Knighting Ceremony

12th to 14th century

Figure 1. (Keen 1984 p. 20)

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The Society for Creative Anachronism’s ceremony for the creation of a knight is interweaves historic details and modern SCA culture. The most obvious and tellingly modern element is the verbiage of the ceremony itself. Without an actual medieval script to follow, An Tir has adopted an oath from The Lord of the Rings books. This recognisable element tends to mislead people to assume that the other, more physical, details are modern fabrications as well. The key aspects of the ceremony listed below however were very much a part of the medieval knighting ceremony.

The earliest accounts of knighting, in the beginning of the 12th century, only talk about the arming of squires to elevate them to knights (Bouchard 1998). At most these early accounts call for “Fasten[ing] on a spur, gird on his sword, and give him a kiss” (Bouchard 1998 p. 121). (See figure 2) It is not until the later 12th century and early 13th century that we begin to have detailed accounts such as in the anonymous Ordene de Chevalerie and Raymond Lull’s Book of Knighthood and Chivalry.

Figure 2. (Stenton 1957 p. 112)
The Vigil
Many in the SCA are asked to stand vigil before their knighting ceremony. The day before the candidate is meant to fast and contemplate the importance of the upcoming event (Lull 13th c.). Although we tend to keep SCA vigils informal, they became very serious and took on great symbolism. “All those who are to be knighted the next day should enter a bath and stay there for a long time, reflecting on the need to cleanse their bodies henceforth from all impurities of sin” (De Charny 1356 p. 167, 169). (See figure 3)

The Clothes
In the Ordene de Chevalerie the author describes being clad in a scarlet gown for the ceremony (Anonymous 12th c. p. 112) so, ‘that ye may know the sum of all And fail not more your blood to give in serving God while ye live.” (Anonymous 12th c. p. 112). This author goes on to specify that the shoes worn should be “Of loose wrought say all brown of hue” (Anonymous 12th c. p. 112). This is meant as a reminder of the earth and death, which takes us all (Anonymous 12th c. p. 113). Two hundred years later, Geoffroi de Charny echoes these details in his Book of Chivalry calling for red tunics to “signifying that they are pledged to shed their
blood to defend and maintain the faith of Our Lord” (De Charny 1356 p. 169) and black hose, “this signifies that they should remember that from the earth they have come and to the earth they must return” (De Charny 1356 p. 169). (See figure 4)

Figure 4. (Time-Life 1997 p. 70)

The Sword
While a girding on of a sword is rarely seen in a SCA knighting, it was a major part of the medieval ceremony (Anonymous 12th c. p 114).

“The two-edged blade doeth learn thee lore
How a good knight should ever more
Have blended right and loyalty”
(Anonymous 12th c. p 114)

I believe that we have moved away from this tradition more for economics, in that swords are expensive and not always able to be given at every knighting. (See figure 4, 5, &6) Even so, the sword is the focal point of the modern ceremony. It is the instrument of most fealty oaths and the dubbing itself.
The Spurs

“Two spurs thereafter did he on
His feet and word within he won:
Sir, e’en as swift and speedily
Ad ye would wish thine horse should be”
(Anonymous 12th c. p. 113)

As can be seen in Figures 1, 4 and 5, that the gift of spurs is a common aspect of the medieval ceremony. One further detail we use in the SCA is that two knights are charged with girding on the spurs. This particular detail is shown in Figure 6 and explained by de Charny in the 14th century. “For each one to be knighted he gives two gilded spurs, one to each of two knights; these two knights each fasten one to a foot, signifying that gold is the most coveted of all metals and is placed on their feet as a sign that they should remove from their hearts all unworthy covetousness of riches” (De Charny 1356 p. 169).
The Belt
The last item to be given in the ceremony is the white belt. In both the modern and medieval, the squire is made to stand.

“Then upright on his feet stands he
And girds him with a belt withal
That white is and of fashion small.
“Lo sire, this little belt doth mean
That thou thy flesh shalt hold all clean
(Anonymous 12th c. p. 113)

Once again this detail has much longevity and is repeated in de Charny’s 14th century account (De Charny 1356 p. 169).

The Buffet

“Nea sir, but dare I not the deed
What is it then? “The stroke,” said he.”
(Anonymous 12th c. p. 115)

The knight in the story above dares not show Saladin this final step for fear of being thrown in prison. He explains it “Sir ’tis the memory stirring thing
Of him who hath ordained the Knight” (Anonymous 12th c. p. 115). This seems to indicate that the ‘stroke’ or ‘buffet’ or later to be called a *collee* was something substantial and not the light tap on the shoulder that de Charny describes centuries later (De Charny 1356 p. 169). Exactly what the buffet was like is hard to know for certain but it is best described;“ He might also receive a *collee*, a light blow of the hand or a punch. The accolade and *collee* were meant to make sure the new knight never forgot the experience of dubbing” (Robards 1997 p. 75-76). (See figure 7)

![Figure 7. (Turnbull 1985 p. 145)](image)

**The Celebration**

“On that same day it behoves him to make a great feast and to give fair gifts and great dinners; to joust and to sport and to do other things that pertain to the order of chivalry” (Lull 13th c. p. 61). One thing a knighting ceremony has and always will inspire, is a celebration. Much like our medieval brothers, we celebrate by fighting, eating, and drinking. However where we typically only have the weekend to celebrate, medieval revels were much grander. “A week of fasting and tourneying followed, to celebrate the great occasion” (Keen 1984 p 84).
Bibliography


