shannon, she’s really into cooking and she’ll do 15th century Andalusian and other Mediterranean styles, early Spanish style food. Most of it actually comes back around to fighting though, either making armor or arming gear. Not even hard shell stuff, we’re talking soft kit— the arming coats. There has been a talk of interest about boot making, period boot making. [Conrad interview, June 5, 2010]

One of the consequences of Loch an Fhraioch’s burgeoning focus on aesthetic and narrative coherence is the expansion of activities that Loch an Fhraioch participates in and practices. In addition to costume and armor construction and Shannon’s cooking, dancing has become a popular pastime of this group. Beyond the aesthetic and narrative characteristics of these activities, there is the social camaraderie aspect to them, and as I will discuss later, activities such as these help to bridge the gap between older and new values and members.
Chapter Two: Contestation and Structure in the Society for Creative Anachronism and Loch an Fhraoich
The Society for Creative Anachronism has evolved since its early events, and has grown to include nineteen kingdoms, covering every continent. These kingdoms, in the order of founding and at their current geographic location, now include:

- **West Kingdom (1966)** - Northern California, Nevada, Alaska, Japan, Korea, and Pacific Rim


- **Middle Kingdom (1969)** - Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Scott County in Iowa, most of Kentucky, and Essex County and Windsor in Ontario

- **Atenveldt (1971)** - Arizona

- **Meridies (1978)** - Alabama, most of Georgia, some of Florida, most of Tennessee, and a few southern counties of Kentucky

- **Caid (1978)** - Southern California, Greater Las Vegas Area, and Hawaii

- **Ansteorra (1979)** - Oklahoma and the majority of Texas

- **Atlantia (1981)** - Maryland, District of Columbia, North and South Carolina, Virginia, and the city of Augusta, Georgia

- **An Tir (1982)** - Oregon, Washington, part of Idaho, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories

- **Calontir (1984)** - Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and part of Arkansas

- **Trimaris (1985)** - most of Florida, Panama;

- **Outlands (1986)**, New Mexico, most of Colorado, some of Nebraska, the city of Cheyenne, Wyoming, and El Paso and Hudspeth counties in Texas

- **Drachenwald (1993)** - Europe, Africa, Middle East
• Artemisia (1997) - Montana, some of Idaho, most of Utah, western Colorado, and western Wyoming

• Æthelmaerc (1997) - West Virginia, some of Pennsylvania, western New York

• Ealdormere (1998) - most of Ontario, Canada

• Lochac (2002) - Australia, New Zealand, and Antarctica

• Northshield (2004) - North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Manitoba, and some of Ontario


Figure 9: Society for Creative Anachronism kingdoms in the United States. Map by Suzanne Barber
These Kingdoms are then further broken down into corresponding smaller units, beginning with subdivisions known as principalities. As I discussed in chapter one, a principality is generally formed when a group is beginning the process of creating its own kingdom. Some are formed indefinitely, such as the Principality of the Mists that encompasses Berkeley, California and the surrounding area.

Local units include:

- Baronies- larger groups of twenty-five or more members
- Provinces- like a barony but does not have a titular head
- Cantons- smaller subsidiary branches formed within or right outside of a barony
- Ridings- the same as a canton but for a province
- Shires - usually smaller, more isolated groups.

Further, there are three institutional forms of branches within the Society for Creative Anachronism.

- Colleges- set-up in areas around universities. A college’s population and participation is expected to fluctuate throughout the year with the academic calendar and their requirements are looser than a shire.
- Strongholds- similar to a college but located around a military base
- Port- for situations where members may be detached from their base for long lengths of time (such as a Naval ship) a port is formed instead of a stronghold.

All of these smaller groups ultimately report back to the Kingdom where they are located. (Plemmons 2010a:14-15).
Social Structure of the Society for Creative Anachronism

The social structure of the Society for Creative Anachronism can be divided into official, and unofficial groups and authority. The official ruling structure is closely tied to the SCA geographical structure. Going back to the Society for Creative Anachronism becoming a non-profit, the SCA Board of Directors have ultimate say in the rules and governing of the Society for Creative Anachronism. As Conrad explained to me during our interview, only after SCA corpora comes kingdom law.

There is society law [official SCA corpora] and then each kingdom has their own bylaws or their own corpora. The rules inside each individual kingdom can only be tighter than those laws set by the society as a whole. They can’t say ‘well we’re not going to pay attention to that rule that Society set’ and let you do something that you can’t do in another kingdom. It usually comes back to something that might be dangerous or possibly illegal. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Conrad goes on to admit that “there are always loopholes” (interview, June 5, 2010) and thus contributing to some of the contestations in the Society for Creative Anachronism. By allowing individual kingdoms to establish many of their own rules, the kingdoms are thus encouraged to create their own and often very distinct culture. These different cultures can sometimes clash against each other or against the SCA corpora when these rules and the SCA board of directors are seen as being too strict and getting in the way.

At the kingdom and local level, this structure is further broken down into administrative positions, and “nobility.” The kingdom’s king or queen is generally picked via a crown list, a tourney in which the fighters compete to become king or queen. The winner and their consort are crowned crown prince and crown princess until the coronation in which they become the king and queen for a set amount of time. Although
every kingdom runs differently, it is often the king or queen who sets kingdom law. There are also other peers, including barons and baronesses, dukes and duchesses, and so on (de la Mare 2006).

In addition to a king and queen, there is a council of appointed bureaucratic offices that run the day to day affairs of the kingdom known as the Kingdom Great Offices. These include the Seneschal; who at the kingdom level is in charge of collecting reports, keeping numbers up, and other day to day activities of running the kingdom. The Principal Herald is the person to whom other Heralds report. The Earl Marshal acts as the head of all Marshals; he reviews any changes to rules of combat to check for safety. The Minister of Arts and Sciences is in charge of encouraging interest in everything non-combat oriented. Chancellor of the Exchequer is the treasurer of the kingdom. The Chronicler keeps information up-to-date and keeps groups within the kingdom informed of upcoming events. Finally, the Chirurgeon is a certified first-aid specialist. The crown can name new offices.

Principalities also elect a prince and princess, generally through a crown list, and local branches contained within their area report to them. Baronies have a baron and baroness which are elected differently depending on which barony is in question but they are commonly elected by the crown. Cantons and shires do not have a ruling crown of any kind, and instead rely on their various officers to keep things running smoothly. Most prominent of these officers are the Seneschal, which acts as a sort of president. In addition, depending on the group size, the group often has a herald, in charge of helping members find a name and heraldic device, and then assisting in registering this device. In
larger groups, such as principalities or at the kingdom level, the Herald also acts as the voice of nobility, making announcements on their behalf.

A Marshal, which at this level has several variations, is in charge of combat safety. There is often a specialist in archery, rapier, and children’s combat. A marshal that is certified for the event must be present for combat to occur. Thus if a rapier certified marshal is not present, rapier combat cannot take place although heavy combat might still be allowed as long as a heavy combat certified Marshal is present. An Exchequer acts as the treasurer for the group while a Chirurgeon is a person certified in first aide and assists the marshal in assuring that members are safe and treated if a minor injury occurs. A Chronicler keeps track of records and helps to keep members informed of upcoming events. Finally, many groups have a Chatelaine who is in charge of assisting new members (Plemmons 2010b:15-16).

Loch an Fhraoich is a small group and does not have enough people to fill all the offices, nor do they necessarily need all of them. As a shire, they must have at least three officers, including a Seneschal, Exchequer and then either a Herald, Arts and Sciences Officer, or Marshal. As previously stated, Inan is the Seneschal. Eirik, as the Herald, also assists Inan in secretarial duties. Shannon is both the Exchequer and Webminister. As Webminister her main duties are keeping the listserv up-to date. Thomas is their Archery Marshal. Conrad is the Arts and Sciences Minister. I believe one reason that Loch an Fhraoich may not have very defined roles, except for those that are forced upon them via SCA paperwork and corpora is their desire to retain camaraderie. I will further discuss the desire later in this work.
Households and Guilds

Unofficial groups called households are also organized around shared interests and camaraderie and can be used to express personal values, goals, and the level of one’s commitment to the SCA. They are not dependent upon a geographic location, although they may have the majority or all of their members located in one region. They can be organized around a shared interest, just as a group of friends, or around a peer and his squires, protégés, apprentices, and others.

I belong to one, two, three, [pause] or four households. The premier household I belong to is Rolling Thunder . . . Mine’s probably one of the oldest households in this Society. It was started by veterans of the Vietnam War, they actually started the house of Rolling Thunder in Alaska of all places, and they wanted to get away from things there. . .

I belong to my protégé, my pelican’s household, and I belong to two knights households. . . I am still connected to these households and I have friends all over you know. You can’t, can’t beat it anywhere else. Where else can you go out for the weekend and put on a wild suit of armor get hot, sweaty, hit your friend, drink beer? [Thomas interview, November 9, 2009]

Thomas is involved with several households and asserts that they allow him to retain friends from many places. Each household expects a certain level and type of participation which gives Thomas leeway on how he wants to engage the Society for Creative Anachronism. Of course, sometimes members from an official group are involved with the same household or guild. Inan and other Loch an Fhraioch members are also active in Rolling Thunder. This allows members of Loch an Fhraioch to associate on different levels with different social structures and play frames. In contrast, members

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15 For an interesting and contrasting view of the household Rolling Thunder see Crammer.
can also join a household or guild as a way to participate in the SCA without members of their own official group. A household, as an unofficial group can not hold an official SCA event, but they may hold one on behalf of a group. This is an important fact in relation to Loch an Fhraoich as I will discuss in Chapter Three.

A guild is a kingdom level organization formed around a common interest. These are used to share information, spread interest, and overall forward the craft they are involved with. Every kingdom has different guilds, and these guilds often host their own listservs. Some of the guilds in the Kingdom of Meridies include the costumers guild, embroideries guild, herbal guild, hound coursing guild, and lace making guild (The Kingdom of Meridies 2010a)

These small individual groups, both official and unofficial, are often made of close-knit and long-lasting friendships that retain their own “feeling” and distinct identity within and sometimes outside of the Society for Creative Anachronism. This is articulated not only by people within that particular group but also by those in outside groups who may have never have even dealt personally with them.

Rewarding of Values

The “official” values of the Society for Creative Anachronism, as articulated by the participants, have from its conception attempted “to embody those lost ideals of chivalry, courtesy, and honor” (de la Mare 2006). When analyzed, many of the workings of the Society for Creative Anachronism reinforce these values and often award them in highly visible ways. Recognized awards in the Society for Creative Anachronism are not generally handed out by merit of perceived skill alone, but rather, the awarding is based
on how well the receiver combined this skill with the aforementioned values. For example, in order to become a member of the Order of the Laurel, an award given to those who have achieved excellence in the arts and sciences, one must also be willing and active in sharing their knowledge with other members to help them achieve their own level of excellence. They in turn, are then permitted to wear a laurel wreath medallion and are referred to by other participants as “Master” or “Mistress.”

A knight must not only be good at combat but must also set an example of chivalric behavior and always strive to act with courtesy, and honor. After attaining knighthood and completing the ritual vigil, they are allowed to wear a white belt, a gold chain, and spurs and are then referred to as “Sir” or “Dame.”

Perhaps the biggest indicator of the rewarding of the Society for Creative Anachronism values over pure skill is the Order of the Pelican, which is given to a member who has shown self-sacrifice in helping the SCA and individual members. They, like laurel recipients, are called “Master” or “Mistress” and their symbol, that of the

Figure 10: Badon wearing his white belt. Video Still by Suzanne Barber
white pelican piercing its own breast in order for its young to survive, offers a visual emphasis to all who see the image (de la Mare 2006, Shuping 2010:36-37).

Although different guides for new members vary in the amount of detail they offer in what to wear at a Society for Creative Anachronism event, they are almost always explicit on what not to wear, including all the paraphernalia associated with these three awards. By limiting these items to an exclusive group, the Society for Creative Anachronism has created visual codes to all members that those who are allowed to wear such items are not only to be honored, but to be emulated. In addition to these SCA-wide awards, individual kingdoms, shires, or households may have their own awards. Eirik shared with me the awards that he has attained:

Eirik: I only have two so, so it’s pretty easy for me. I have an Award of Arms I got in 1989 from John the Mad Celt when he was on the throne and then I’ve gotten a Companion of the Argent Shield which is a teaching award.

Suzanne: Is that specific to this kingdom?
Eirik: Yes, it is specific to Meridies and it’s specific for teaching the fighting arts. I even know why I got it. I even know who got it for me. All of that got back to me strangely enough. . . These guys got it for me [members of Loch an Fhraoich] by going to Crimson River, doing the fighter practice, and his Grace Sir Ailenon showed up to that fighter practice and he noted that the quality of the fighting for the shire was above standards, something better than he expected it to be. And every time he talked to somebody he would say ‘why are you doing this?’ ‘Well Eirik says do this, well Eirik said I should start doing that’ and he said literally everybody he spoke to at some point said ‘well Eirik said I would be more successful if I do this.’

So I show up in court at the hottest Border Raids\textsuperscript{16} in known history of man . . . And that was when I got my Argent Shield. It was a surprise completely blind-sided me. Had no idea I had anything coming, and it was a very big honor to be recognized for that. Having done it with these guys was really cool because the quality of fighting in the shire was really good when I got here, it was one of the reasons that I stayed. [interview, November 9, 2009]

Eirik elaborated more about his Argent Shield than his Award of Arms, an award given out across the Society for Creative Anachronism as an award for fighting, and is usually one of the first awards received (de la Mare 2006, Shuping 2010:37). This suggests a greater value is placed upon the localized award. Furthermore, this award focused on Eirik’s involvement with his specific group, emphasizing the connection and camaraderie he had with them.

Thomas had a similar reaction when describing his awards, placing greater emphasis on the more localized or esoteric awards over more common ones. Even Thomas’ Award of Arms, which was previously mentioned, is an SCA-wide award, is explained in a highly individualized way, emphasizing that this award has a deeper

\textsuperscript{16} A war fought every June over Southern Kentucky (The Shire of Rising Stone 2009).
personal meaning through a connection to his brother, making this award closer to a smaller localized award.

Thomas: I was given the Award of Arms for serving as part of the royal body guard for King Cedric and Queen Alainne. Not only the fact of just doing that, it is the fact that I was one of the royal bookends. I’m a twin, my twin was on the other side, I was on this side and teedah! Award of Arms that was interesting.

So then lets see, I have an award from the Middle Kingdom called the Doe’s Grace. It is a specific award given by the Queen of the Midrealm (Middle Kingdom) and there are very few in this Kingdom who carry this award. I have it, my twin brother has it, probably five or six more in this kingdom have it. It was an award to honor one of the past Queens of the Midrealm who died of cancer. Her device was a white doe and it’s an award I’ll always cherish. Lets see, I have the Argent Shield for fighting. I have two Grants of Arms. A Grant of Arm is the next level up from an Award of Arms.

Eirik: It changes your title from “Lord” to the “Honorable Lord.” So now he is the “Honorable Lord Squared” [laughs].

Thomas: I don’t know how. The reason I got it the second time was purely by accident. Somebody didn’t do their homework and told the Queen that I didn’t have it. I got it again at Gulf Wars a couple years ago for working very hard at the Director of Public Works for the third largest gathering of the Known World.

And I was called into court wearing my original Grant of Arms. It entitles me to wear a collar of state. And I had my collar of state on, and I walk up and kneel in front of the Queen and she said ‘somebody made a mistake’ looking over her shoulder at the Harold. And his eyes were about as big as saucers. And here I am, and she said ‘we’re going to give you another one of those.’ I said ‘okay.’ So I don’t have a whole lot of them, but the ones I have I cherish very much.

17 King Cedric and Queen Alainne served as King and Queen in the Kingdom of Meridies from September 12, 1981 to March 4, 1982 (The Kingdom of Meridies 2010b).

18 A large war held every March originally involving the kingdoms of Ansteorra and Trimaris. It now involves numerous kingdoms as “allies” (dei Medici 2010).
I do have one that is very specific to the area of archery, the Order of the Split Arrow. I am one of the eight founding members of the order. It is an award given specifically to combat archers. And the order was brought back into Gulf Wars several years ago, and we were told that we were going to be given this honor through the crown. We were actually given this award in front of the Known World.

Eirik: So yeah, I think you’ll find that, and I don’t want to say that people with no awards or with tons of awards don’t appreciate things, but I think you’ll find that people who just have a few are very appreciative of the ones they’ve got. [interview, November 9, 2009]

Not only is Thomas’ award for archery particularly special to him because he founded the order, but also, archery as a prime contestation in the Society for Creative Anachronism is not often so publicly awarded. The fact that this localized and highly personal award was given in front of the Society for Creative Anachronism as a whole, at an inter-kingdom event, makes it even more marked for Thomas.

With these awards, the smaller groups are able to assert what they value beyond the basic Society for Creative Anachronism ethos and to help create a distinct feeling within the SCA. In addition, both SCA-wide awards and the localized awards serve as aesthetic markers both within and without of the different groups present in the Society for Creative Anachronism framework.

These awards are not only group awards, they are awards given to individuals by other individuals. In this way, to a great extent, awards are based on who you know and who knows you. These awards serve not only as aesthetic markers, but also as a visual map of relationships and networks both within and without their inner group. These awards then not only tie small groups together, they in turn tie these small groups to the “larger than local” via individual relationships symbolized in these recognitions. This
mapping also serves as a show of prestige, “I got this awards because I did this and this person knows me and noticed that I did that” (Noyes 2003:16-17, Shuman 1993).

**Contestations**

As with any international group there are numerous contestations that have shaped the formation of the Society for Creative Anachronism, many of these contestations continue today. Not all of these contestations affect every group or individual, and for the sake of focus I will concentrate on key contestations that have been experienced and referenced by my informants in Loch an Fhraoich. Not surprisingly, different members of Loch an Fhraoich expressed different opinions and reactions to these areas of contestations, and in some cases, not all members even agreed there was an issue.

This divide often fell along the line of older members versus newer members. Frequently, this coincided with whether a contestation was seen to destabilize the value of camaraderie or narrative and aesthetic coherence. Wherever possible, members tried to strike a balance between these two values, but when this was difficult or impossible to achieve, the length of time one has been involved with Loch an Fhraioch (or one might even say what generation they were part of) dictated where they struck the balance. Older and or less active members usually favored camaraderie while newer or more active members tended to favor narrative and aesthetic coherence.

**Levels and Types of Anachronism**

Not all participants agree to what capacity the performative and anachronized experiences of the Society for Creative Anachronism should have in developing the “known world” and although, according to the official site, “the SCA is an international
organization dedicated to researching and re-creating the arts and skills of pre-17th-century Europe” (SCA n.d.a), there is a wide range of interpretations of this statement. While some participants take this to mean that your persona must be European, it is not uncommon to hear that a persona does not have to be European in origin, but rather, that a persona must come from a culture that would have been known by pre-17th-century Europe. Conrad explained to me during an interview how this concept of pre-17th century Europe expanded to be more inclusive over the years:

Of course the 14th century mafia\textsuperscript{19} might choose to argue otherwise (of course they’ll argue anything out of 14th century being a joke). People kind of skew the lines a lot. The original intent was for Western Europe. Then they kind of opened that up to Western Europe and those they had contact with. That was basically to allow the Scots and the Vikings in. And by the way, Viking is an occupation, not a people, they were Scandinavian or Dane.

But now they have opened it up. There are people who will actually do early American Indian, and they do it well, because it is actually documented pre-17th Century and they had contact with the Europeans most definitely. The ones who are serious about history of that particular persona, they will fight as similar as they can safely to the way their persona would have fought. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Loch an Fhraoich has several members who fall into this second category, in particular Inan, as representing a Turkish woman, and Eirik and Thomas who both portray Vikings.

This debate, according to Conrad has died down a bit, but people continue to push the boundaries with personas such as Native Americans and Samurai.

\textsuperscript{19} The 14th-century mafia, as will be described in more detail, is a somewhat derogatory term used to describe people that are perceived as being overly focused on accuracy. They are often contrasted against “stick jocks” an equally negative name given to those that are perceived to be there just for the party and to beat people up on the battle field.
Yet another form of contestation arises between the dichotomy of historical accuracy versus anachronism, and the levels of each that should or must be tolerated.

Right now there seems to be a huge push in driving the SCA as a whole more towards a living history aspect. They [the SCA at large] don’t want people out there in mixed costume. They don’t want you to consider yourself to be a Celt and be running around with metal legs, because you know, they just wouldn’t have. But to me there are two flavors of anachronism. There is the anachronism where you have Vikings fighting 14\textsuperscript{th} century French knights, and there is the anachronism where you have a Viking with a 14\textsuperscript{th} century French halberd. . . That is an anachronism too. That is a Viking fighting with a weapon that is out of his time frame.

So I think there needs to be an allotment for those people who wish to interpret anachronism that way. And you can’t if you push everyone towards living history. So, just because I want to look just like a Viking when I step out on the field doesn’t mean he has to. [Eirik interview, November 9, 2009]

To Eirik, although he personally values attempting to look as close to a Viking as he can, he does not feel that it is necessary for everyone to value this aesthetic choice.
He suggests that there are inherently two types of anachronism occurring in the Society for Creative Anachronism and an individual should have a choice as to how much they wish to engage with these two “flavors.”

Conrad agrees with Eirik’s opinion that the Society for Creative Anachronism is not a reenactment group.

Reenactment would be scripted, we would already know the outcome before we began. We are a re-creation group, we recreate a lifestyle. I think lifestyle is the only way to describe it because we go into the arts and crafts, the science of the day. Anything they did then aside from raiding, pillaging, plundering, and plague we do now, and we try to do as close as we can to the way they did then. That is what would really classify it as a re-creation, because obviously we aren’t going to cook with spoiled meat or marry twelve year olds. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Like Eirik, Conrad also sees the Society for Creative Anachronism moving towards a search for accuracy in the quest for re-creation. When I asked him during our interview if he has seen the Society for Creative Anachronism change since he first joined he told me that it has, and that for him at least, this has been a positive move:
Yes it has changed. When I first started the main emphasis was to get you combat legal, that was all that mattered. You could be as ugly as homemade sin (to use a common saying) carpet armor, freon cans, whatever. Of course freon cans had already been banned by the time I came around. Now more people are putting emphasis on historical accuracy and just generally looking better. Because when you look better, you feel more confident, you are more apt to find your place on the field.

It is a very good thing. It encourages people to improve. You know if you are one of these guys over here still toting in the carpet armor, and you see people in full fluted gothic plate, you’re like ‘wow I’m kind of the asshole here.’

Authentic armor was more protective than anything that was just thrown together to get you on the field will ever be. Just from what I have seen of actual historical armor. You’re wearing a mobile tank. There is very little of your actual body exposed. You are more well protected. You might just not move as fast or in as many directions. In full fluted gothic plate, raising your hands above your head— didn’t happen. [interview, June 5 2010]

Conrad offers numerous reasons as to why this move towards “authentic” or accurate portrayals is advantageous. Among them, is the statement that historical armor worked better than modern alternatives made out of plastic or carpet. Thus he places his
reasoning into a functional rather aesthetic category. Furthermore, Conrad positions this debate onto a dichotomy of the “14th century mafia” versus “stick jock” mentality.

Oh yeah, we refer to them as the 14th century mafia. But the mafia doesn’t exist so that will be stricken from the records or sheep shall die. They’re more focused on historical accuracy than really any other portion of the SCA. It has a tendency to get annoying sometimes, and a lot of them, or let’s say less are tolerant than someone who is still just coming up with it.

But they can be really good influences and they’re great sources of information. And once you break into their comfort zone of them actually wanting to speak to you, which usually just involves expressing an interest in or I guess you could say joining the club, and at that point they want to rebuild you. And it could be a really, really, good experience or it could be a really, really, horrible experience just depending on who that person is. [interview, June 5, 2010]

On the whole, Conrad views this move as positive, but appears uncomfortable by some of the methods of the “14th century mafia” crowd. On the other hand, Conrad does not take seriously someone who does not value aesthetic and narrative coherence. Although Conrad didn’t use the term “stick jock” during this interview, I have heard him (as well as other members of Loch an Fhraioch) use this term to describe a person on the flip side of the 14th century mafia. Someone who does not value accuracy and does the bare minimum to get out onto the field. They value partying far more than aesthetic and narrative coherence. I asked Conrad what accuracy is during an SCA event:

A serious attempt at accuracy is what that goes back on. Not wearing carpet armor with duct tape showing and your Nike’s shining. The purple and pink vikings at Pennsic was- that was interesting. There was a group that did full Samurai armor, there were like eight of these guys all in neon colors. Barrel plastic painted neon colors. That’s people goofing off. Anyone who makes neon armor is never taken seriously. [interview, June 5, 2010]

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20 Pennsic is the largest and longest event in the SCA. It takes place every summer in Pennsylvania (Lecin 2011).
Rather than describe what accuracy would entail, such as what Conrad says a 14th century mafia person would, he instead chooses to explain what an attempt at accuracy is not. It is also worth noting that Conrad uses the word “attempt” in acknowledgment of the impossibility of perfect accuracy or authenticity. Here I see Conrad as trying to retain a balance between these two views. If he goes too far one way then it will prevent one of the two dual values of Loch an Fhraioch. As a younger member, Conrad falls further on the side of aesthetic and narrative coherence (i.e closer to the 14th-century mafia) on the continuum than that of camaraderie (stick jock).

When I asked Thomas how important having a fleshed-out persona and being accurate was he offered this:

Thomas: To have a completely fleshed out persona to me is very important. You need to have the storyline, you need to have place, you need to have a time frame, mindset, skills. My persona ran away from home because his uncle had killed his father in a land dispute. He ran away and ended up in Kiev, and went down from there to Nava. Kiev to the Rouslands and then he went to Byzantine, Constantinople to see the Holy Roman Emperor or the Holy Eastern Emperor. Saw, got rich, came back, killed the usurper of his fathers lands. You know, now I’m just out for collecting taxes off of the English

Eirik: [laughs] stole Harald’s name

Thomas: Stole Harald’s name, and I cannot get, the thing about it, I cannot get people who have known me for years keep spelling it the English version. It’s alright [pause] but it’s good. If you don’t have a flushed out persona you really don’t know who you are, you’re there for the party [pause] wait a minute we are there for the party! Oh well! [interview, November 9, 2009]

Thomas’ persona is fleshed out enough that he is able to have an inside joke with Eirik surrounding his name. It should be remembered though, that Thomas was trying to
integrate old members back into Loch an Fhraoich, members who belonged when the shire valued camaraderie over narrative and aesthetic coherence. It is interesting then, to observe that while he clearly values this coherence, and agrees that one should try to gain it, he is quick to backtrack on saying anything negative about a “stick jock” sort of mentality. Unlike Conrad then, Thomas as an older and less active member, remains closer to the camaraderie or more stick jock side of the continuum.

Partying and Practical Jokes

Partying and practical jokes have a long history in the Society for Creative Anachronism, and they play a central role in the social structure. Loch an Fhraioch in particular is fond of both activities. What is an acceptable style of joking and parties is often left up to debate. Loch an Fhraioch, in particular, has run into problems with their form of partying and jokes because many consider it to be inappropriate. The members responsible have left Loch an Fhraioch, but the shire is still fond of their jokes and parties and the recent lull and dampening of these activities has been felt in particular by the older members. Eirik and Thomas relayed memories of a common joke they played at Society events:

Eirik: It was fun. It was him [Thomas] coming to my house at four o’clock in the morning and picking me up, throwing my stuff in the back of a truck. We drove all the way down there, we fought in the tourney both, of us did really well in the tourney that day. Hung out.

Thomas: Met new people.

Eirik: Yeah, met new people. We went and signed up for a feast table and when we signed up we were the only people at the feast. When we came back it was a table full of women. So we ended up eating the feast at just a table full of women that night. It was just very joyous, we had pleasant company, non-smelly pleasant company. It was excellent.
Thomas: I actually got to meet a Persian.

Eirik: A Persian? There was an actual-

Thomas: She was definite, she was not an Iranian, she was a Persian.

Eirik: Yes, that is funny because I got to sit at a table with a Ukrainian guy, it was his first SCA event this time. That’s two in a row now. I’ve been to Silver Hammer\textsuperscript{21}, we’ve had somebody's first event and they came from a foreign country. And I did not pull the sheep eye stew line on him, and you would have been so proud of me.

Every time we have a new person at feast, they always serve a soup of some kind, chicken soup whatever kind of soup. Ok I had a chance. This lovely onion or leek and cheese soup. Man I had the perfect opportunity, just as soon as he finished that glass. ‘Oh how’d you like the sheep eye stew?’ But because you always get them after they’ve eaten they don’t really know because it’s all weird and medievally, and they’ve been freaked out because it’s all weird medieval food to start with.

Thomas: You just catch them with the sheep eye stew ‘So how’d you like the sheep eye stew?’ [laughs]

Eirik: I didn’t do that this time you’d have been proud of me.

Thomas: I would have.

Eirik: I rose above that. There may be hope for me yet. [laughs]

Suzanne: How many people have you gotten with the sheep eye?

Eirik: Oh, on the average, one a feast. [laughs]

Thomas: I keep looking to try to buy some of those gummy eyeballs at Halloween and just store them away and just send them to him just in case. So he can have them swirling around in the soup. Knowing him he’d do it too.

Eirik: Probably, and I’d probably find the one person that was extreme diabetic and just dropping a gummy eye in their soup was enough to send

\textsuperscript{21} An annual tourney held in October (Pisani 2011).
them into a coma. ‘Eirik didn’t you think of that?’ ‘Well no who thinks about that!’ [laughs] [interview, November 9, 2009]

Here, although Eirik and Thomas have great memories about this prank, Eirik decided not to play this trick the last time he had a chance. It is interesting to note that Thomas, who is not as active in the Society for Creative Anachronism as Eirik anymore, and who has been bringing older members back to meetings, was the one to say he would have played the prank. Eirik initially said he would use the gummy eyeballs, but, albeit exaggeratedly and in a joking manner, suggested some of the problems of taking this joke too far.

When discussions of partying did come up at meetings, there was always a slight amount of tension. I suspect my presence may have been the cause of some of this tension, as the members of Loch an Fhraioch have always been very careful to not discuss what happened in front of other people or new members. Some members clearly wanted less restrictions while others were weary of the fallout were the party perceived as out of hand. Still, partying continues in Loch an Fhraioch. “It is kind of on the decline right now but that is one of those things that kind of cycles as the new group comes in and the old group gets older the revel style changes. Lets just say it is a different kind of party now than what it was when I first came around, but it is still just as intense” (Conrad interview, June 5, 2010).

The style of partying has been modified to try to prevent this feeling of going too far. As I will discuss in more detail in a later chapter, this has been done to try to retain a sense of camaraderie within the group, while not disrupting their respectability within the larger SCA framework. Despite these efforts, some members still strongly disagree about bending to the desires of outside members.
Gender

Gender was not explicitly a topic of contestation that was brought up by my informants during my time with Loch an Fhraioch. I would guess that the majority of the members would say that if gender is a problem within the larger Society for Creative Anachronism, it certainly isn’t within their group. Yet gender is always at play, and so I feel it is important to address the areas of tension that I experienced or observed during my time with this group. One of the primary areas where this was apparent was the playing out of gender stereotypes within the SCA framework as Thomas illustrated to me during our interview:

As a funny part of a little joke, there is a friend of mine, her and her husband are armorers and they make armor for a living. Well the few times I’ve been to Pennsic I’ve helped her in the shop. I’ll be sitting there, the guy coming out of armor from fighting sitting in the back, looking like he knows what he’s talking about and here is some woman over here just beating some rivets into some armor. And who do they ask ‘whose shop is this’ or ‘how much this is?’ Just the guy that happens to be sitting there, since they don’t think a woman can make armor. She will drink most people under the table, and has a right arm about the size of a watermelon because it is just from swinging a hammer all day. And she’s a very good, very funny person, and we have a running bet about how many people will end-up the rest of the week asking me how much my armor was.

[interview, November 9, 2009]

In this case, both Thomas and the woman are aware of the gender stereotypes at play here, and presumably, they both find amusement from tricking people with this understanding.

This stereotyping though, goes both ways in the Society for Creative Anachronism, and in particular Loch an Fhraioch, for while it is okay for a woman to be a fighter, and not particularly unusual with this group, a man not fighting is something to
be marked. Matt Hale, my partner, was continuously asked and lightly teased about when he was going to put on armor, although they were well aware that he had no interest in doing so. This was meant as a friendly jest, but it still shows an incident where something did not follow the perceived order and had to be remarked upon.

A further area to consider in relation to Loch an Fhraioch specifically is how important fighting is to the group. Although individual members have interests beyond fighting, the majority of the group’s activities revolve around fighter practice. This, in turn, creates a group centered around a primarily male activity so that to be active one either needs to fight, or be connected to a fighter (or at the very least willing to socialize primarily while watching the fighter practice). This can make it difficult for a single woman or man who does not want to participate in this aspect of the Society for Creative Anachronism to be as engaged with this group. It is interesting to note that during my fieldwork I was the only member present not fighting or connected to a fighter. During the pure arts and sciences meetings (generally held in poor weather or before a long event) few fighters attended, making these meetings quite small. The few fighters that were present often split off to work on armor or eat in the kitchen.

I do not want to make it seem that the group would be unwelcoming or rude to a person not interested in fighting, but rather their activities would not present the same level of opportunities that another group, less focused on fighting, might present a single member interested in other activities.
Media Influence

The Society for Creative Anachronism developed along with a variety of media, including table top games such as Dungeons and Dragons, created in 1974 (Fine 1983:14) video game systems, and the rise of the internet with the listservs, forums, websites, YouTube videos and so on that go along with this advancement. This has obviously affected the Society for Creative Anachronism, but not everyone believes all the changes have been positive. Conrad, when I asked him, gave an example of where this influence created, in his opinion, a negative pattern of participation.

With the age difference, a lot of the younger kids now have been associated with online gaming, or watched a few too many movies, and they associate it [The Society for Creative Anachronism] with that, rather than as its own thing. It can sometimes skew the purpose. They look at it more as a game than a re-creation. There are people I would classify as sport fighters, the people who, you’ll see this a lot. They’ll show up, they’ll get really good at fighting. They’ll get themselves knighted, maybe win a crown or two and then disappear because they have, at that point, beaten the game. Most of those guys have no interest in the history. They do what they have to do to get by. As far as historical representation, they’re more focused on the competition than they are on anything else. [interview, June 5, 2010]

This type of participation, besides creating a video-game experience, benefits the individual rather than the group, threatening camaraderie. Beyond this, because the main point of this type of participation is to “win,” and to do that does not require a lot of time spent on other activities other than fighting, the majority of these people will not put in the time necessary to achieve aesthetic and narrative coherence. These people then, although showing “stick jock” tendencies, threaten to destabilize Loch an Fhraioch even further because they do not cherish the camaraderie that the “stick jocks” value.
One surprising, positive aspect of new media that came out of my fieldwork was the ability for fighters to acquire videos of themselves fighting, in order to both share with others online at sites like YouTube, as well as to discover where they were making mistakes. Several members of Loch an Fhraioch were thrilled to see the video camera that I was originally hesitant to bring, afraid I might overstep my place as a visitor. Instead, I was told that they had never been able to find a video of themselves fighting, and they were excited about finally having that opportunity.

Not all the influences of new media have garnered a straightforward negative or positive response, instead the reaction is often mixed or a give and take situation. Conrad was quick to suggest the ways the internet has complicated the way the Society for Creative Anachronism runs.

It’s been really positive in some ways, and really negative in other ways. It makes it really easy to communicate, which reduces the need to actually go and physically see someone. So it is kind of a double edged sword. It makes it easier to get information about events last minute changes or anything like that. The coordination of the larger events is done primarily on the internet through chat boards. Being able to reserve your cabin space a month ahead of time using your credit card over the website makes things a lot easier. [interview, June 5, 2010]
The internet, when functioning in the capacity of organizing activities both bolsters and destabilizes camaraderie. By making it easier to find information about events, and to keep things organized, more people are able to attend more events, which in turn strengthens networks both within and without groups. At the same time, this convenience means that fewer in-person planning sessions are needed and this in turn allows this camaraderie to wane in between events.

A further area of contestation that was brought to my attention very early in my fieldwork was the outsourcing of Society for Creative Anachronism goods. A discussion occurred between Badon and a local merchant who occasionally plays with Loch an Fhraioch about another SCA member in Tennessee who now outsources to India to have tunics made that he could then sell for a higher profit margin. In this case, both Badon and the other members were disparaging of this practice. Not only did it take away from any potential profit from their own work, but I would argue that this also violates the value of camaraderie. These gifts, as outsourced or mass produced, do not have the same sort of connection that a handmade item does to Loch an Fhraioch. Thomas added a further notion to this sort of outsourcing during our conversation when he commented, “and it goes along with the phrase ‘I made this.’ ‘I did this,’ so it is the same way I am raising my own eggs hens for eggs and raising my own chickens for killing” (interview, November 9, 2009). In this way, making your own item or buying an item made locally not only supports camaraderie but also connects to the larger social movement of sustainability and buying local.
Not every member agrees that this situation is negative, and Conrad had a different opinion.

It may have put a strain on some of the merchants that we have, but as far as the individual members, that has been a wonderful thing as far as the improvement on the image in the field. Because now a full suit, a full halberd of riveted flat link chain mail, that once cost upwards of $2000, you can get for $600. It’s great for us! [interview, June 5, 2010]

Conrad does admit that their may be negative consequences for the local merchants, but he justifies this by explaining how these lower costs will help bolster one’s image and accuracy. In this way, outsourcing and mass production can actually aid the value of aesthetic and narrative coherence, albeit at the expense of camaraderie.

Honor and Chivalry

Honor and chivalry are two important words in the Society for Creative Anachronism, and they are constantly at play both within the official rules and framework as well as within the individual acting within this framework. The problem with these words, although few would say that they don’t sound good, is that very few people have the same idea of what exactly these words entail, or in the case of chivalry, what historic period of chivalry is being referenced. Though the Society for Creative Anachronism was based on more of a Victorian sense of chivalry from Ivanhoe, this was not, as Eirik pointed out to me, the same type of chivalry at work during the middle ages.

But honestly there are two schools of chivalry, there’s your more romantic, Victorian era ideal of chivalry and then there is the more brutal knightly viewpoint of chivalry. Where you know, it wasn’t rescuing fair maidens and slaying dragons. It was beating the serfs off the land because your liege lord decided he needed that land. So it was an honorable thing to do it was good work. You were doing god’s work. [interview, November 9, 2009]
Certainly Eirik was not suggesting to me that a more brutal idea of chivalry should reign in the Society for Creative Anachronism, but rather was pointing out some of the complexities of selectively re-creating the medieval world (O’Rourke 1993).

Where this moves from ideal discussion to action is often during a Society event, where much of the fighting is based on an honor system. I will later discuss the idea of calling or not calling a shot, and some of the misunderstanding that may occur, but another point of contestation that occurs frequently is what type of weapons should be allowed, or are honorable to use. When I asked Conrad about contestations within the Society for Creative Anachronism he instantly mentioned archery.

In the SCA overall, the whole argument for and against combat archery has been the hot button for a number of years. The argument of whether it should just go away, or if the rules should be rewritten, or what to do with it, or whether or not to even keep it. There have been things that ruined peoples lives in and out of the SCA just because of certain people who get vindictive when they don’t get their way. But you are going to have people like that no matter what hobby you are in. [interview, June 5, 2010]

I heard more debates about archery during my fieldwork than I could ever hope to record. Loch an Fhraioch has several members who are active archers during war events and this places them well within the area of contestation. Archery, it is felt by many, is a dishonorable way to fight in the SCA. It is seen as unfair that a person can just walk onto the field, and before they face anyone else can get knocked out by a arrow from someone they cannot see and doesn’t have the “guts” to face them in hand to hand combat. This they say, ruins the fun of the game. Certainly in this act and reaction we can see the Victorian idea of chivalry and honor at work.
On the other side, many people who are archers (such as Thomas) participate in archery because they may not physically be able to participate in any other way, either due to a temporary injury, or for more long term reasons. Furthermore, they point out that archers and crossbowman were an important art of medieval combat. Why, they ask, should archery be stigmatized because someone isn’t “good enough” to block a shot or is a poor sport. Like the majority of contestation in the Society for Creative Anachronism, this shows no sign of being resolved anytime soon.

At the heart of many of these contestations lies the implication and issues of play. As Gregory Bateson has shown, the declaration of play relies on metacommunication, a metacommunicative act that must be read correctly by all parties (1955:48). When this is achieved the proper play framework is established, allowing participants to enact new social rules and roles. Not every participant has the same framework, and as Conrad and Eirik illustrated with their discussion of contradictory ideas of chivalric fighting styles, when a person acts outside this expected frame, they are perceived as playing “wrong” and the play frame is broken. At sites of contestation can be found these instances of frame breaking (Abrahams 2003:214, Bateson 1955:48, Goffman 1974).
Chapter Three: Negotiations in the Society for Creative Anachronism
In order to analyze the instances of negotiation within Loch an Fhraoich, I will examine multiple sites of discourse. To begin, I have broken down the Society for Creative Anachronism into five analytic categories of enactment: material culture, ethno-kinetic movement, persona performance, knowledge, and events. These categories are only an interpretive framework and almost never exist separated from the other categories in actual practice. They are not to be taken as definitive and distinct; for a particular action or object will often encompass several aspects of different categories at once. For example, both knowledge and ethno-kinetics are involved within the making and use of a material object which is further dictated by the users’ persona and the event they are attending. Nevertheless, by dividing the actions and objects into these categories it is possible to see the contradictions participants are faced with and their resulting negotiations to support their values. How a member or a group manages these negotiations dictates where other participants place them within the larger Society for Creative Anachronism frame and contributes to that member’s or group’s self-perceived identity.

Next, I will examine instances where the values of narrative and aesthetic coherence and camaraderie directly contradict. I will examine this in two parts by first discussing how members of Loch an Fhraoich handle a disruption of one or both of these values by examining the tradition of gift giving within this group. I will then look at areas where members have taken one value too far and are at risk of overriding the other value. In both cases it is necessary for members to mediate one value with the other in order to avoid breaking the play framework.
Material Culture

The first category I will examine is the material culture produced by the individuals in the Society for Creative Anachronism; except for the iconic fighting, it is perhaps one of the most noticeable aspects of the SCA. The material culture created by the Society for Creative Anachronism participants includes garb and patterns for garb\textsuperscript{22}, feast gear\textsuperscript{23}, favors\textsuperscript{24}, heraldic arms, illuminated manuscripts, armor, food, drink, thrones, rattan weapons, and jewelry to name but a few examples. Thomas told me, “I can sew. I can cook, shoot arrows, arts and sciences a little bit, calligraphy a little bit, and just odds and ends you pick up. You know, you do what you want. You can expand your horizon all you want. Everything— brewing, vending” (interview, November 9, 2009).

With an increase of interest in the Society for Creative Anachronism and other fantasy and historical recreation activities, a plethora of online merchants now exist catering to these communities. As was discussed earlier, these sites and even individual merchants outsource to other countries for cheaper goods and higher profits. Despite the relative ease of purchasing an item from an anonymous web source, a handmade item, made for a specific individual, better supports the value of camaraderie than a mass-produced piece. It is a way to show a connection to a person via a physical object.

Suzanne: But it sounds like you prefer to make it if you can?

Eirik: It is just not as much fun for me. When I started back after a ten

\textsuperscript{22} The costume worn by an individual.

\textsuperscript{23} Plates, cups and so on used at feast events to eat from.

\textsuperscript{24} An item given to a fighter for good luck or to show affection. Often given to the fighter from the person they are fighting for in a tournament.
year break I cheated, I found BMX armor online and, you know I had a full suit of armor in the amount of a week or so. But it just, it is just not the same. So I took all of that really easy two minute on, two minute out of armor stuff, and given it and traded it away as I made my own piece because to me that is part of it. It falls back into persona. I believe my persona my guy that I am portraying, would have known how to make armor. He made his living with his blades, you would think he’d know how to upkeep and maintain it and his armor. [interview November 9, 2010]

To Eirik, the ability to be self-sufficient and to say that he made a particular item was very important and became part of his aesthetic ideal. By making the items himself, Eirik was able to show his connection to others via his knowledge of how to construct the item. So valued is the idea of the handmade item that using a purchased item that one is capable of making is at times looked down upon within Loch an Fhraioch. However, when safety is concerned, they are willing to make allowances for items that require particular skills such as helmets or articulated gauntlets.

Suzanne: Do you know how to make a helm or is that-?

Eirik: Let’s just say that at one point I have been involved with the helmet making process. Let’s also say that my attempt at making a pair of articulated aluminum clam shell gauntlets has fairly well proven to me that perhaps metalworking is not my forté.

Suzanne: And a head is a very valuable thing.

Eirik: It is. It is not something I want to trust to my hand-craftsmanship with metal. Leather, I’m okay with leather, I’ve done my own leather armor that is awesome for me. [interview, November 9, 2009]

Although Eirik ultimately decided that making helmets and gauntlets were above his skill level in metalworking, he still attempted to make them. There are, as I have already mentioned, exceptions to this rule even within Loch an Fhraioch. Sometimes, looking
better is more important than making something yourself if you truly lack the time, skill, money, or desire to make an item. This is particularly true if you are very skilled in another area of SCA craft such as singing, cooking, illumination, fighting, and so on. Conrad for example, does not sew his own garb, but instead has his mother do so, but he does practice sand-casting and fighting.

![Eirik with his Viking helmet](image)

Figure 17: Eirik with his Viking helmet. Video Still by Suzanne Barber

Sometimes one person has become so skilled at creating a specific item that the reputation of their product and its usefulness far outweighs the benefit of trying to create their own piece. This is particularly true in products made of modern or hard to work with materials.

Like with combat archery, the blunts that they use at the end of the arrows. There is a guy in Florida by the name of Baldar who pretty much has the market cornered on that. He was the first one to do rubber moulding for those tips. And there have been people who have tried to copy them and they failed horribly. I’m not sure what the difference is and what he is doing that makes his work, but you hear the term Baldar blunts. They were all made in his shop there is no one else who makes them like that. [Conrad interview, June 5, 2010]
In this case, the special skills and tools needed to work with rubber have made it difficult to recreate these arrow blunts to a satisfactory level. Indeed, when I googled “Baldar blunt” to check my spelling, the first site to be listed was a forum discussion from a non-SCA related medieval re-creation group on how to tell a real Baldar blunt from an imitation.

With this many tools and materials available to Society for Creative Anachronism members, it is no wonder that people experiment with a number of materials and techniques. During our interview, Conrad explained to me where he sees this experimentation fitting into the Society for Creative Anachronism and his own preference for aesthetic and narrative coherence.

To me it’s really an exploration of how they would have done it then if they had some of the tools we have now, and how they coped with not having some the technology we have now. Like in armor making they had anvils and heat. Now we have all these presses, we have power tools. We can do in a day what may have taken them a month. If you look at the volume of armor produced in that era it is amazing that they got that much done. [interview, June 5, 2010]

One is of course not born knowing how to use these tools to create medieval objects or objects used to simulate medievalness. Eirik shared with me one of his earliest memories of making armor before he “knew any better.”

On the other hand I had a friend of mine who would set-up a workshop in his basement. And we didn’t know beans, we learned it all from scratch. We were sitting down there with legally, legally acquired highway road signs and a belt sander taking the paint off of it. No, no breathing apparatus, we don’t know any better bzzzzz because we’ve got to have the aluminum. But it was fun, every bit of it, every time you bounced a piece off and smacked yourself in the head because I didn’t expect that. Every bit of it fun. [interview, November 9, 2009]
Often, when first starting out in the Society for Creative Anachronism (especially in the earlier years of the SCA before set ways of making things had been established) experimenting with a variety of items and methods is common.

There are a variety of ways one learns the skills needed to create the material culture of the Society for Creative Anachronism. The first thing needed is the knowledge of what to make and why, which I will discuss in a later section. After that, comes *how* you make the item. Countless forums, listservs, websites, YouTube videos, and books exist explaining how to make these items. Apprenticeships through guilds or other arrangements are also common. Thomas shared with me how he learned to make items early on in his Society for Creative Anachronism career:

One of the lucky parts about when I started, one of the people in the group was a professional artist and he had the leather working skills and the tools
and he started teaching us how to take leather from a flat sheet and turn it into armor and pretty soon we had leather armor to go with our helmets and stuff, which we had to order. We didn’t have the metal working skills at the time so its better left for those with those skills to do their work. [interview, November 9, 2009]

Thomas was able to come to such an agreement with a fellow member. Often a person will take skills gained in another aspect of their life and apply them towards the Society for Creative Anachronism. Yet another option are classes taken at a collegium event.25

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25 As discussed in a later section in more detail, this is an event focused on teaching.
Conrad: There has been a talk of interest about boot making, period boot making. Personally one of my interests is sand casting with pewter and bronze.

Suzanne: How did you learn?

Conrad: Other people in the SCA. They showed me at one of our collegium events where it was basically just a day of classes. They brought their stuff and were just showing how to do sand casting. I saw it and I was like ‘hey! That is pretty cool! I can do that!’

Suzanne: What do you make?

Conrad: Different things, buttons, belt buckles, knife blades, anything that will fit in the mold. [interview, June 5, 2010]

In this case, Conrad not only learned how to do sand cast molding at the collegium event, he learned he was interested in it in the first place. Often during an arts and sciences meeting, or while watching fighter practice, members of Loch an Fhraioch would share skills, patterns, or ideas they received from attending a collegium event.

_Ethno-kinetic Movement_

These material objects are not only admired visually, they are used, and as a result the Society for Creative Anachronism is rich in a second analytic category worth examining- that of the resulting kinetic movement of the body in sport and play. “Ethno-kinetics, that is to say the motions of culture- gesture, movement, facial expression” (Barber and Hale 2010) and so on play a key role in the functioning of the Society for Creative Anachronism. This includes the very prominent fighting, dancing, medieval games, and the less common hound coursing, hawking, and equestrian sports etcetera. The style of fighting one chooses is a highly visible indicator of one’s identity.
within the Society for Creative Anachronism both in how one sees themselves and in what groups an individual has “played.” As Marcel Mauss in his work *Techniques, Technology, and Civilization* (2006:78) and later W. Warner Wood in *Made in Mexico: Zapotec Weavers and the Global Ethnic Art Market* (2008:19) both discussed, an individual learns how to move through their culture and so too, in the Society for Creative Anachronism, does an individual learn his or her style of fighting, dance, or game play through those he or she associates with. Thus movement within the Society for Creative Anachronism becomes an ethno-kinetic marker to all who know how to read it.

Loch an Fhraioch’s most central activity is fighting, and thus it is worth focusing on how the ethno-kinetics of fighting interact both within Loch an Fhraioch and in the wider Society for Creative Anachronism world. Not surprisingly, ethno-kinetics in fighting are directly associated to what sort of armor a person is using and this in turn is often dictated by the climate. Conrad explained to me the reasons for some of these differences:

The style differences are obvious from one place to the other. Of course in the warmer climate people will wear less armor so you don’t have to hit as hard as they do in the colder climates where people wear layers, upon layers, upon layers. But the speed differences of course, when you are wearing less armor you have less holding you back. And some people even in the colder climates will choose that style just for the extra speed. They’ll sacrifice warmth and protection for speed and agility. [interview, June 5, 2010]

At the most basic stylistic level in Society for Creative Anachronism fighting, before even considering how it is done, is the force and speed with which one hits, and then the speed and force required for a person to count the hit as sufficient. The amount and type of armor one wears dictates how hard one physically feels a blow or how quickly one is able to land or block a blow. Of course one is not required to wear heavier armor in a cold
area, and personal preference can often dictate individual and pockets of style within a larger kingdom. Conrad illustrated this point with examples from around the Kingdom of Meridies.

In east Tennessee the groups up there tend to hit harder than other parts of the kingdom. Guys down around Atlanta, they are known for being faster. Of course, they are riddled with Dukes and knights in that area. Not really sure what the stereotype of Alabama would be because they kind of have a mix of all of it. This area is interesting in that aspect of it because so many of us have played north of here and south of here that we are kind of the blending zone. Some of us hit really hard, some of us don’t. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Even within a relatively small geographical area, and amongst people who frequently fight in kingdom events, styles differ depending on which individual group a person has been active within. These differences are slight, but they can have consequences in how one is received within one’s own or other areas of the Society for Creative Anachronism. When I asked, Conrad was able to explain in more detail some of the possible reasons and consequences of these differences:

Oh yeah, Meridies is pretty well known as a, I hate to say it, but a partying kingdom. As far as fighting goes we are known for hitting not quite as hard as other kingdoms, and calling a lot lighter than other kingdoms. Mostly because it is hot here and we don’t wear a lot of armor so you don’t have to hit us as hard. But there is a general understanding amongst the other kingdoms that we fight with on a regular occasion and they know this about us and really there is never an issue.

There are a few times where somebody thought they may have hit a person with sufficient force that they should take the blow and that person may not agree. And of course with anything like that there are going to be disagreements, but it is actually been to a minimum in the last five years. Previous to that, you’d see it a lot more often but people have kind of chilled out over the last five years. [interview, June 5, 2010]

26 In the SCA a duke is a person who has reigned as king two or more times. Here Conrad is pointing out that the fighters in this area are highly skilled as evidenced by their titles.
Despite Conrad’s observation that in and around Meridies a greater understanding of these fighting styles has cooled some of the tensions that can crop up around shot throwing and calling, a fighter is still often expected to change their style when moving to another area of the Society for Creative Anachronism.

For me it wasn’t a big deal to change my style to fit in, but I can see where for some it would be. I have always been one of those who would kind of pick up on the herd mentality I guess and kind of blend. Usually after one or two practices it is made very clear what I need to do to my style to fit where they are at. [Conrad interview, June 5, 2010]

Conrad, who has moved to several different kingdoms and areas within this kingdom, has had to change his style several times. Although this was not a problem for Conrad, he has heard plenty of stories where such a transition was not so smooth. When I asked him what kingdoms or areas he thought would not accept new styles, or that would be difficult to transition to he told me:

You are going to hate me for this, but the West. Just from the stories I’ve heard, people go out there and get broken. There is no mercy and they will club you until you don’t come back. It seems like there is no interest in teaching you how to be part of the herd. As far as being intolerant of other styles, they would be followed closely by Arizona. If you so much as even own a bow, don’t go there.

Most accepting of different styles, either well one of three, possibly four: Ansteorra, which is all of Texas, Meridies is really good at receiving other styles, Gleann Abhann which is Mississippi and Louisiana (which they were actually part of us for a long time so that just makes sense) and Trimaris in Florida. Basically what you would consider the deep south, those kingdoms, that whole southern hospitality thing carries over I guess. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Thus where one is located not only dictates his or her own ethno-kinetics, but how one

27 I am from the San Francisco Bay Area, the West Kingdom.
reads and interprets others. These readings can become stereotypes into general feelings towards kingdoms and it is not uncommon to hear disparaging or praising remarks on ones own or other kingdoms based on their fighting.

In addition to how hard or fast one hits, the ways in which a hit is thrown is an integral part of one’s distinct ethno-kinetic make-up. One of the best known styles is credited to Duke Paul of Bellatrix and his household, located within the Principality of the Mists in the West Kingdom.28 Conrad immediately named the Bellatrix style of fighting when I asked him if there was a style that was popular all over the Society for Creative Anachronism.

Figure 21: Badon (in white) serves the soup while the fighter in red dumps the soup. Photo by Suzanne Barber

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28 This encompasses Berkeley, California, where the Society for Creative Anachronism started.
Serve the soup, dump the soup—Paul Bellatrix hand positioning. He always fights shield out, sword back across the shoulder, and you either serve the soup or you dump the soup. It is all about hand and thumb position. When did he come up with that? Early eighties? Like early eighties or late seventies, that is when he became famous for it. There are people in Drachenwald, in Europe who train that way. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Duke Paul, famous for his metaphor of serve the soup and dump the soup to describe the basic swing and block action in his fighting style, revolutionized Society for Creative Anachronism.

There are of course fads in fighting styles, and these trends can become localized within a kingdom or even within a smaller area inside a kingdom.

In the Kingdom of Meridies right now the big fad is the center grip oval shield in the “A” frame position where your sword in one hand and your center grip in the other you make an A over yourself, or just a wedge over the top of yourself. The only shots that can come in have to come straight in towards the body. And a lot of people are using that and they will until the majority of the people discover how to beat it and then they’ll move onto something else. But it always comes back around to the old Bellatrix style, that is the constant, it will never go away. There will be people who fight that way until the world explodes. It’s all about planes and angles. [Conrad interview, June 5, 2010]

The “A” frame style is currently popular in the Kingdom of Meridies, and could be a clue to others when fighting someone from this kingdom on where they are from or, if they are familiar enough with this style, how to beat them. Despite these cyclical trends, ultimately Duke Paul’s fighting style has proven to be the longest lasting. This shows an example of where an “oikotypified” (Sydow 1999) style of fighting has spread to become larger than the local group (Shuman 1993:45). As other localized groups moved away from this style of fighting, their own localized version appeared (for example the “A” frame) and these in turn spread beyond the group. This continuously bridges the small
group with the larger Society for Creative Anachronism framework via this dynamic tension, making hitting strength and speed a more important differentiating factor between groups (Toelken 1996).

Another difference that one can see and read in ethno-kinetics are the types of fights one chooses to compete in. Conrad explained to me the preference of Meridies and the consequences of these choices in larger Society for Creative Anachronism multi-kingdom events.

Meridies. Meridies is case and point of that, we are a kingdom of tourney fighters, it’s why we get our butts handed to us every war we got to. And there is a small, still kind of happening of uprising of the movement to go into the melee combat. And we have done really well the last couple years
at gulf wars. Of course, that is where we have our largest turnout for any grand melee. Our units at Lillies Wars\textsuperscript{29}, which is in Kansas, or at Pennsic are virtually nonexistent. We’re just not interested. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Loch an Fhraioch has begun to participate in Meridies’ attempt to bolster melee combat. At several of their more recent fighter practices, melee practice has been included. Despite this, the vast number of their practices were still one on one tourney-style practices.

![Figure 23: Melee practice. Video Still by Suzanne Barber](image)

Just as groups are read and judged by their fighting style and ability, so are individuals. If someone’s style is too different from the area they are fighting in, they can gain the reputation of not calling shots when they “should” and then can be perceived as being too competitive or a poor sport. At a more benign level, it is also a useful way to gauge someone’s experience. I asked Conrad what made a good or bad fighter, and how it was possible to tell.

\textsuperscript{29} A war event held every June in Missouri by the Kingdom of Calontir (Thiem 2011).
It makes itself very apparent just in watching. You can tell when someone is comfortable with what they are doing, and of course their skill level. Someone who is green will quite honestly not have the kill count of someone who is really comfortable and doing this for awhile will have. They are probably not going to have the confidence of the other person that has been doing this for awhile is going to have. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Ultimately, no matter what style a fighter uses, being confident, and more to the point, being successful in fights is the best indicator of skill and time in the SCA fighter’s world. This ability and skill often has deep personal meaning to an individual, and although it plays a central role in Loch an Fhraioc, being unable to fight due to an injury or other reason is respected, especially if replaced with a different way to display one’s ethno-kinetic prowess.

Thomas: I know one gentleman's passion is, he used to be a fighter and now through his act of bravery and trying to help someone who was stranded he was injured due to a car hitting him and he’s paralyzed and is all but completely crippled. But his passion now is medieval fishing, and he actually runs a medieval fishing tournament with no modern conveniences of fishing.
For me it’s the fighting. I miss it terribly. I’m recovering from surgery, three surgeries, and trying to get my life squared away and become debt free so I can live like none else. It’s a sacrifice I have to give up, to continue on what I do. But you know, I can I can still smell chlorite and diesel in my sleep when I was in the army. I can still hear the twang of my bow beside my head when I shoot the knights that used to beat me up.

Eirik: We’re just going to have Nancy officially added as his middle name so he’ll be Harald “Nancy” Lacklander. [interview, November 9, 2009]

In this case, despite some rough teasing involving Thomas’s masculinity, it is okay that he does not fight during this time to other Society for Creative Anachronism members. To Thomas, though, this comes with a distinct feeling of regret and loss until he is once again able to participate. This illustrates the close tie that ethno-kinetics have not only to group identity, but individual identity.

Persona Performance

A third category to examine is the construction and enactment of a participant’s individual persona, which can range from nothing more than a name and a rough date to an elaborate back story and resulting performance. For the most part, current core members of Loch an Fhraioch value having a firm grasp on their persona as Eirik and Thomas illustrated to me during our interview when I asked them about their persona choices.

Suzanne Barber: And did you know you wanted to be a Viking in the SCA?

Eirik.: Absolutely, there was never a question. I never waffled. I never wavered. That was one of the things that I didn’t have to spend any time when I got in. I knew I had always been fascinated by Vikings. Anybody

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30 Herald Lacklander is Thomas Young’s registered SCA name.
who would get into a row boat and sail across the Atlantic Ocean, that piques my interest. . .

Thomas: That’s definitely something we both have in common. I had no second thoughts, no complaints at all whatsoever about what I was going to do. Besides they get to wear what they want to. They don’t have to follow certain rules. And they, you know, they’re all around good people. Like you said, you’ve got to give them respect.

Eirik: Except for the whole robbing and butchering thing.

Thomas: Oh yeah, well that, that’s you know, everyone has got their little quirks. . . I’ve known people a year and a half or two years to settle down on a time period, let alone a persona and it’s-

Eirik: Geographical region, they’ve been in for five years and they haven’t decided if they’re English or French. They’re not sure. I have an English first name and a French last name, Mom was English and Dad was French.

Thomas: Yeah, it’s, you know, for us it was easy. [interview, November 9, 2009]

Eirik and Thomas entered the Society for Creative Anachronism knowing what kind of persona they wished to be. Conrad, although still new to the Society for Creative Anachronism when compared to Eirik and Thomas, has a similar firm grasp upon his persona. “My interest, I actually found out that my real family has ties as far back as the early 1700s in Germany. And then looking at the time period and the armor used in the
transitions, I went with late 13th early 14th century German” (interview, June 5, 2010).

Even members who never used to concern themselves with narrative and aesthetic coherence have changed to an emphasis on a more developed persona. Inan, during an arts and sciences meeting at her house explained to me that she used to just “play” and never worried too much about her specific persona but that now, as Lady Inan Bint Sufian, she attempts greater accuracy with the garb she sews in order to better portray a Turkish woman of the Middle Ages.

Eirik had a similar experience in his Society for Creative Anachronism career and further elaborated on it during our interview:

I don’t know, I used to be, I used to do a fairly good portrayal of an early Norman stick jock party animal. You know I wore the stuff, I looked pretty good on the field, but I didn’t do anything Viking like. I didn’t care, it wasn’t really a big deal to me. But that’s changed a lot as I’ve started
learning more and more about it and I’m now one of the more persona-centric people I know.

I want my guy to look the part, so for instance, I now wear linen, all linen and wool, and that’s it, because those are period. . . I don’t use cotton anymore. I don’t use . . . polyester [laughs] No more polyester tunics for me, you know. I don’t do riding tabards anymore. All that I do are knee length and mid-calf length tunics, linen tunics, with Viking trim and stuff on it. I try to do as much hand-stitching of things as I can. So for me its very important that if you are going to come in and do something, do it well. [interview, November 9, 2009]

This assertion that Eirik made is echoed by Inan and other members in the shire, and is the root of their reluctance to welcome college students. The students’ aforementioned lack of seriousness could threaten to destabilize this new push towards narrative and aesthetic coherence and cause the shire to return to a “stick jock” mentality. To further complicate matters, the students’ unreliable attendance means that they are unable to reinforce the value of camaraderie that is so central to this group. These students, then, are not so much a threat towards unbalancing the tension between aesthetic and narrative coherence and camaraderie, but rather threaten both values at once, making both newer and older members hesitant to welcome new non-local college students.

Despite this general trend within Loch an Fhraioch, there are still those who refuse to pick a set persona, and will instead choose a multitude of different times and themes to play with and piece together into a bricologe (Lèvi-Strauss 1962:16). “There are some who will waffle faster than a house of pancakes depending who the hot stick is that year. They kind of follow that person and become a clone. But then there are other people who do the same thing because well, they don’t want to make new stuff” (Bryan Dockery interview, June 5, 2010). Here Conrad illustrates that though Loch an Fhraioch now
values narrative and aesthetic coherence within their group, this should not create a situation of creative stasis. Instead, working within the correct frame, members should strive to continue to produce at a higher level, with better armor, costume, and other crafts. Thus there is a dynamism connected to their search for coherence, or their idea of “authenticity” (Bendix 1997, Toelken 1996).

Beyond following the latest popular fighter’s fashion, Conrad observed that popular media often had a strong influence upon persona choices of participants.

Conrad: It goes with movie themes. How many Romans appeared after *Gladiator*? How many pirates started showing up after *Pirates of the Caribbean* came out with Johnny Depp? *13th Warrior* the insurgence of the Vikings.

Suzanne: Are longer standing members disparaging of that?

Conrad: Yes, They’re the ones who all sit back and laugh before all the big wars saying ‘well what’s the theme going to be this year?’ They’re the ones who have had their persona for fifteen years and they are not about to change. [interview, June 5, 2010]

Choosing a persona based upon a popular media is, as I have discussed in the history of the Society for Creative Anachronism, not a new event and some of those members that dislike these current trends were themselves influenced by popular media as Eirik and Thomas both admitted.

Thomas: There again you have to see some of the things we grew up on with the movies of you know *Alfred the Great* and *The Vikings* and some of the other movies that we were growing up on. You know its all a good thing but people —

Eirik: I’d have to say that movie *The Vikings* is probably what did it for me, seeing that has a kid. [interview, November 9 2009]
The Society for Creative Anachronism’s roots can be traced back to a literary media origin and can be seen even within the official guidelines for naming and registering a coat of arms device, usually referred to as just a “device.”

The general rule for naming would be that you can use a given name that may have been used, and you can use a surname that may have been used, but not together. Like you wouldn’t be able to be Arthur Pendragon. You could be Arthur, but you wouldn’t be able to be Arthur Pendragon. Because that name was actually used in a work of, I guess I have to say fiction. But that is kind of what the whole society was based on was the Arthurian legend.

And as far as your device or your crest, it actually gets checked against the actual College of Heralds to be sure that you are not using something that was actually used. And I believe they are still on three points of difference that is has to have, either color, or position, or size to be able to use the same charges or the same items. The same guidelines for creating your device are the same guidelines used in the actual College of Heralds. [Conrad interview, June 5, 2010]

Conrad readily offers the observation and understanding that the Society for Creative Anachronism’s ideals are based off of literary accounts. Naming and heraldry conventions act as guides to keep these ideals and roots from becoming too apparent in the Society for Creative Anachronism of today. If a person wishes to register their name officially, they generally work with a herald of the Society for Creative Anachronism to make sure that no one else in the Society for Creative Anachronism has their name, and that a historical precedent can be

Figure 27: Badon’s shield painted with his device. Video Still by Suzanne Barber
found for the given and byname they want to choose, either in historical documents, historical literature, or historical name books. Similarly, a device must also be checked and approved by the heralds. Once a persona is settled on, the narrative framework is created to which a person then attempts coherence.

Knowledge

Finally, it is helpful to examine knowledge as an analytic category. This knowledge includes not only how to do the aforementioned categories, but why a person does them that way, the way this knowledge is collected and assembled, and how a participant asserts their authority in this knowledge. In this way, I am not examining the knowledge itself, but rather how it is expressed by individuals and groups in differing ways. This knowledge, although generally non-academic, is an understanding of the history, literature, and culture of both the middle ages and the Society for Creative Anachronism. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has said, “objects are the actors, and knowledge animates them” (1998:3).

The internet has made it easier for Society for Creative Anachronism members to both gain knowledge and also to express and defend their knowledge and authority to others.

There is so much information available on the internet. Even if it is just used as a reference to go and find physical books and items, or to know say if the Frist Center in Nashville is going to be having a display that is relevant to your persona or some research that you are doing. The internet definitely aids in that. [Conrad interview, June 5, 2010]

Often authority and knowledge are validated through historical references and primary documents.
In Society for Creative Anachronism specific traditions, anecdotes often serve the same function. When information is offered by a Society for Creative Anachronism member that goes against common conceptions of history, a good natured challenge or correction is often offered along with the information as a further way to prove knowledge on a particular subject. Thomas illustrated this tendency when explaining his twin brother’s persona in relation to his own. “And my twin brother’s been Irish. And the story is there. You know we’re Vikings and they brought the trait of red hair to Ireland. It didn’t start in Ireland, it was the other way around. It came from the Norse so, look it up in Wikipedia!” (Young interview, November 9, 2009). Along with such challenges, it is not unusual to hear that a member was “always a history buff” or that a person they know went on to get an advanced degree in medieval studies after time spent in the Society for Creative Anachronism.

The quest for knowledge in the Society for Creative Anachronism often begins with “how.” How do I make this? How do I do this? Later it may move more towards why something is done as the knowledge one desires to gain becomes more focused than before.

The opportunities are there for you to learn all kinds of things. My first armor was um… basically whatever I could do. Razor knife and carpet, and we cut it. Well the suit of armor I’m wearing now is almost all leather, and I’ve made it almost every bit of it.

So I’ve learned over the years to make armor. The skills of how to dish metal and make things. I’ve learned how to do that. I’ve learned very poorly how to do articulation and that doesn’t even touch like he [Thomas] says the calligraphy and the fact that I’m now sewing. For me its all persona generated. I’m trying to learn the skill set that a Icelandic Viking
learned in that particular time. So I’m going to need to know how to fish, need to know how to throw live weapons, know how to shoot nasty Vikings. [Eirik interview, November 9, 2009].

As Eirik learned to make things, and grew more comfortable with how the Society for Creative Anachronism worked, his use and search for knowledge was put towards forwarding his persona, to gain narrative and aesthetic coherence.

Event

A fourth category to explore is the event, which in some ways could be considered the culmination of all the other categories. These events range from large multi-kingdom “wars” to the individual events put on by the shires, which may only last for half a day or more. The largest, inter-kingdom events include Pennsic, the largest event, which lasts for two weeks, Estrella Wars, Gulf Wars, Lillies War, and the Great Western War. Along with merchants, feasting, court events and other activities, these wars, and other smaller wars such as Border Raids are melee driven (SCA n.d.c, Krouse 2010). Conrad broke down some of the different events in the Society for Creative Anachronism and explained the historical precedent for them.

What we refer to as grand melee. The larger events like Border Raids, Gulf Wars, Pennsic, where it’s not just one on one tournament fighting. And what that would actually represent is like border skirmishes. So not only was there the tournament circuit, there was actually grand melees that were not intended to be war. [ interview, June 5, 2010]

With the exception of Gulf Wars, Loch an Fhraioch and the Kingdom of Meridies in general, is not a major player at many of the massive wars. “We have done really well the

31 A week-long war held by the Kingdom of Atenveldt and another invited principal kingdom. Other kingdoms then align with either kingdom as an ally (Kingdom of Atenveldt 2011).

32 A war held by the Kingdom of Caid (Southern California) in October (Swann and de los Unicornios 2011).
last couple years at Gulf Wars, of course that is where we have our largest turnout for any grand melee. Our units at Lillies Wars, which is in Kansas, or at Pennsic are virtually nonexistent, we are just not that interested” (Conrad interview, June 5, 2010).

Beyond the wars, their are tourney events, in particular crown tourney events where the prince or princess is chosen via winning the tourney.

Within these larger events, households, guilds, and other subgroups often host their own parties which can illustrate to the outside what that particular group is about both by content and who is allowed or not allowed to attend the event (Noyes 2003). The participants of these events derive their aesthetic “pleasure from the intricate knowledge of people, techniques, and symbolic meaning” (Prosterman 1995:13) that infuses and makes up an Society for Creative Anachronism event.

Not all events are about fighting, nor are they all large affairs. Other events include court and feasting events, collegiums where skills are taught, and just plain social affairs. Cramer suggests that there is a divide in the Society for Creative Anachronism on what types of events are favored depending on where the kingdom is located. Towards the West, long camping events are favored, where generally court is held during this time. In the East, feasting and pure court events are favored. He primarily attributes this to the weather (Crammer 2005:63).

Since he had experience in multiple groups, Conrad was able to explain to me some of the different social events that occurred in the SCA, and what groups are the most likely to have these different types.

Oddly enough, that same thing, with the smaller group they seemed like they were closer but more competitive they did more things together.
outside of SCA functions. They would get together at someones house and have a BBQ and not even talk about anything SCA sometimes. Whereas with the larger groups usually if any of those people involved are together it is because of or for the SCA

The majority of the time we [Loch an Fhraioch] are together though it is to discuss something to do with the SCA either upcoming events or the event we may have just come back from or preparing to host an event which is actually kind of a new thing for this group. They went for eight years without hosting anything. [interview, June 5, 2010]

The Society for Creative Anachronism is built around the social aspect of events, and for the members of Loch an Fhraioch it is important enough to try and host their own event.

As discussed earlier, Loch an Fhraioch has begun talking about the possibility of becoming a barony within the Society for Creative Anachronism. As a barony, Loch an Fhraioch would have more clout in kingdom-wide decisions. Although this talk is filled with jokes, and is primarily speculation, efforts are being made to pull more people to their local events and to attain a more “respectable” reputation.

Currently the shire hosts one event a year and Conrad told me that a lot of time went into “preparing to host an event, which is actually kind of a new thing for this group. They went for eight years without hosting anything” (B. Dockery interview, June 5, 2010). The Not So Grand Tourney is a direct and playful mockery of the Meridien Grand Tourney- an extremely formal and important event to the Kingdom. The Not So Grand Tourney is themed, and has in the past been focused around Men In Tights, Rednecks, and Monty Python. The theme for 2010 was “Not So Grand Tourney IV: Disorderly Conduct” and revolved around a medical theme, playing upon a medical intravenous (IV) as a pun for the roman numeral four.
Within this event, they had a “zombie battle” where two teams fought, one human and one zombie. When a human was killed they become a zombie until the last human was standing became “Zombie Master.” Although I never heard it directly mentioned, this form of melee appears to be heavily influenced by video and other game culture, where the “last man standing” model is quite common. In addition, the current proliferation of zombies in pop culture almost certainly influenced the decision to have this event. They also had a “Wheel of Ailments” tourney in which a fighter spun the wheel and for that battle they “had” whatever ailment came up. For example, if the wheel landed on blindness, they had to fight with a blindfold.

Throughout the planning sessions, the members of Loch an Fhraoich mentioned to me that this is a great event because it is “fun” and just about having a good time with friends. It was, in other words, designed to support their value of camaraderie over Society for Creative Anachronism decorum or an attempt at narrative and aesthetic coherence.

Recently, in addition to this event, Loch an Fhraoich has been given the opportunity to host an official kingdom event. This opportunity, they told me, isn’t normally given to a small “border” shire. This new perceived sign of respect has caused complications within the shire as the members worry about if they can still have their party and retain this newly gained “respectability.” Although some members of Loch an Fhraoich immediately suggested the solution of just not having the party, this idea was just as quickly dismissed. As a solution, a household made entirely of members of the shire will host the party within the camp of Loch an Fhraoich. This way they can assure that
attendees will know whose party it really is, but because it is technically being hosted through an unofficial sub-group, the shire is not responsible for any perceived inappropriate behavior that occurs. The members of Loch an Fhraioch have utilized their knowledge of the Society for Creative Anachronism’s workings in order to use its own framework to subvert itself and thus allow Loch an Fhraioch to retain both their values of camaraderie and their respectability. The way the members of Loch an Fhraioch are able to understand the structure, and how to use this structure against itself to gain what they desire, is similar to how the Pentecostal women Elaine Lawless discusses use their religions concept of femininity and motherliness to gain a form of power. Unlike these women, the members of Loch an Fhraioch are engaging in this behavior purposefully, and will fully admit to what they are doing (1993).

In a further bid to increase the shire’s importance, they have started planning to have a second event every year. They explained to me that most shires have two events a year, but that they have previously worried that not enough people would attend to justify the work. They wanted this second event to be a “serious” one, but not just another tourney. During several meetings that I attended, they developed a tentative plan to have an indoor event where team games will be played in conjunction with a winter merchant fair where people can shop for Society for Creative Anachronism based Christmas gifts. In both of these cases, the shire was faced with the contradiction of their primary value of camaraderie and their desire to be taken more seriously within the larger Society for Creative Anachronism world. To solve this dilemma, they used their hosted events to balance these two objectives. “Not So Grand” was a nonnegotiable event, but in order to
justify it within their new direction they will now host a “real event.” Furthermore, this new event will not be a tourney but instead will have events meant to foster camaraderie with team games and gift buying and thus ultimately support their values while submitting to the Society for Creative Anachronism framework. In this way, the members of Loch an Fhraioch are able to suspend the shire between the tensions of these two values without succumbing to either side completely.

**Value Negotiations**

Another form of negotiation that must be discussed is the mediation between camaraderie and narrative and aesthetic coherence when they directly contradict. If this negotiation is not handled correctly one value may override the other to the point where the play frame collapses. I will begin by examining this balancing of values in the act of gift exchanging. I will follow this up by exploring times when these values have become too unbalanced and issues of practicality and frame breaking occur. For this section, I have relied more on observations I made during my fieldwork, as well as my video footage, rather than recorded interviews. I did not find that the complexities of these negotiations lent itself to a recorded interview, but rather the multiple people involved were needed to bring out the nuances of these negotiations.

**Gifts and Negotiations**

Gifts are often given within the Society for Creative Anachronism and become an important visual indication of one’s relationship with another individual or group. Many are given for a particular achievement within the Society for Creative Anachronism such as attaining a rank or participating in numerous events while others still are given merely
to show affection for another member. These gifts, when thought out for a specific person, and handmade, are highly valued within Loch an Fhraoich as indicated by numerous references to them during my fieldwork as well as in the designing of an entire private shire party around gift exchanging. Like Amy Shuman, I found that “it is the excess of meaning in gift giving that provides the space for negotiating social relationships...” (2001:495).

**Barbarian Gift Scramble**

Loch an Fhraoich has an annual Twelfth Night party complete with a white elephant event known as the Barbarian Gift Scramble. Although these gifts are of course not personal, since nobody knows who will end up with what, there was nevertheless great concern shown towards the stipulations of what was appropriate to give. Even though a price range was not indicated, members of Loch an Fhraoich did make the provision that the gift must be handmade. After some discussion as to what qualified as “handmade” it was decided that to be handmade it had to be “period ” and either made by the participant or by a merchant who caters to the Society for Creative Anachronism with handmade goods. It was explained during a meeting that these rules were new and were being implemented because last year some participants felt cheated by getting stuck with a gift they felt was chosen with no thought or preparation.

This, to me, indicated that for Loch an Fhraioch the value is placed not on the object, but the intention and thought put into selecting the item as a way to indicate the group’s importance to the individual and once again support the idea of camaraderie. These items serve as a material connection or extension of a person’s relationship to
another, and, depending on those involved, often carry a level of prestige about them as well. All of these items taken together can be read as part of a person’s network of connections within the Society for Creative Anachronism, anchoring them within a specific time and place in the known world.

*Camaraderie versus Aesthetic Coherence in Gifts*

Sometimes a gift is given with a particular person in mind for a specific reason, but these gifts are not always selected with the receiver’s persona in mind or attention to what level of value that individual places on achieving aesthetic and narrative coherence. When this occurs the individual is forced to decide what will be done with the item. Similar to the exchange of food gifts during Purim, where these gifts involve “intricate negotiations of sometimes conflicting obligations” (Shuman 2000:498), members of Loch an Fhraoich are forced to negotiate between the conflicting values of camaraderie and narrative and aesthetic coherence. The members must choose between four decisions.

First, the individual can wear the item regardless of where it fits into his or her persona as in the case that Eirik described to me.

My lady wife crocheted me a pouch with my device on it. Guess what, come to find out crochet is not period, let alone early period Viking. But you know what, that pouch adorned my belt for many years for being one of the biggest, nicest roomiest, pouches I’ve had. [interview, November 9, 2009]

In this case, regardless that it went entirely against his persona, Eirik chose to wear the crocheted pouch without any alteration in order to show the connection to his wife, regardless of that it went entirely against his persona. He justified this further by asserting the pouch’s usefulness and superiority over other presumably more accurate pouches.
Second, participants can wear items but disguise them in some way so as to not distract too much from the aesthetic coherence of their crafted persona. I asked Eirik during our interview what he would do if he were given something that did not fit his persona, he gave several options, including the idea of hiding the out-of-place item.

I’ve been given little plastic figures and things like that, and then you have what’s called a mojo bag. That’s all the things that go into it that people have given you, that are meaningful, and grant you serenity or peace, and so you draw a power from it or whatever. [interview, November 9, 2009]

In this way, Eirik and other participants, while using a mojo bag, can still acknowledge the importance of the connection to another individual symbolized with the gifts without visually disrupting their aesthetic coherence.

Third, the receiver can wear the item and use their knowledge to justify the it within their persona framework. In this way, by utilizing their knowledge, they are able to stabilize their persona hyponarrative within the framework of Loch an Fhraoich and the SCA by providing a narrative explanation for metalipses of their aesthetic coherence caused by the gift.

During a particularly cold Sunday, members of Loch an Fhraoich decided to hold a crafting session instead of fighter practice. I was speaking to Badon while he was laying

Figure 28: Badon’s metal knees. Photo by Suzanne Barber
out leather pieces, which would later become part of a set of armor. He explained to me that his persona was that of a Welshman from the 1100’s and that these pieces of armor would become knee and elbow cups. Curiously, a set of metal knees were set out next to leather even though they were not having any obvious work done on them. When I questioned Badon about them, he admitted that they were made and given to him by a good friend and skilled armorer. He gushed over how well they were made, the protection they offered, the comfort, the relative lightness for a piece of metal armor— he had no criticism for its construction. He had only decided that morning (after already starting the leather knees) that he would use them. A Welshman in the 1100’s wouldn’t have been able to afford them, he explained. “If you aren’t following economics [of your persona], what are you doing” (fieldwork observation, November 15, 2009)? After thinking the problem over for a few weeks, Badon created a story of how his persona had managed to acquire metal knees.

At first, I did not see the significance of what Badon had done in choosing to use the knees. Badon obviously felt great attachment to them and felt honor bound to wear them. If he had decided not to use them he might have been seen as being ungrateful and
in violation of the shire’s value of camaraderie. In order to use them, however, he would have to violate the aesthetic coherence of his persona. To solve this problem, Badon utilized both his historical knowledge of the period, and his vernacular knowledge of what was acceptable within the Society for Creative Anachronism framework. He found a social, rather than objective truth in order to craft a story for his persona that would satisfy both aspects of his group’s values and identity- camaraderie and narrative/aesthetic coherence (Schrager 1999).

The fourth decision a participant can make to deal with a gift that contradicts their persona is to take apart the given gift and reconstruct it into something that they find acceptable within their persona framework. This was a common practice within the shire, both with gifts and other items purchased by the individual. This was particularly common with jewelry as referenced by Brenda, the newest member of Loch an Fhraioch, when she explained to me that the necklace she was wearing was actually an anklet that Badon had given her. She had lengthened the anklet by undoing

![Figure 30: Detail of Inan’s Viking sheath dress showing decoration made from multiple sources. Photo by Suzanne Barber](image-url)
some loops and then attaching them to the back in order to produce a necklace she felt she could wear. Badon overhead the conversation but was intrigued and even complimented Brenda on the necklace, reinforcing that he not only approved of what she had done, but liked the aesthetic result.

Finally, an individual can choose not to wear the gift at all. This choice was never verbally suggested by any of my informants. When I asked members of Loch an Fhraioch directly if they would still wear or use an item that did not fit with their persona they told me that of course you would still wear it or use it, just maybe not all the time. Not to wear it at all would be a violation of their group’s value of camaraderie. While I have no way of knowing if that ever happened, I can suggest that at the least, this was not a verbally expressible option to the shire. I would argue that here, it is easy to see that while different members lean towards one value more than another, it is still crucial to the members of Loch an Fhraioch to not unbalance the tension between camaraderie and aesthetic and narrative coherence by completely neglecting one value.

At times, a member’s aesthetic coherence is put at risk by the camaraderie found in an unofficial group as well as the shire. Eirik, earlier in his Society for Creative Anachronism career, became involved with a household that ultimately did not fit with
his persona. This household strove for aesthetic coherence within the group by giving
gifts to other household members that fit within the groups aesthetic and narrative
framework.

Eirik: I started off Viking but was grabbed really quickly after I got in by a
household run by a 14th century French knight. His lady was very good
about making livery for us. So we would all take the field and look really
good. We’d all look alike, but it would be 14th century garb. You know, the
slash and puff, and the quarterly riding tabards, and things like that which
are so foreign to what Vikings wore. So I just, it’s really simple, you just
take the chain-mail off your face and put it down around your neck and
tadah your Norman! It was that simple

Thomas: [laughs] Tadah you’re Norman! I like that.

Eirik: It’s the truth, and then when you get ready to go back to Viking you
just take it back off your neck and tack it back on your face and tadah
your Viking! It’s amazing. [interview, November 9, 2009]

Although spoken tongue in cheek, Eirik did find a way to switch between his preferred
Viking persona and the aesthetic choice of his household. Much like gifts given by
members of the shire, Eirik wore the items that were given to him, even reconstructing
part of his helmet to make the look more cohesive. As Eirik’s aesthetic and narrative
coherence became more important (and quite possibly as he grew closer to Loch an
Fhraioch) he stopped playing with this household as much, and instead focused more on
working with his Viking persona and narrative.

Aesthetic Coherence and Practicality

I have already established that narrative and aesthetic coherence is a key component
to the new identity of Loch an Fhraioch, and that this particular value can cause
complications when involved with the other group value of camaraderie. This, however,
is but one type of complication that arises for an individual. I will now focus on the
problems of creating an item, which maintains both aesthetic and narrative coherence by satisfying the participants desire for historical accuracy and practicality. Practicality can come into question with issues of money, time, health, and ease of the work. Inan, during an Arts and Science meeting pulled out her latest piece of garb, a black “Turkish-style” gown. Down the front of the gown she had begun sewing white and red beads. As she explained her idea for the gown she paused, turned to me, and told me the beads are plastic. “Some people use real pearls . . .

Figure 32: Beadwork created with plastic rather than pearls. Photo by Suzanne Barber

the people who play nobles at the Renaissance Faire do. But we really use these clothes, we live in them” (observational fieldwork, November 14, 2009). Certainly one could argue that real seed pearls would aid in the construction of narrative and aesthetic coherence, but it is the idea of medievalness that is desired and Loch an Fhraioch’s edgeplay allows for the question of practicality. If this outfit is going to be used, that is lived in rather than just worn, then practically speaking plastic beads that represent the idea of pearls are an acceptable substitute.

In a similar case case, Eirik told me that he purchased a kidney belt online instead of making one.
Suzanne: I know you said you have been learning how to make everything. Have you made pretty much everything in your garb and armor?

Eirik: I did not make the Kidney Belt, but I certainly have the skill-set to. I bought it off of eBay because it was cheap and quick. I could have it in a matter of a couple days and I could be out fighting. I didn’t have to find the leather, cut the leather, dye the leather, stitch the leather. The helm, I did not make my helm, so. [interview, November 9, 2009]

In this case, even though Eirik was capable of creating a kidney belt— and in fact had done so many times before— he chose to purchase one on eBay instead because it was cheaper and saved time. This allowed him to participate faster and in turn enacted and supported a play frame. During an Arts and Sciences meeting, Badon also described to me a site where he routinely buys linen tunics because they are cheaper and quicker than making them himself. Beyond the contradiction that buying an item online causes, it is interesting to note here that both these informants are known for their abilities in making items. In other words, this act does not destabilize or threaten the value of camaraderie since they have already gone through the bonding process of learning to make these
items. Rather, they can spend the time they might otherwise use making these items to practice another craft or possibly (as in the case with Badon) teaching a less-experienced member how to make the item.

Members of Loch an Fhraoich routinely offered to assist me in sewing some of my own garb, even going so far as to draw up a pattern for me. This suggests that in my case, because I had not proven that I was capable of sewing, in order to retain the level of respect of Eirik or Badon, I was expected, albeit with help, to at least attempt to learn how to do it myself before I could purchase it online. I believe this was in order to support both values. By making sure I knew how to make something, it assured that I had a certain level of knowledge required to reach an acceptable level of aesthetic and narrative coherence. The time required to learn, and the communal aspect of teaching, insured that I would spend time with the members of Loch an Fhraioch and support the value of camaraderie.

When I asked who I should speak to about garb construction every person told me to talk to Shannon. Shannon was considered the expert sewer, not only because of her skill in the actual production process, but also because of her knowledge of history and sewing techniques. When asked, Inan admitted that she sewed, but amended this by telling me that she could only machine sew and that Shannon, who hand-sewed everything, would be the one I’d want to talk to. I was curious and when I got the chance, I began to question Shannon on her technique. Shannon told me that she had fully hand-sewn and referenced everything with historical documents and examples before, but now she only does that for a competition that requires it. Boning, stays, buttonholes, and other
similar things are sewn on a machine in order to save time on places that nobody will see. Thus, like Inan’s use of plastic beads, it was the idea of the object that was important and “. . . where both the thing and the idea of the thing are produced; a physical object is produced, but its materiality becomes equivocal in that it is inscribed with the simulacrum of the thing it purports to be” (Dorst 1989:65). Unlike some of my other informants, Shannon didn’t believe using modern conveniences created a more durable or better product at the end and instead emphasized that she hand-sewed all stress points to allow them some more movement and to help them last.

The desire to attempt to do something for oneself can be taken too far in the minds of the Loch an Fhraoich shire members. While at a meeting, Badon shared a story of when he went too far. He explained that he got the idea to try and dye his linen the “real” way with natural dyes and natural solvents that would have actually been used during 1100’s Wales. This included a selection of roots, herbs, minerals, and a large vat of urine, which needed to be heated almost all day. He mentioned that although it did dye the clothing in the desired manor, it created such a noxious smell that his then wife demanded he stop. After years of experimenting, Badon now figures he has the right to take the easy route in garb and armor construction and now uses modern material and construction methods.

Sometimes it was not the construction of an individual item that was perceived as going too far, but rather, the quest for narrative and aesthetic coherence itself. While I was observing Badon and Shannon working on some garb, Conrad told us a story of an individual who had recently gotten sick at an event because he had worn period style
pajamas. The weather had turned cold and the pajamas did not offer enough protection from the weather. The three laughed about this story and Badon added: “if you’ve got to have period pajamas something’s wrong” (observational fieldwork, November 22, 2009). It is reasonable to assume that this member then could either not participate further in the event or at the very least didn’t feel very well. This sort of act risks breaking the play frame by literally preventing the person from participating in or enjoying the event. With this sort of criticism Loch an Fhraoich is able to warn their members about the consequences of going too far with narrative and aesthetic coherence and thus risk overriding the value of camaraderie or breaking frame.
Conclusion
The Society for Creative Anachronism is a large, international, non-profit organization that is broken down into nineteen smaller “kingdoms,” and then further into individual groups. The SCA is often depicted and discussed as a large homogeneous organization. Instead, in this work I have examined on the smaller group in situ the larger organization. I have focused on the smaller group in order to bring to light new details of how this group and the individual members operate within a self-selected international organization in a network of personal connections. These groups attain a feeling of distinctness within this large organization by creating an identity for themselves, which expresses their values within the larger SCA framework. Sometimes these values contradict each other or subvert the larger overriding SCA ethos and members will mediate their participation in order to avoid breaking from the SCA framework entirely while still protecting their group identity.

Negotiation in the Society for Creative Anachronism can be examined in light of narrative construction and maintenance. The Society for Creative Anachronism supports an official homogenous metanarrative. It is this narrative that is most often heard and examined by outsiders. Despite the initial perceived dominance, this metanarrative acts as a frame or matrix narrative and contained within are multiple hyponarratives and little narratives. As one allows their view to slip further towards the idio and unicultural level, these hyponarratives increase in number while decreasing in scope. They go from representing a kingdom, to principality, to a barony, to a shire, to a group of friends within that shire to an individual member. At every level these narratives connect the individual and group to others, creating a network of relationships and shared narratives.
that help create a sense of unity and prevent a fracturing of voices and thus support the overriding metanarrative. In order to prevent this system from collapsing inward or fracturing apart, a certain amount of playful transgressive metalepsis and edgeplay must be allowed. The negotiation of this edgeplay is debated, and the style and amount tolerated is often a distinguishing mark between groups. Some key contestations that I have focussed on were the levels and types of anachronism allowed, the types of partying and practical jokes encouraged or discouraged, gender, media influence, and the understanding of honor and chivalry.

Loch an Fhraoich, the shire from Bowling Green, Kentucky, is currently in transition from one type of shire allowing a certain style and amount of edgeplay, to another with different expectations and allowances. This has caused the development of two, sometimes very contradictory, values within its group. The first of these values is an emphasis on fostering a feeling of camaraderie or brotherhood. This value was the original concern of Loch an Fhraoich and as a result many of their actions and activities point overtly to this end. This value, however, has at times led the group to subvert the SCA framework to the point where they were in danger of breaking from it entirely. These actions have been noted by outside SCA groups and strongly admonished in the past, partially contributing to the members of Loch an Fhraoich’s search for a new identity.

The second desire, that is their push towards attaining narrative or aesthetic coherence, is a newer value to the group. Narrative coherence can be understood as the desire to create an emplotted story, one that makes a cohesive whole out of a constellation
of facts and emotions. Aesthetic coherence aims to create this same feeling of cohesiveness visually through dress, environment construction, and other material goods. Historical reenactment appears at first to offer this sort of wholeness but on further inspection reveals the problems of this reflexive operation. This reflexive operation divides the experience into an episodic one, destroying the sense of wholeness that one is attempting to achieve. Of course, as has been stated, members of Loch an Fhraioch are not appropriating a specific historical figure and instead, via narrative edgeplay are creating an idea of “medievalness” in both their verbal, visual, and enacted narratives.

To achieve this second aim, it is sometimes necessary for Loch an Fhraioch to give up parts of their past which to them conjure up these aforementioned feelings of camaraderie. This sacrificing of different values within Loch an Fhraioch is done with the hopes of eventually becoming a barony or at the least in attaining important recognition within their kingdom. Rarely does the group or the individuals within focus entirely on one value, and instead lean toward one value or the other while attempting to maintain a balance between the two. Although certainly not a set rule, in generalized terms older or less active members of Loch an Fhraioch tend to favor camaraderie while newer and or more active members prefer to bolster narrative and aesthetic coherence. This can perhaps best be seen in the contrasting views of Thomas, one of the founding members, and Conrad, a younger and more active member. Where Thomas will almost always support the quest for camaraderie, Conrad will often favor narrative and aesthetic coherence.

In order to examine the instances of negotiation of these two values, I broke down
some aspects of the Society for Creative Anachronism into five analytic categories:

material culture, ethno-kinetic movement, persona performance, knowledge, and events. 
As I have shown these categories rarely ever exist independently in the SCA and instead rely on each other for their context and meaning.

If one examines Inan in light of these categories you could observe that she uses a Turkish persona which she displays via her garb and other material culture. She uses her knowledge of both medieval history and SCA culture to defend her interpretation of a medieval Turkish woman and her choice of this particular persona. She enacts this persona and brings to life the material culture she has created around this idea via “Turkish-style” belly-dancing that she performs at an event. How a member like Inan, or a whole group manages these negotiations dictates where other participants place them within the larger Society for Creative Anachronism frame and contributes to that member’s or group’s self-perceived identity.

I examined instances where the values of narrative and aesthetic coherence and camaraderie directly contradicted. By paying attention to the tradition of gift-giving I was able to show how particular members and the group handle a disruption of one or both values. A member of Loch an Fhraioch will never choose to discard a gift that does not fit within their personal narrative construction and instead will use their knowledge or other material culture to incorporate the item while attempting to minimize the disruption of their narrative and aesthetic coherence. This can involve something as simple as wearing the item and justifying it by its usefulness or hiding the item as Eirik has done. In more
complex negotiations, the privileging of the item may force the user to change their narrative in order to incorporate it within their persona framework. Badon illustrated this when he found a way to explain the use of his metal knees.

Despite this delicate balancing act, members can still take one value too far. Narrative edgeplay, since it allows for the idea of “medievalness,” grants members the opportunities to take short-cuts without sacrificing their narrative and aesthetic coherence. Thus Inan could use plastic beads instead of pearls, and Eirik could purchase a kidney belt rather than making one when issues of practicality occurred. This accommodation of practicality helps to mediate the tendency to take narrative and aesthetic coherence too far.

The binding factor within the SCA, that is the supporting framework, is play. In order to evoke the “this is play” framework members rely on metacommunication but this evocation requires that all members relay and read these metacommunicative acts correctly. When this is achieved the proper framework is established and participants are free to enact new social rules and roles. This process is not always achieved, and even once established this play framework is vulnerable to collapsing in on itself. The problem resides in the fact that every hyponarrative, whether belonging to an individual or a group, involves an idea of proper play. When a person who does not share the same ideas of play acts outside this expected frame, they are perceived as playing “wrong” and the play frame is broken. Naturally, the more hyponarratives individuals share, the more likely they are to successfully establish a play framework. Thus individuals that are connected at multiple points are likely to share multiple hyponarratives and the stronger
or more meaningful these points the more likely that these shared hyponarratives will be able to maintain a playframe. One could then understand Loch an Fhriaoch’s desire for camaraderie as a desire to retain a strong shared hyponarrative, allowing for the successful evocation and maintenance of a play framework.

Individuals or groups who frequently interact can learn to read each others differing metacommunicative acts and tolerate other conceptions of proper play. Thus Conrad explained that Loch an Fhraioch plays well with other nearby groups, and that Meridies in general plays well with neighboring kingdoms. As distance increases and the number of shared hyponarratives decrease the tolerance for differing play styles begins to break down and stereotypes start to take over. Some members of the West Kingdom complain that fighters in Meridies call shots too easily or are sore losers that complain too much while some Meridies fighters think of fighters in the West Kingdom as bullies. This type of contestation expands beyond just fighting to encompass ideas of gender, media use, levels of anachronism and so on.

Although often framed within the terms of play by members of Loch an Fhraioch, it should be quite obvious that activity and participation in the Society for Creative Anachronism is a complex balancing act proving that play in the SCA is in fact a very serious business. Members of the SCA understand this, and are necessarily reflexive of this process. This reflexivity exposes the play framework and allows for transgressive metalepsis like Loch an Fhraioch’s Not So Grand Tournament. Without the understanding of the underlying framework, this event could be misread and the joke lost.

It is often the mistake in the study of fan culture or large international organizations
to ignore the creation and enactment of a Not So Grand, or to exclusively study the event without connecting it to a larger whole. To do either is to miss how individuals and groups operate and support their own visions and conceptions of themselves in relation to each other and the larger framework. It is not that it is a necessity that we understand why and how Badon incorporates metal knees into his persona, but rather it is crucial that we remember that there are multiple Badons in every large organization whose voice is in danger of being lost if we slip too far back towards a homogeneous vision.
Loch an Fhраоich in its Current Position
The SCA Kingdoms in the United States
Appendix B: Glossary
A Glossary of Terms as Used by the SCA and Loch an Fhraoich

14th Century Mafia: the 14th-century mafia is a somewhat derogatory term used to describe people that are perceived as being overly focused on accuracy.

Apprentice: can be thought of as an apprentice to a Laurel. Like a squire or protégé, the exact meanings and terms for this relationship varies between people.

Arts and Science Meeting: a meeting where creative endeavors are the main focus rather than fighting or shire business.

Barony: larger groups of twenty-five or more members, they have a baron and or baroness.

Calling a Shot: the act of declaring a hit as being strong enough to stick or not. The fighter being hit must decide if a blow would be realistically hard enough to have injured or killed them if the weapon were real. In the case of a blow being on a limb, the fighter uses use of that limb. In the case of a leg shot, the fighter will go down on their knee, a hip shot and they must sit on the ground, and an arm shot and they place it behind their back.

Carpet: a form of armor common in the earlier days of the SCA that is literally made out of carpet. It was often used by newer members as a cheap, easy to make armor that could get them onto the field and fighting quickly.

Chirurgeon: an officer that is certified in first aid. They assist the marshal in assuring that members are safe and treated if a minor injury occurs.

College: a group set-up in areas around universities. A college’s population and participation is expected to fluctuate throughout the year with the academic calendar and their requirements are looser than a shire.

Collegium: a set of classes on Arts and Sciences’ topics, often part of a larger event but can sometimes be its own event.

Corpora: the internal laws and regulations of the SCA.

Crown List: a tournament used to determine the next King or Queen.

Device: the heraldic symbol of a person or group. These symbols are often painted on shields or sewn onto clothing.

Exchequer: the treasurer of a regional branch.
Garb: term used for the costumes worn by the SCA, used to differentiate mediaeval clothing from modern day “real world” clothing.

Guild: a kingdom level organization formed around a common interest. These are used to share information, spread interest, and overall forward the craft they are involved with.

Herald: in charge of helping members find a name and heraldic device, and then assisting in registering this device. In larger groups, such as principalities or at the kingdom level, the Herald also acts as the voice of nobility, making announcements on their behalf.

Heraldic Arms: the symbol of a person or group. These symbols are often painted on shields or sewn onto clothing and are sometimes just called a “device.” The SCA has set rules on picking and registering a heraldic device. The herald of the region is in charge of assisting members in creating and registering this device.

Household: A household is an unofficial group that is organized around shared interests and camaraderie and can be used to express personal values, goals, and the level of one’s commitment to the SCA.

King and Queen: the head of a kingdom. They are generally picked via a crown list, a tourney in which the fighters compete to become king or queen. The winner and their consort are crowned crown prince and crown princess until the coronation in which they become the king and queen for a set amount of time. Although every kingdom runs differently, it is often the king or queen who sets kingdom law.

Kingdom: the largest geographical region in the SCA. The SCA currently has nineteen kingdoms. Each kingdom has its own rules, regulations, and distinct culture and tradition. These kingdoms often cross over state, and national borders as well as covering several continents.

Knight: a member of the Order of Chivalry that has sworn fealty to the crown of their kingdom. Only a knight can make another knight.

Laurel: a member of the Order of the Laurel. This title is given to a person that excels at the arts and sciences and who passes this knowledge onto others. Their symbol is a laurel wreath. They are addressed as either Master or Mistress.

Marshal: an office that has several variations, is in charge of combat safety. There is often a specialist in heavy fighting, archery, rapier, and children’s combat. A marshal that is certified for the event must be present for combat to occur.
Melee: team combat rather than one on one tournament. There are many different scenarios for melee combat. Loch an Fhraioch has recently started trying to practice more for melee combat.

Nobility: although technically everyone is considered a noble within the SCA frame, titles must be earned within the SCA. Generally when members of Loch an Fhraioch spoke about nobles they were referring to members with titles.

Peer: a person who is a member of one or more of the following: Order of Chivalry, Order of the Laurel, Order of the Pelican, or Order of the Rose. These are the highest awards that can be earned in the SCA.

Pelican: a member of the Order of the Pelican. Their symbol is that of a pelican piercing its own breast to feed its young. The Order of the Pelican is given to those who has shown dedication to the SCA. They, like Laurels, are addressed by the title Master and Mistress.

Play: the word “play” is complex in its use by the members of Loch an Fhraioch. It can be used as a word to mean participate i.e I play with that group. It can be used in a negative sense as in I used to just play with that group, implying that an individual did not take the SCA seriously enough.

Protégé: can be thought of as an apprentice to a Pelican. Like a squire or apprentice, the exact meanings and terms for this relationship various between people.

Seneschal: The head officer of a regional branch, is in charge of the administration and secretarial duties of that branch. The Office of the Seneschal’s heraldic device is a gold key.

Shire: a smaller, usually more isolated groups.

Squire: can mean different things to different people, but in general a squire could be thought of as an apprentice to a knight. A squire is expected to perform specific duties for the knight and in turn the knight instructs the squire in fighting and understanding chivalric behavior. This is not an official title in the SCA and a squire is not guaranteed eventual knighthood although this is often the goal. Squires often (but not always) wear a red belt (sometimes with their knights device) to symbolize their relationship and position.

Stick Jock: a term often used in a derogatory manor given to those that are perceived to be there just for the party and to beat people up on the battle field.
Tournament (tourney): tournaments may be run for multiple different weapon types and styles. A tournament consists of a list of fighters and although there are different types of tournaments, generally speaking it involves elimination of fighters by one to one combat until a single fighter remains who “wins” the tournament.

War: a larger SCA event, wars contain different battles that can have multiple scenarios. Often larger wars contain many different events beyond combat.
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