Persona 101

Choosing, Developing, *and* Using *Your* SCA Persona

OTHER CLASSES TAUGHT BY HUGO

Introduction to Late Sixteenth Century Europe, 1566-1610: The late sixteenth century was fascinating period with more of interest than just Queen Elizabeth I and William Shakespeare! The lecture includes both the important cultural changes and developments that influenced the beginning of the Early Modern era as well as an introductory survey of key historical events and figures across the different regions of Europe during this period.

The Birth of the Dutch Republic, 1575-1591: The Low Countries (modern day Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg) erupted into revolt against Habsburg Spain in the 1560s. By 1609, the rebellious northern provinces had organized as the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands and achieved de facto independence. How did they get there? This lecture looks to answer that question by focusing on the difficult but seminal years of 1575-1591.

Pike and Shot Warfare, 1530-1590: The sixteenth century was a unique period in the history of European warfare. As a transitional period, it saw a wide variety of arms in use at the same time: firearms, field artillery, infantry armed with sword & shield, dense blocks of pikes, knights in shining armor with lances, and lightly armed cavalry armed with pistols. This lecture addresses how these armies were assembled, armed, and fielded.

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FIRST PRINTING

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The High-Level Explanation: a Persona is an assumed fictional identity of someone who could have lived before the seventeenth century in Europe (or in a culture that had contact with Europe). This involves the use of a historically plausible "SCA name." Together, they are two of the basic tools used to pull us out of our day-to-day and give us a chance to experience something else: the dream of living and acting in a time other than our modern world.

- *Compared to Theater, Strict Living History / Reenactment Events, and Ren Faires:* The SCA is not a performance for an audience; we are all "in Persona" together.

- *Compared to RPGs or LARPs:* For many people, they are their usual selves with different names, but others do "play in-persona" at varying levels.

WHAT A PERSONA SHOULDN'T BE

- *Fantasy Genre:* The SCA is ostensibly based around historical reenactment. Elves, dwarves, orcs, and wizards are not appropriate frameworks to build a persona around.

- *Timeframe:* "Pre-seventeenth century" by definition. While you can argue for a grace period until 1650, not everybody views this favorably. Regardless, the English Civil Wars and Thirty Years War represent a distinct end to the historical and cultural continuity of the earliest stage of the Early Modern period that began in the late fifteenth century.

- *Post-"Period" Personas:* Focusing beyond this cutoff (e.g. a Jacobite Scot in a kilt or a pirate with a parrot) can be seen as flagrantly thumbing your nose at the letter and the spirit of the SCA's historical eras. *But,* if you're interested in being a pirate or Scottish, there are lots and lots of interesting examples and analogues that are a more appropriate reference and inspiration for the SCA's historical focus.

- *Historical Personages and Titles:* We are not Elizabeth I, William Marshall, or Robin Hood. The nature of the SCA's award system defaults personas to members of the gentry or lesser nobility (though many chose to portray lesser social standings). You're not a prince or duchess. SCA's own culture and structure have a lot to say there.

NAMES AS THE MOST OBVIOUS SIGN OF PERSONA

Names form what is arguably the most recognizable indicator of a chosen Persona. It's hard to be a believable Viking when you call yourself Juan Cristóbal de la Corredera or be remembered as a Japanese courtier when you're named Eleanor of York!

- *The SCA Basics:* Names are composed of two elements: a given name and a byname. Depending on the culture, a byname could be derived from many different elements.

- *Real World, Historic Use of Names:* Combining multiple languages to infer or reflect on a multiple-culture persona story isn't a historical practice: you would have been referred to by the language of your resident location (e.g. being called "Hugo van Harlo" in the Low Countries, but "Hugh Harlowe" in England). There are some exceptions, though!

- *Workarounds:* Linguica Anglica and the Legal Name Allowance

- *Heralds are Helpful!* A herald can help you research a name and advise you on the appropriate naming patterns of the culture of your choice.

HISTORICAL GARB IS OFTEN AN INDICATOR OF PERSONA

All the SCA requires is an "attempt" at historical clothing, or garb, but a most people who continue to play in the SCA eventually move into garb that's most historically accurate than a t-tunic or basic dress with modern shoes. This can be both a way to experience the historical side of the game in an increased way as well as showing respect to the game and the people who you play it with.

- Some people orient their clothing choices around their persona(s).

- Others are just clothes horses and like fancy garb from different times and places!

II. Persona Continuum

There's a wide variety of how much attention and effort people give to their personas within the SCA. You can chart those different levels along a continuum of effort:

Least Detailed, Quickest   *Most Detailed, Time-Intensive*

1 ——————— **2** ——————— **3** ——————— **4** ——————— **5**
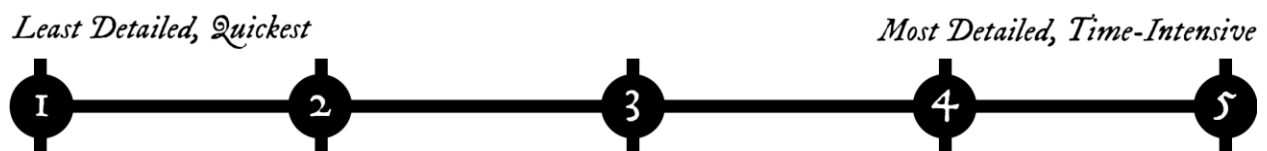
1. *Here for a Good Time:* Has chosen a historical first name amd makes an attempt at garb. Primarily plays to have fun with friends and do cool stuff. "Joan of Three Rivers."

2. *Rudimentary Persona Concept:* Has an idea of a general culture and/or era and has chosen a name appropriate to it. May have garb or activities in the SCA that reflect that persona choice. "Jón Sigarddson, the Viking / Crusader / Brewer / Blacksmith / etc."

3. *Foundational, Functional Persona:* Decided on a specific time *and* place beyond general culture or historical era with a name, garb, and some material goods that matches it. Done some research and can speak to a thing or two about their persona or historical context.

4. *In-Depth, Research-Driven Persona:* Uses various methods of research to dive deep into history, anthropology, archeology, etc. to build a mature and growing understanding of a chosen historical context. Often uses a chosen persona as a tool to connect different aspects of their SCA experience and will let their research dictate purchases and activities.

5. *Persona as a Literary Construct:* Applies research about a specific time and place to create a fictional character from their Persona that includes plausible life details about that character's outlook, upbringing, and place in their society. In many ways, this is similar to the work of an author.

PERSONA DEVELOPMENT IS NOT A VALUE JUDGEMENT

Your Persona can as detailed as you want it to be or as simple as you want it to be. None of the above points are better or worse than any other. There's not a value judgement in place here; it's just describing. *However, if you're attending a Persona 101 class, you likely want to be moving towards the more in-depth end of the continuum.*

"Authenticity is a stick with which we beat ourselves."

Persona research and development is rewarding for those of us interested in it as it helps us better understand our interests in the historical context in which they occurred. That's rewarding in and of itself, but also, that increased understanding creates an opportunity for greater verisimilitude in our equipment and at events.

DANGER OF USING A PERSONA TO UNIFY EVERYTHING

Some people try to connect *all* their interests and activities into a single persona story. Others want a persona story of such exceptionalism and adventure that it would be at home in an epic novel. This results in narratives that are very hard to justify historically – if not outright impossible due to convoluted timelines and distances.

Not everything you do in the SCA has to be connected to your persona! You don't have to tie in everything you do in the SCA to your persona, either!

III. Choosing a Persona

A basic, foundational Persona should be able to place a SCAdian within some manner of a historical context through the answer to two questions: *when & where am I* (a general or specific historical setting), and *who & what am I* (an idea your place and role in society).

- *This can be simple:* I'm a Viking in Viking Age Norway who raids across the seas.

- *Or, it can be in-depth and detailed:* It is 1582, and I'm a member of the rural gentry of the region of Salland in the Lordship of Overijssel – one of the "Dutch" provinces in the Low Countries embroiled in a revolt turned war of independence against Habsburg Spain.

  I have manorial holdings, property, and a village under my care and so earn most of my wealth through rights over the property and the raising of cattle upon it (this part of Overijssel is poor agricultural land with lots of moors), in addition to my investment in various businesses interests in the nearby city of Deventer, most notably the printing press.

  However, I have often taken leave of my home in Salland in order to finance and raise an infantry company of pike and shot (mostly Germans, but some from Overijssel and Guelders), which I lead as its *hopman,* or captain, against the Spanish and Catholics.

BRAINSTORMING FOR IDEAS

Some people have an idea for a Persona – either in broad strokes or a very specific idea – in mind early into their time playing in the SCA. However, others who want to create a more in-depth Persona struggle to identify and select a historical time and place that will be rewarding. In this case, brainstorming around the following elements may help define a Persona for them:

- Time and/or place of interest
  - o   Historical event
  - o   Historical personage
  - o   Historical invention, movement, or activity
- Activity or hobby
- Real life family history

- Clothing styles or material goods you find interesting (tastes and what you find acceptable may change the longer you're in the SCA and more exposed to historical mores you are)

- Comparative popularity *or* rarity of a persona amongst friends or the wider kingdom:

  o *Popular in Calontir:* Viking Age Norse and Anglo-Saxon, Roman, & a wide swath of Islamic impressions from Al-Andalus and Persia

  o *Middling:* Landsknechts, High Medieval Western European (c.1100-1400), Japanese, Mongolians, & Rus / Russians

  o *Underrepresented:* "Late Period" (frequently analogous to post-Reformation 16th century), 15th century (especially men), Post-Viking Age Scandinavians, Late Period Irish, non-Russian Eastern Europe, Ottoman Turks, & non-Japanese Asia

YOUR HISTORICAL PERSONA IN THE SCA CONTEXT

The SCA can be thought of existing in its own time warp of a "Known World" where Roman legionnaires from 100 A.D. can interact with 14th century English housewives and Aztecs from 1520 A.D. On top of this, all these time travelers can be awarded with arms and accolades from such ahistorical kingdoms as Calontir.

- Somehow, we all understand each other - even though, historically, our personas would have spoken in many different languages (i.e. we all speak English).

- Cultural and religious animosities don't lead to violence, strife, or disruption (i.e. English and French personas of the 14th and 15th centuries may still heckle one another, but no one's been murdered and had their camp taken over by invading SCAdians... yet).

Reconciling this is certainly a meta problem to solve, but it can also be a fun thought experiment.

- *Completely historic / contextual:* Your Persona story ignores the SCA altogether. Any awards, offices, or relationships within the SCA are not reflected in the accounting of your Persona.

- *Wholly within the construct of the SCA:* You may reference a historical context for research, but your Persona is wholly and exclusively a citizen of the SCA Known World.

- *A combination of both:* Your Persona may have begun in your chosen historic time and place (and may yet return on occasion), but through some means has travelled from their place of origin into the Known World of the SCA and its shires and baronies.

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You know Where & When your Persona is located and Who & What that individual would have been, but how do you make it a deeper, richer experience?

How do you go from "High Middle Ages French" to "late in the rule of Saint Louis the IX of France from 1254-1270 as a member of his court in Paris?"

Meet your new best friend research!

- EBSCO

- Wikipedia (Go to an article's bibliography!)

- books.google.com

- www.academia.edu

- www.jstor.org

- Laurels and other "research nerds" within the SCA

"...to create a complete being, one who can withstand odd and unusual questions, and come back with answers in order to better breathe life into our experience in the SCA - and to better the experience of others."

TWO APPROACHES TO RESEARCH

1. *Anthropological / Historical Research:* What was the world and culture of the time and place of my Persona, and would sort of factors would have impacted his or her life?

2. *Applied Research:* I like to do activity *X*. How was it done in this time and place?

YOUR FIRST STEPS OF PERSONA DEVELOPMENT

The prospect of research *can* be daunting, especially when you're just starting you! You don't need a small research library or a pile of downloaded journal articles and thesis PDFs for it "to count." Assembling a few resources can help get you started learning more about your persona and chosen historical interests.

And before you know it, you just might end up with a research library after all!

1. *A general overview of your historical period.* This could be a college textbook or other academic/historical book, journal article, or thesis. Wikipedia may be a start, but don't stop there – dive into the references and bibliography.

2. *A map or other representation of where you've located your Persona.* Maps are helpful tools to orient ourselves against the world around us, and the same applies for our Personas.

3. *A visual reference of clothing from your time period.* Costuming books may be a valuable reference, but check sources – some may be more fantasy and theatrical and not a reliable source. Pinterest (when vetted) and other reenactment groups may also be valuable.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL RESEARCH TOPICS (AND PERSONA CHECKLISTS)

Open-ended and blank slates of research possibilities can sometimes paralyze us, so SCAdians have come up with various "Persona Checklists" that offer up questions about our Personas that help us understand the historical context of our chosen fictional lives in a wholistic sense:

- The Known World

- Government and Politics

- Religion and Beliefs

- Family and Home

- Occupation and Education

- Culture and Society

For reference, Hugo's own Persona Checklist: HugoVanHarlo.com/About/Persona-Checklist

V. Applying and Using Your Persona

CONTINUING RESEARCH

For many people, the ongoing rabbit hole of persona development and research is its own reward. There's *always* more to learn, especially when we are researching the social and historical factors that would have influenced the life of someone living more than 400 years ago!

GARB AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Clothing and SCA items such as ornate camps, fancy garb or armor, feast gear, and wooden trunks can be one of the most immediately recognizable aspects of persona – but also either the most expensive or most time-intensive to create. Big projects and saving for big purchases is great!

There are also plenty of simple and cheap pieces of garb and gear that call attention to your persona as well as improve the "period" ambience of an event:

- Headwear and Footwear ("Going from a Costume to Clothing")

- Small Accessories and Jewelry

- Drinkware and Feast Gear

- Period Containers and Lighting (Additionally, Electric Candles)

- Small Camp Accessories (eg. Period Seating, Benches, or Stools; Tableware; Games)

- Items Decorated with Your Heraldic Device, Arms, or Badge

SCHTICK AND "HIGH PERSONA" / "IN-PERSONA" PLAY

- *Phrases and Language:* Are there cultural or time-period appropriate phrases (or oaths, by God's Blood!) or snippets of your persona's language you can use in conversation? The historic purists and linguists have challenges here, as current languages are different than the ones from 500+ years ago. Your mileage and perspective may vary.

- *Socio-Historical Touchpoints:* A cousin to the point above, what are element's of your Persona you can incorporate and drop into conversations?

  (e.g. Everyone knows that, as a good patriotic Dutchman, Hugo hates the Spanish... and now people buy Hugo stroopwaffles and other Dutch confectionaries.)

- *"Enchanted Ground:"* Casual gatherings (and occasionally, entire events) where participants are expected to act and interact in-persona.

- *Events of Culture:* A more formal variant of the Enchanted Ground, events of culture are more scripted events used to display persona / cultural activities and/or contexts.

- *Cheat Sheet:* Writing down some persona odds and ends (phrases, food & beverage, historical facts, your persona's opinion about current events) on an index card you can carry folded up can help keep your persona top of mind at events.

ONE LAST PIECE OF ADVICE:
DO IT FOR YOURSELF & HAVE FUN

Some Starter Persona Development Questions

YOUR KNOWN WORLD

1. What language(s) do you speak, and are you literate?

2. What nationality of people other than your own are you likely to encounter?

3. What historical events happened before your birth or as a child that would have strongly influenced you?

FAMILY & HOME

4. What manner of building (or estate) do you live in?

5. What is the typical local food, drink, or meals like?

6. How were you educated (formally or informally)?

CULTURE & SOCIETY

7. Who are the most famous people of your day?

8. If you can read, what books, poems, tales, stories are popular?

9. What do you do for fun?

RELIGION & BELIEFS

10. What religion are you?

11. What objects do you own that are connected to your beliefs?

12. What mythological beings do you believe in or have stories about?

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

13. What form of political system are you under, and who is the sovereign or authority above you?

14. Are you under any obligations to your authorities (military or otherwise)?

15. Who are your neighbors and who rules them? Are you allies or enemies?

OCCUPATION & STATUS

16. Are you a member of any professional, class-based, or other formal organizations?

17. Do you employ anyone or keep anyone in service?

18. What do you measure your wealth in (goods, coinage)?