

A GUIDE FOR SILENT HERALDS

BY

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Badge for deaf interpreters.

Vert, in saltire two trumpets or surmounted by a dexter hand appaury all within a bordure embattled argent

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I. Introduction

Taken from a guide for field heralds by lady ayslynn merch guincatan, p.e.

Long ago heralds were messengers, negotiators, marshals, and even spies for their monarchs. As the Voice of the Crown, a herald rode out before a battle to offer terms from his Crown to the opposing forces, all the while observing as much as possible about the enemy should the terms prove unacceptable. Commanders were assigned heralds to provide efficient and reliable communications amongst the army. Socially, heralds organized and conducted the tourneys, sponsored by the nobility, that were so important to the knights of the medieval world.

II. The Goal of Silent Heralds

The major goal of all court heralds is to enable communication. To be a good sign language herald (from now on referred to as silent heralds) and achieve this goal silent heralds need to be seen, to be able to hear, to see scrolls in advance, to be kept "in the loop" , and the cooperation of the vocal heralds.

The first element is being seen, you need to stand where you can clearly hear what is being said during court yet be clearly seen by those who need your services. Usually the best location is on stage or half-high to the stage (only on floor level as a last resort). Another placement which also works is the Royalty on the floor level and the sign language herald on a platform above and behind them, it is very rare. However different terrain and situations may call for a different location for yourself, please use your best judgement. It is best to be in the same line of sight as the Royalty so the Crowns, what's going on in court and the interpreter can all be seen at the same time. Do not allow yourself to be blocked by guards or retainers and standing where there is good light and little shadow to assure that your signs can be clearly seen. Usually, if the silent herald is placed to be seen, he/she will also be able to hear. Remember you cannot interpret what you cannot hear.

Seeing scrolls in advance is a great help. a silent herald has at least a faint hope of fingerspelling a name correctly if she/he has seen it before. Some scrolls have very flowery or funny or "puny" wording which needs advance preparation. This is not always practical, but ways should be sought to make it so more often.

It is very useful to be kept "in the loop" if we are prepared for the business that is going

to take place in Court. Music, dance, theatrics, all the neat stuff that makes a court different and exciting—we need to know about it. And scripts in advance are rare and wondrous things.

Vocal heralds who speak in a slow, deliberate fashion and who enunciate clearly are easier to hear, to interpret and easier for the deaf to lip read. Most of the time the information you will sign passes through their lips. We are all on the same side, we should be working together

A basic knowledge of ASL is needed (we don't want you to finger spell a whole court) but fluency is not necessary to begin with. You are offering a voluntary service to those members who lack the ability to hear. It is a rarity to find someone who is of interpreter quality and is willing to interpret a court, voluntarily. All that is required is that you sign what is going on to the best of your ability. As I once told a friend who apologized for having such a limited vocabulary, 'it was better than nothing'.

The best thing to remember is that a silent herald is a much the "Voice of the Crown" to those who cannot hear as the vocal herald is to those who can.

III. Code of Ethics

Silent heralds have a professional obligation to follow the Code of Ethics established by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

A. Confidentiality

"The interpreter/translator must keep all assignment-related information strictly confidential."

This is difficult in an SCA context, since the information basically becomes public knowledge as it is being interpreted. However, this does mean that any information a silent herald is privy to before Court (names of people getting awards, etc.) is kept confidential until it becomes public knowledge.

B.What to Sign

"Interpreters shall render the message faithfully, always conveying the content and spirit of the speaker, using language most readily understood by the person(s) whom they serve."

If the silent herald can hear that someone is speaking but can't understand the words, it is interpreted as, for example, "Morgan speaking, hear nothing."

Sign Language Heralds interpret whatever the main business of the Court is at any given time. The main business of the Court is usually one of the following:

The words of The Royalty.

The words of the vocal herald, including but not limited to, the scroll.

The words of the individual called before the Court

Reactions, comments from the populace.

C. What Not to Sign

"Interpreters shall not counsel, advise, or interject personal opinions."

Silent heralds interpret what we hear. We sign what is voiced to us, we speak what is signed to us. No additions, deletions, etc. We also interpret any sounds that have an impact on those present: a loud crash that might make everyone jump or turn to look in a particular direction, for example.

D. Behavior

"Interpreters shall function in a manner appropriate to the situation."

Appropriate dress and general behavior is covered by this point. In general, it is easy for the silent herald to be appropriate in an SCA Court if he/she remembers that he/she is the Voice of the Crown. Appropriate dress is clothing which is of a plain color which is in contrast to the silent herald's skin tone.

IV. SCA Title Signs

King

Manual alphabet letter "K" from non-dominant shoulder to dominant hip. (Be sure that the palm orientation is correct -- if not, this can easily be confused with the sign for "**PRINCE")

Queen

Manual alphabet letter "Q" moving from non-dominant shoulder to dominant hip.

Prince

Manual alphabet letter "P" moving from non-dominant shoulder to dominant hip. (Be sure that the palm orientation is correct -- if not, this can easily be confused with the sign for "**KING")

Princess

Manual alphabet letter "P" moving from non-dominant shoulder to dominant shoulder to dominant hip

Count

Manual alphabet letter "C" moving from non-dominant shoulder to dominant hip.

Countess

Manual alphabet letter "C" moving from non-dominant shoulder to dominant shoulder to dominant hip.

Viscount

Manual alphabet letter "V" moving from non-dominant shoulder to dominant hip.

Viscountess

Manual alphabet letter "V" moving from non-dominant shoulder to dominant shoulder to dominant hip.

Baron

Number "6" to a manual alphabet letter "P" near temple. For six pearls of a cornet

Baroness

Number "6" to a manual alphabet letter "P" near temple. For six pearls of a cornet + "**GIRL"

Knight

Manual alphabet letter "K" at waist moving from center to dominant side, drawing the belt which is the symbol of the order.

Squire

Manual alphabet letter "S" in the same movement as the sign for "KNIGHT"

Court

The sign for lecture with the manual alphabet letter "C"

V. Signs For All of the Kingdoms and Some Principalities

Atlantia MAL "A" + "**SEA, OCEAN"

Atenveldt "**SUN" + "**FACE"

An Tir "**LION" + mime the claw outwards

Ansteorra "**SUN" starting from waist up + "**STAR"

Caid Simultaneously with both hands outline the shape of crescents in the air about eye height

Calontir "**CROSS" + "**FANCY, DECORATED" {the cross with the *stuff*}

Drachenwald Mime sign for "firebreath" + "**WOODS"

Outlands "**DEER" + sign for animal jumping outward

*East MAL "E" moved towards right

*West MAL "W" moved towards left

*Middle Non-dominant hand, palm upwards. Dominant hand above this, palm facing body, "B" handshape. Dominant hand moves in small circle and lowers to strike center of non-dom. palm with fingertips

Meridies MAL "M" + 3 "**STARS"

Trimaris "**THREE" + "SEA, OCEAN"

Aethelmearc Interlaced fingers (for the escarbuncle) + "**ROLLING"

Ealdermere "**FLOWER" + "**WOLF"

Cynagua MAL "C" at throat moving into sign for "**SWAN"

The Mists "**FOG"

Settmour Swamp "**TOWER" + mime sign for falling over

Concordia of "SNAKE" in circle biting its tail +
the Snows "SNOW"

Coldwood "COLD" + "WOOD"

Stonemarche "STONE, ROCK" + "AREA"

VI. History of Sign Language

For thousands of years, deafness has been associated with "dumbness" or lack of intelligence; the use of the term "deaf and dumb" until recently, was commonly used to label deaf people. This stigma of inferior intellect has been so powerfully attached to deafness that it continues to persist to this day and to plague the deaf throughout the world.

Although the Israelites were commanded by God through Moses to display a compassionate attitude towards the deaf ("Thou shall not curse the deaf..." - Leviticus 19:14) they created laws that relegated the deaf to an inferior social position. The deaf were neither allowed to own property nor to conduct business transactions. The Talmud clearly places the liability on the owner who entrusted the care of his livestock to an idiot or a deaf person if the livestock caused damage to another's property.

Ancient Greeks were also unhelpful in their assessment of the deaf. The eminent Greek historian, Herodotus, noted that Croesus, the King of Lydia, had two sons, one hearing and the other deaf. Croesus gave a name to his hearing son and recognized him as his own son but refused to name the other and to recognize him as a son. Aristotle equated deafness with an incapacity for reasoning. Judaeo-Christian and Greek influence was such that these attitudes were carried throughout the western world by way of the Roman and Byzantine empires, becoming entrenched into the Justinian Code, the foundation of modern law in many European countries. Even to this day in modern Greece, deaf persons are prohibited by law from operating motor vehicles, despite overwhelming evidence in other countries that the deaf are safer drivers than the hearing.

There is evidence from Egyptian hieroglyphics and Greek monuments that conductors of music and court magicians used some sort of gesture language. Greek theatre had

an entire competition category for mime and gesture, of which there are some descriptions (in theory) but unfortunately none of those sources have come down to us. What remains are the following:

Some interpretations of the Masoretic text (the accepted text of the Torah and other Hebrew writings) include markings which have been extensively researched as "chieronomy" (i.e., gesture markings) for use by conductors to mark the melodies in chanting Torah portions and the psalms.

Some evidence from Coptic temple worship of the transmission of melodies through a sign language/chieronomy through the often blind musicians. Some objections have been raised of how the blind could read sign language, but current (i.e., 20th century) evidence from deaf-blind schools show that sign language is not a visual language but a spatial one, accessible to both the deaf and the blind.

There is more than ample evidence from many sources of a common body of sign language in use in the Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries. Current texts exist, but the most significant findings are the following:

(th)is sindon (th)a tacna (th)e mon on mynstre healden soml (th)aer mon aefter regiles beloude swigan halden wile and geornlice mid godes faltume begyman sceal....

[Direct Anglo-Saxon text translated into Anglo-Saxon from Latin]

[Translation] These are the signs that are to be used in the monastery, and observed diligently with God's help, where it is desired to keep silence according to the command of the rule.

Oldest continental sign lists are in two customaries from Cluny, written by two monks from that house in 1075 and 1083. Identical lists of sign language to *Monasteriales Indicia*. Examples follow:

"If you want cheese, then put your two hands together flat, as if you were pressing it".
[This is also the current ASL sign for cheese]

"If you want salt meat for any reason, then pinch with your right hand low down on your left, where the flesh is thickest, and make with your three fingers as if you were salting it." [This is also the current ASL sign for meat]

The first published British pamphlet of the British manual alphabet dates from 1698, but the first illustration of sign language still extant is John Bulwedi's *Chirologia, the Natural Language of the Hand*, a treatise on sign language used to serve for privy crypters, and secret information in 1644. This was a manual for couriers and spies, not for Deaf persons. The manual is over 150 pages long and all of its descriptors of vocabulary are in Latin, which would indicate that it was not purely British in origin. This manual also notes the work of the Venerable Bede (11th century) and his use of a signed alphabet for indicating numbers in code (e.g., G=7)

Evidence of other manual alphabets in common use in the Middle Ages for the purpose of silent

communication exist and three distinct alphabets are noted in Rosellius *Thesaurus Artificiose_Memorie* (1579). Considering that the title refers to "aids to memory", one would presume that these are in common usage.

VII. People in period

Rudolphus Agricola, 1443-1485, was interested in the deaf and wrote a book "De Inventione Dialectica". He wrote that a person who is born deaf can express himself by putting down his thoughts in writing. The book was never published till a 100 years later.

Girolamo Cardano, 1501-1576, was a Italian physician concerned about his deaf child, Cardano came across Agricola's book. He agreed that the "sense of hearing and the use of spoken words were not indispensable to understanding ideas." Cardano also believed that the deaf need to learn to read and write. "True, it is difficult but possible." "We can, in reality, manifest our thoughts either with words or with gestures." Cardano invented some kind of code for teaching but did not pursue it instead went on studying other medicines.

Pedro Ponce De Leon, 1520-1584, Catholic monk, established the world's first school for the deaf at the Monastery of San Salvador near Madrid, Spain where he taught till his death. "He taught the deaf mutes from birth to speak." Peter of Ponce first taught them "to write while showing them with his finger the object which was named by the written characters; then drilling them to repeat with the vocal organs the words which correspond to these characters." He was the inventor of this art and each pupil reasoned very well. He kept records of his methods and results but were destroyed in a fire. "In spite of his success and the favorable publicity of his work, at his death it seemed to die with him."

Juan Pablo Bonet, 1579-1620 - In 1620, he published his famous book "Simplification of Sounds and the Act of Teaching the Deaf to Speak." He believed deaf-mute should be forced to learn one hand manual alphabet using pictures illustrating the position of the hand for each letter before learning to speak and lipreading.

VIII. Sources

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