

Tisane



ti·sane ti-'zan, -'zän, n.
Etymology: Middle English, from Middle French, from Latin *ptisana*, from Greek *ptisanē*, literally, crushed barley, from *ptissein* to crush – Date: 14th century : an infusion (as of dried herbs) used as a beverage or for medicinal effects

To get on our mailing list, e-mail to newbrg@aol.com or drop an old-fashioned note to the return address on the mailer. Once our mailing list is set up, sample issues will be available for a stamp or S.A.S.E. (Yes, that is subject to change, too!)

If you are on line, join us on the [sca-herbalist](http://www.yahoo.com/groups/sca-herbalist) mailing list (go to www.yahoo.com/groups/sca-herbalist to sign up).

Do you have a favorite herb, gardening tip, historical tidbit, or recipe? Maybe a book you think the world should share? That's perfect for this newsletter — send it to the Chronicler!



The quarterly newsletter of the Herbalists and Apothecaries' Guild of the East Kingdom

Volume 2, Issue 3

September, 2001

Mission Statement:

The goal of the Eastern Kingdom Herbalists and Apothecaries' Guild is to encourage study, teaching and practice of medieval herb uses, as well as study of medieval apothecary and pharmacy practice, in the East Kingdom. The Guild should serve as a conduit for herbalists and apothecaries in the kingdom to communicate with and learn from each other, and to disseminate knowledge about medieval herbalism and pharmacy to others.

From the Agitator

I'm pleased to report that a) the "*Sekanjabin For The War Effort*" project netted the Kingdom at least six gallons of Sekanjabin (the look on the King's face when we presented the first installment was a study) and b) that we had a very successful Pennsic meeting. There were also meetings at Great Northeastern War and War Camp in Eisental. Upcoming meetings include the Herb Track at Montevale's Schola for the Lost (Oct. 5-7), and Crown Tourney in Dragonship Haven, Nov. 11.

We're doing great and growing daily. The Display/Exhibit at Great Northeastern War was especially well received: I'd like to see more such displays.

Some notes and agitator babblings from the Pennsic meeting:

✱ It was suggested that we add an annotated bibliography and links to class handouts on the website: so consider this a call for class handouts and book information! (e-mail to jahb@lehigh.edu) I will put up my herb book bibliography on the website, and as soon as we have more class handouts I'll put them up along with links to my class handouts.

✱ Further, someone suggested that we please, in our handouts and other information, include the Latin names for herbs.

✱ There was a spirited discussion of herb-related activities at demos. This is a great way to get the word out about herbs. FYI: if

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Heads up!

We are in the process of creating a membership list for our Guild. Hopefully, we will be able to use this information to help members contact other Guild members in their local area as well as gentles throughout the

Kingdom who share their interest.

We began the membership list using the mailing list for the *Tisane*. If you receive the *Tisane* by mail, you are on the membership list. If you wish to be added to the membership rolls, or know someone who wishes to be included there, please send me the following information:

Mundane name
SCA name
Address
Phone #
Email address
Areas of interest

You can mail me the information at:

Lady Annys Wolf of Wharram Percy
c/o HopeAllyson Dwiggin
1223 Suzann Drive
Warrington, Pa. 18976

Or e-mail the information to me at annys@ot.com.

In service to the dream and the Guild,
Annys



GUILD MEETINGS

May 19, 2001

Before the June meeting in Coill Tuar (recorded briefly in the last issue) EKHAG met at Spring War Camp in Owles Rest. The agenda went roughly like this:

1. Pass around books and handouts from Jadwiga's hoard.

2. Discuss next year's tithe to the Crown. Ideas included strewing herbs, comfits, herbed candles, and chocolate-dipped fruits. (Not to mention the Sekanjabin For The War Effort project).

3. Brainstorm for class and event ideas. This led to the herb track at Schola for the Lost. Other suggestions were for classes on honey nut candies, period comfits, bruise cream, chocolate covered fruit. (Was this meeting held right before a meal, by any chance?)

4. Consider a field trip to The Cloisters in the Fall. Jadwiga is to investigate possibilities.

July 21, 2001

The Guild met again in July, this time in the Northern Region for the first time!

The meeting was held outside behind the barn (minor snafu — a beautiful **display** was set up inside the barn by the A & S competition, but I had mistakenly assumed the meeting was scheduled for the back of the barn, where the classes were being held.)

At least 15 people came by and picked up newsletters — I had made 15 copies and didn't have any left when I packed up. Hopefully we will see some new members from the meeting!

We talked briefly about the guild, its activities, some of the events we have attended or sponsored, and then went over the **herb-related class schedule for Pennsic**.

The latter half of the guild meeting was dedicated to playing with **period perfumery**. I had brought some period essential oils and vials, and Isabella was kind enough to provide some alcohol and also other essential oils for us to make water-based perfume blends. Anyone interested got to make and take back to camp their own personal blend of perfume.

I'd like to think that the people who attended had fun, and hopefully the word will get out that we're out there and active!



Part of the herbal display at Great North Eastern War's A&S barn



Medieval Candlemaking

by Lady Liadan ni Laoghaire

A Brief History of Candlemaking

For centuries, candles have cast a light on man's progress. According to one source, beeswax candles were used in Egypt and Crete as far back as 5,000 years ago. Rushlights are among the first primitive candles used, which were basically a long, dried out reed that had been soaked in animal fats and later burned to provide light. Each rushlight lasted about one hour, and so was not overly successful in providing good light to work through the evening. Other versions of early candles included using animals and even fish as sources of light. The Scandinavian cultures of the far north impaled small birds upon spears and inserted a wick into the bodies. These petrels would produce a torch similar to a rush light, since their bodies had so much fat and oil in them. A type of fish known as a candlefish was also used in this method to produce an early, if rather unpleasant smelling, type of candle.

The Romans are credited with developing the wick candle, using it to aid travelers at dark, and lighting homes and places of worship at night. These candles were composed of a linen wick, dipped repeatedly into animal fat (tallow) until the candle began to take on a thickness. The candle, once completed, could be burned for hours and lasted considerably longer than its predecessor, the rushlight.

In medieval Europe, everyday use candles were made from tallow (melted-down animal fat). Mutton was the most prized fat from which to derive tallow, then deer and beef fat. Pig's lard was the lowest grade used for candles, if no other fat or wax was obtainable. Spermaceti, or whale oil, was also used for lamps in some northern cultures. Remains of highly crafted candelabra were excavated in abundance from the scorched ruins of Pompeii. The earliest surviving specimen of a candle was found near Avignon in France and dates from the first century A.D. The annals of ancient Ireland record candles as thick as a man's body and the length of a hero's spear. It was the custom at night to burn a massive torch outside the tents of campaigning kings. Timekeeping candles have been recorded from the ninth century. These had twelve divisions marked on them and they burned for twenty-four hours; each division marked off two hours.

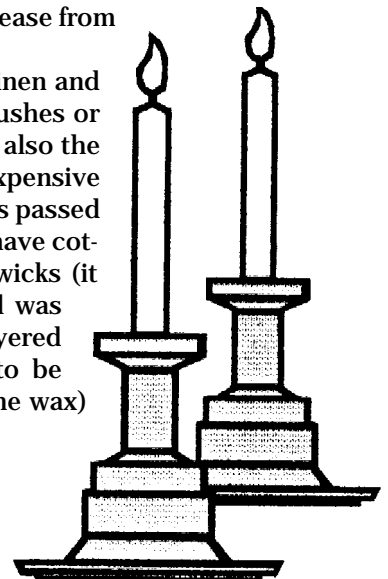
It was not until the Middle Ages when beeswax, a substance secreted by honeybees to make their honeycombs, was introduced to candlemaking. Beeswax candles were a marked improvement over those made with tallow, for they did not produce a smoky flame or emit an acrid or meaty odor. Beeswax was a costly substance though, and not as readily available as were tallow and lard. Because of this, beeswax candles were used exclusively by those who could afford them, in particular the nobility and the Church. The bee was considered blessed by God, and it is because of this that only beeswax candles were (and still are) burned in the Catholic church. Canon law still in effect mandates that all candles burned in Catholic churches must be at least 60% beeswax.

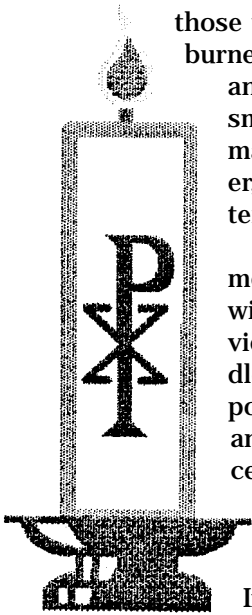
Originally an industry carried on in monasteries or at home, candle making became an established craft by the Middle Ages and the first recorded guilds were formed in Paris in the thirteenth century. In the mid-15th century, wooden molds were invented for candlemaking purposes; however, these molds only worked with tallow candles since beeswax was too sticky to release from the mold. Beeswax candles continued to be hand-dipped or poured.

Wicks were initially made out of small strips of linen or rushes. Linen and flax were the least popular wicks since they did not burn as well as the rushes or cotton wicks. However, most candles used linen and flax since these were also the most readily available materials for wicks. Cotton wicks were the most expensive and hardest to come by; however, in the 1400s the English Chandler's guilds passed a law mandating that all candles made by any professional chandler must have cotton wicks. Later, this law was revised to include 50% cotton/50% weeks wicks (it has yet to be determined what "weeks" refers to). The wicking material was plaited or woven together into a type of braid, and the wax was then layered onto the wick. Because of the way wicks were braided, they needed to be snuffed (a process that describes trimming the wick to about ¼" above the wax) every ten to fifteen minutes.

Making a Hand-Dipped Beeswax Candle

Both Beeswax and Tallow candles were used in period. I use beeswax exclusively in my period candlemaking, for numerous reasons. I have placed a pros and cons chart below this section for reference. In period,





those who could afford them, used beeswax candles because they had a pleasant smell, burned far longer than did tallow candles, did not melt in the heat as did tallow candles, and were relatively smokeless, when compared to the thick, somewhat greasy black smoke of the lesser-quality tallow candles. Because of this, all of the period candles I make are dipped, rather than molded. In period, they did have candle molds; however, the molds were made of wood, and because of beeswax's somewhat sticky consistency, the wooden mold would not release a candle made from beeswax.

There were two processes for making beeswax tapers in period. The first method is the dipping method, which is fairly self-explanatory — simply dipping the wicks repeatedly into a vat of melted wax. This is the method performed by most individual homemakers. The second method, the poured method, was used by larger candlemakers and the Chandler's Guilds in period. This second process included either pouring the melted wax onto the wick repeatedly, or by placing a series of wicks onto an apparatus and dragging them across a tray of melted wax. I have outlined the procedure for dipping candles below.

The process I use for my candlemaking is as close to period as I can make it, with a couple of exceptions. First of all, I use a modern, square-braided wick.

The wick is similar to the cord one could make on a lucet, and woven from cotton.

In period, wicks were hand-braided, and the modern wick was not invented until the 19th century. However, I use the modern wick for safety concerns; modern wicks are woven with one cord in the braid pulled slightly tighter than the others, causing the wick to curve at a 45 to 90 degree angle as it burns. This angle causes the wick to be consumed by the flame as the candle burns, so that someone does not need to snuff the wick every 10-15 minutes. In period, candles were constantly snuffed by people, and it was a habit that required little thought; since we are not in the habit of snuffing candles so frequently, my concern is that the candle using period wicks would be allowed to burn too long without snuffing, causing the flame to rise too high and possibly preventing a fire hazard. So, for this rationale, I use the modern wicking that does not require snuffing.

Other than this exception, the methods I use have changed little from those a person may have done 500-1000 years ago. First, I find a local beekeeper from whom to purchase pure, unfiltered beeswax. One can come by bleached-prefiltered wax, but I find it more authentic to use the pure, unfiltered and unbleached wax. The first step in candlemaking is to cut the large blocks of beeswax into smaller pieces, and melt them in a large vat. This is placed in a container of boiling water (double-boiler), so as not to ignite, and then left for a few hours, until the wax has completely melted. Once the wax is melted, I take a piece of linen and place it over my taper dipping container — a large cylindrical container. I then lift the pot of wax and pour it very slowly through the linen and into the dipping vat. This is done to strain out any of the bee parts or pieces that could still be in the beeswax. I use linen for this instead of nylon, as modern candlemakers would do, because I believe it to be the more authentic material. Once the linen dries, the wax-coated fabric also comes in very handy for smoothing loose edges of fabric or tapering threads for sewing and handwork.

The wax can be bleached by pouring the melted wax into thin sheets. This can be done either in a shallow wooden mold or a cookie sheet. Once the wax has cooled into solid sheets, these can be placed into the sun for a few days until the sun bleaches them a creamy white. This is an optional stage, however; I happen to favor the natural gold color of beeswax and do not bleach my wax. It is purely an individual preference for each would-be chandler.

Once the wax has been filtered, the actual creation of the taper begins. A large piece of wicking is cut, anywhere from 16" to 24" long. The entire length of wick is dipped into the wax, then pulled out and straightened with one's fingers. It is allowed to cool, so that the wick is primed and ready to light once the candle is finished. Once the wick is primed, grab the wick in the center and allow it to fold in half. I recommend weighting down each end of the wick, in order to help pull the candles straight as they are being dipped. This may be done by tying a small rock or a couple of small washers to each end of the wick. Once the candle is about ¼" to ½" in width, the weights can be cut off and discarded, once the wax is removed from them. (In period, wax was always recycled and never thrown out, it was far too difficult to come by.) While dipping the candles, allow about three-fingers span between the two edges. As the candle thickens, this span will decrease and you want enough space between the tips of the tapers so as to continue dipping it without burning the tips of your fingers. (Trust me, beeswax burns are quite painful — the melting point of beeswax is considerably higher than the melting point of tallow or paraffin!) Continue dipping the tapers in the melted beeswax. Allow about thirty seconds or more between successive dippings.

The candle should begin to become wider at the base than it is at the top, if done properly. If the



opposite happens and the wax is becoming thinner at the base than at the top, correct this by dipping the candle only halfway in until the width is symmetrical. This typically happens when the wax is either too hot, the candle is not being allowed to cool enough between dippings, or the candle is being dipped too slowly and the heat from the bottom of the vat is melting the wax at the candle's lower half. Also take care to dip the candle into and out of the wax at a steady pace; if dipped into the wax or pulled out too quickly, small pockets of air will become trapped between the layers of wax. The candle will burn fine even with the air pockets, but you will notice whitish spots here and there once the candle has cooled. The process is repeated for hours, until the thickness of the candle reaches about $\frac{3}{4}$ -1". The wax must be maintained at a constant temperature during this entire process, as if it becomes too cool the wax will lump upon the candle unevenly or create a ringed pattern down the length of the candle. Conversely, if the wax becomes too hot it will not adhere to the candle, but in fact begin to melt the layers already on the candle. The proper temperature will create a smooth, even candle without drip marks, imperfections, or lumps on the candle's surface.

When the process is complete, the candles are left overnight to cool completely. After this, the wick can be trimmed where the two candles meet, and then placed in candleholders to be burned. The entire process takes at least one full day, from start to finish.

Why Beeswax instead of Tallow?

I use beeswax exclusively in my candlemaking instead of tallow. There are pros and cons to each which I have tried to list as fairly and impartially as possible below. The pros and cons listed below consider both mundane issues as well as period ones, as you can probably guess. There really is no right or wrong to either one, nor is one more historically authentic than the other; it really is a matter entirely of personal preference.

BEESWAX		TALLOW	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
Burns slowly	Burns at higher temperature – melted wax on skin will hurt	Burns rapidly	Can get rancid over time
Minimal dripping	Somewhat expensive	Cheap, easily obtained	Can get soft in hot weather
Smells nice (like honey)	Slightly sticky to the touch	Not sticky, very smooth	Has an odor when burned
No risk of rancidity	Cannot be used in wooden molds	Molds well, can be used in wooden molds	Smoke is darker and thicker than beeswax
Minimal smoke	Used less frequently in period, only by wealthy and clergy	Used commonly in period by average people	
Does not get as soft in hot weather	Moderate dripping		
Doesn't require killing of animal	Burns at lower temperature – melted wax on skin will be annoying		Requires killing of animal to obtain
Golden honey color		True white color	

NOTE: If you do decide to use tallow, you will probably need to render your own. It is strongly recommended to use either mutton fat or a combination of mutton and beef fats for rendering your own tallow, as it creates the most pleasant-smelling and least meaty-scented candles. Order of preference by most tallow candlemakers (both in period and mundanely) is mutton fat, beef fat, and lard fat. Lard fat is said to make the poorest quality candles and has the strongest and most unpleasant odor of the three fats used in tallow rendering. Contact me privately if you would like instructions on how to render tallow.

Bibliography

Texts:

Herman, Dennis. *Domestic Lighting: Candles, Lamps, and Torches in History* (CA #68). The Society for Creative Anachronism: 1973.

Oppenheimer, Betty. *The Candlemaker's Companion*. Storey Press, Pownal, VT; 1957. ISBN 0-88266-994-X.

Oppenheimer, Betty. *Making Hand-Dipped Candles*. Storey Press, Storey Press, Pownal, VT; 1957. ISBN 1-58017-205-9.

www.candles.org/history.htm - National Candlemaking Association

<http://www.rathborne.ie/candle.html> - Rathborne Candles, an Irish chandler in business since medieval times

Various articles and postings from Stefan's Florilegium in rec.org.sca.candles

Suppliers:

Glorybee Supplies www.glorybee.com Carries most candlemaking supplies

Stone Valley Apiaries <http://www.centurytel.net/stonevalley/StoneValleyApiaries/SVAfirstpage.html>
Sells unfiltered beeswax at very reasonable prices

Pourette www.pourette.com Another candle supplier

The Agitator Reports: (continued from page 1)

anyone wants a quick'n'dirty cheat sheet to use at demos, I have one up at:

www.lehigh.edu/~jahb/herbs/herbhandout.htm

✳ Part of our charter is that we will make a presentation once a year to Her Majesty. Current plans call for making that presentation at 12th night. So, start herb-related craft projects for the presentation now! Last year we presented eight bottles of muscle-soothing massage oil for fighters and a number of embroidered Sleep Pillows after the recipe in Ram's Little Dodoen. Presentations to Their Majesties from local guilds at RPs are also a great way for the guild to be noticed.

✳ There will be an Herbalism category at Northern Lights (the big A&S Pentathlon in March). They DO take entries by proxy, so start thinking about what you are going to enter!

✳ The work of the Committee to Hash Out Ranking Levels continues. While rankings will be a wonderful way to test and extend our skills (for those who wish to participate in the rankings), we don't want them taken too seriously because rankings are not and should never be the main focus of the guild.

✳ Remember: any event can have herb classes or a guild meeting. If anyone wants a guild meeting at their local event, contact me and I'll try to come; otherwise, hold a meeting (my suggestions for how to hold one are in the June Tisane), take notes, and send 'em to *Tisane* and the mailing list.

It's the season for harvesting, so if you have a garden, have lots of fun with bringing in the last of the herbal bounty: and even if you don't, have fun planning fall and winter projects!

In love and in service

Pani Jadwiga Zajackowa, **Agitatrix**

*Here's one for our apothecaries —
particularly those who have trouble getting good dragon's blood from their suppliers . . .*

A Theory of Dragons: What If ...?

My husband and I were driving home from an event, and that event happened to be *Come to the Herb Faire* in Coill Tuar. As is our wont, we were discussing our different experiences at the event: I took more classes, whereas my husband was acting as a chatelaine to some people who had never been to an event before. He was describing the young man, who despite his tender age, was proving himself to be a rather good scholar on his own behalf. They had been discussing elves at that moment (don't turn up your nose, as I first did — ask my husband for that tale), when talk turned to other fanciful creatures. Then suddenly, the youth said something, and the conversation turned away to other things Scadian:

“I have a theory to explain dragons, too, but I'm still working on it.”

Hmm! Such a lovely statement is likely to set my own humble imagination afire! A theory of dragons? So, of course, my mind set to wandering...

First and foremost, I am a bard. I tell the tales of the people I meet, to other people I meet, and learn their stories in return. I listen to the old fairy tales, and sift for the bits of wisdom that our ancestors were trying to teach in a world where the “one-liner” meant the moral of a story. I strain for the grain of sandy truth in the pearl of mythology. Then, secondly, I am a strange half-breed of scientist and archeologist. Heinrich Schliemann followed an old myth about a place named Troy, and eventually found the city again. A farmer stumbles over an odd hole in his field, and the Pompeii that Pliny the Younger watched fall (and, incidentally, watched helplessly as his father died) sees the light of the sun. A tiny town named Minos on an even tinier island named Crete yields its secrets, and don't they find a maze under the palace! Was there ever a minotaur? Or did Greece just hate the foreigners they paid tribute to so much that they peopled its center of political power with a bogeyman?

Some things we may never know. But dragons? If you will, follow me as I slip into the stream of consciousness...

I know how the story goes. Human nature hasn't changed at all since Solomon wrote of nothing new under the sun, so some things must be familiar — and stay familiar. We dig in the dirt, and run to our betters with the things we uncover. When we are small, we run to mommy, but when we are bigger and older and wiser, it's our college professor. And earthquakes and earth shifts are nothing new, either. So, perhaps, a young man is out in the back of beyond with a spade, and there's a strange concavity in the earth. He digs, and touches a thing that we would identify today as a skull of a T. rex. Well, what would he think? So he feverishly uncovers, and what he finds he hastily packs off to the nearest center of learning. Centers of learning are always near politico-economic centers, at least back in those days, so before a few hours pass the king's men are asking politely if the thing may be brought to the king.

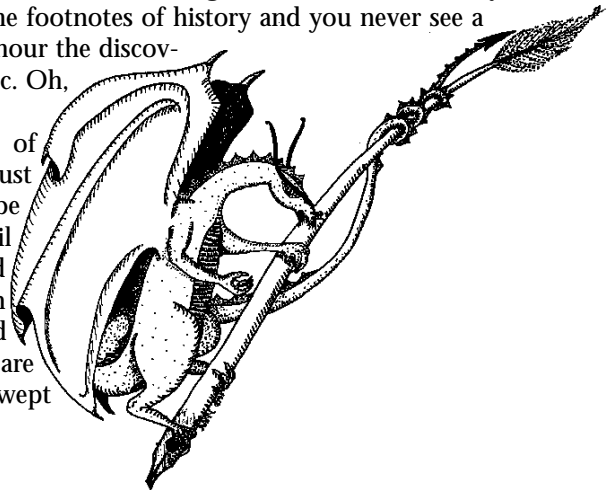
Kings are acquisitive — how do you think they become kings in the first place?? So the thing is brought before him, and he knows his history / mythology as well as the professors of that theoretical university. The court marvels at the thing, now labeled “dragon skull” It is marvelous. It is rare. It is precious.

It is packed off to the treasure room, along with all the other rare and precious and marvelous stuff.

Have you ever been to a dig? Have you ever pulled fossils from the living earth? I have. Have you ever wondered why they're so carefully plastered and crated and shipped with the greatest gentleness? It's not because they're rare! Fossilized bone, when pulled from the wet earth that transformed it, degrades horribly when exposed to air. Within days, your lovely pile of bones can be a lovely pile of dust. You must soak your bones in an acetate solution, basically gluing the thing together and preventing any air from ever reaching its marrow. Otherwise, your exciting and wonderful discovery becomes a toenail clipping in the footnotes of history and you never see a cent of grant money again. Fame and fortune have rested on the hour the discovery was preserved - talk to the people who jointly found the Titanic. Oh, you never heard of the French team? I'm not surprised.

Back to that treasure room, which never even heard of acetate. So, in three days' time there is a heap of strange colored dust on a hastily-erected platform in a treasure room, which may be opened once a month in the busiest season. All is commotion, until a religious man puts forth the idea that perhaps the evil embodied in the base beast's skull could not stand being in a palace or room with objects of the faith. Or maybe it couldn't breathe consecrated air, or some such. What other explanation would fit? So dragons are evil, based on the empirical evidence, and the dust is cautiously swept out the door.

Hey, it could have happened.



2001 Guild Calendar

January 13	Twelfth Night (charter granted)	Nordenhal	Kingston, New York
March 3	EKU (herb track classes)	Iron Bog	Palmyra, New Jersey
March 10	Hrim Schola (herb track classes)	Frosted Hills	Millbrook, New York
May 19	Spring War Camp (herbal exchange table, Guild meeting)	Owl's Reste	York, Pennsylvania
June 9	Herb Fair (classes, activities, Guild meeting)	Coill Tuar	New Windsor, New York
July 20-22	Great Northeastern War (Guild meeting)	Malagentia	Hebron, Maine
August 3-19	Pennsic (classes, Guild meeting)	Debatable Lands	Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania
September	Schola 1001 (herb track classes)	Montevale	Ft. Littleton, Pennsylvania

Tisane

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