My Lords and Ladies:

Since last November's Estates Meeting, I have given a great deal of thought to the title structure. I have spent hours in research and discussed this issue at length with many members of the Estates and the populace. I have come to the conclusion that our current title structure needs to be regularized.

Part of the problem is that there is a very small pool of titles to choose from. Most of the alternatives we currently use are just translations of existing titles, or equivalents from different cultures. There is very little linguistic consistency in our title structure. For instance, the title "Earl", that we use for a retired King, is in actuality just the British equivalent of the title of Count. The title "Comtessa", a retired Queen in our Game, is just the Çatalan translation of "Countess". (Catalonia is the region between France and Spain.) "Marquis"; is from French, but "Marquesa" is from Italian.

What I would like to propose is the following:

Regularize the title structure using English titles for consistency. Since we all speak English, this should not be a problem. Then, we should allow people to translate their titles into whatever language they wish.

Once this is accomplished, it raises the problem of differentiating between Count (retired King) and Count (ruler of a County), and other such non-Landed titles. These would include Lord, Baron, Viscount, and others. We actually have a few ways of doing this, some of which are even Period.

Throughout our Period, there existed the concept of the "title by courtesy" or "courtesy title". Often, the eldest son of a Peer would use one of his father's lesser titles as a "courtesy", using it like a real title until he could inherit his father's. For instance, the son of the Marquess of Winchester, whose title was granted in 1551, would be addressed as the Earl of Wiltshire, while his son would be addressed as the Baron of St. John. We could easily adapt this usage or our own, and use the form "Count by Courtesy".

Another alternative is to simply use the word "Court" before the tile's designation, giving us "Court Lord", but this is a borrowing from the SCA and not documentable in or near our Period.

The third alternative is to use the word "Titular" before the designation: "Titular Baron". My preliminary research dates this use of the word to 1611, and I hope to document it further back in time. This has the advantage of being in use in the modern era, so its sound is not foreign to most ears, yet it does not sound obtrusively modern.

Another alternative is to place the words "of the Court" after the designation, as in "Countess of the Court", but I find this unwieldy.

An option that is in use in the Estates Writ on titles is the use of the word "Royal", giving us "Count Royal". This would only be acceptable for a Kingdom-level retirement title such as Count. This use of the word "Royal" dates to 1642, when Charles I created his daughter "Princess Royal".

The last alternative is to simply not make a differentiation between the two types. You are a Baron, a Lord, or a Count, and it is up to the people who know you to know whether you hold your title by virtue of holding an Estate, or whether your title was bestowed upon you.

This last one is the option I prefer: it is simple. What does one person care whether the person they are addressing is a retired King or the head of a County? Either way, that person will be wearing a Chain of State and a Coronet, so he will be shown respect.

It's always been a good rule of thumb that, if you don't know the person with the pointy hat, addressing them as "Your Grace" is a pretty safe bet. If they're a King, Duke, retired King or Prince, it's OK to call them that. If they're a Marquis, Count, Viscount, or Baron and don't warrant the "Your Grace" (they get "Your Excellency"), they'll be flattered. Either way, you win.

The regularized title structure would appear as follows, in Article IX.D. of the Bylaws (other text omitted for brevity):

1. EMPEROR/EMPRESS.

2. KING/QUEEN.

3. PRINCE/PRINCESS.

a. Title granted to a retired ruler of the Adrian Empire after a successful reign. An Estate Royal.

b. An Heir Apparent to the Adrian Empire (Imperial Crown Prince/ss)

c. An Heir Apparent to a Kingdom. (Crown Prince/ss)

d. A member of the Order of the Protectors of the Dream.

4. ARCHDUKE/ARCHDUCHESS.

5. DUKE/DUCHESS.

6. MARQUESS/MARCHIONESS.

7. COUNT/COUNTESS.

a. Title granted to a retired ruler of a Kingdom after a successful reign. An Estate Major.

b. The ruler of a County. An Estate Minor.

8. VISCOUNT/VISCOUNTESS.

a. A Founding Member of the Adrian Empire. An Estate Major.

b. Title granted to a retired ruler of an Archduchy after a successful reign of at least six months.

9. BARON/BARONESS.

a. The ruler of a Barony. An Estate Minor.

b. A holder of a Court title awarded by the Crown.

10. LORD/LADY.

a. The ruler of a Household. An Estate Minor.

b. A holder of a Court title awarded by the Crown.

11. KNIGHT CHAMPION, MASTER, PREMIER, or WARDEN.

12. KNIGHT BANNERET, DOCTOR, CIVIL, or FORESTER.

13. KNIGHT BACHELOR, ROBE, MINISTER, or ARCHER.

14. LORD/LADY PROTECTOR.

15. VICEROY/VICEREINE.

To see the full section of the Bylaws, visit http://www.geocities.com/nigelbyz/Articles/newbylaws.html.

What this structure does is put every title into a list that would be recognizable to anyone familiar with a medieval Feudal structure. The actual placement of these titles in precedence can be left to Estates Writ. People would be free to translate their titles into whatever language would suit their persona.

The revamped Writ may be seen at http://www.geocities.com/nigelbyz/Articles/newwrit.html. To see the old and new Bylaws side-by-side, visit http://www.geocities.com/nigelbyz/Articles/comparisonlaws.html. To see the old and new Writ side-by-side, visit http://www.geocities.com/nigelbyz/Articles/comparisonwrit.html.

So now, that you have read my treatise, I invite your comments.

I thank you for your attentions to this matter.

In service,

Sir Nigel the Byzantine
Fleur-de-Lis King of Arms