

Arden

18 Lessons of War and Peace
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1313, the 1st month, 22nd day:

Karyakos, Tertius, Zokitos and Pantaleon spent most of the morning giving lectures to us about famous battles. Lugo was invited along with all the younger King's guards and Palace Boys interested in military things, the older Argoanuts and the sanctuary men, as well as squires from many knights. The winds had lightened during the night and the little fleet was still several hours away rowing at a steady pace. Admiral Pantaleon spoke first as he needed to prepare to sail. Admiral Pantaleon, Tertius and Zokitos spoke about famous battles from history: looking at the strengths, weaknesses and strategic positions. Karyakos spoke about leadership relating its' importance or lack of importance, to each of the battles described by the others. He pointed out that since the time of Iason the 2nd. the North African Pirates were mostly more nuisance than threat in the Adriatic and Ionian seas, largely a result of the powerful Venetian navy. They were more or less confined to the coast of Africa from Spain to Egypt. The Iason-Consort pair have given Parga strong leadership as our ancestors had from their Kings and Consorts. This was really a hold over from the time of Alexander the Great. Alexander and his best and oldest friend and lover Hephaestion set the model for our ancestors.

The idea for two kings came from Sparta long before that. They wisely joined the two and created our system. Alexander's great achievements were built on leadership and vision. Agree with what he did or not, people followed because he lead. He ran into trouble toward the end of his life because Hephaestion was not able to counter balance his seduction by power. Alexander had remembered many lessons from his time at the Academia but he forgot a few as well. He allowed himself to self indulgence and dilution. That all important counter balance was not properly positioned to do its job.

The Spartans had two kings so that if one was out of the capital the other would still be in charge. That still did not prevent one or both from becoming seduced by power. Our system joins love and power together. That is our way. One of us is expected to produce male children, princes. The other is forbidden from marrying a woman but must adopt his son from a list of worthy citizens. If something happens to my son another is adopted, if something happens to the Crown Prince one of his younger brother moves up the ladder by birth order and approval of the council, which also must approve the adoption of the Prince Consort. The King's wife must be a citizen and is chosen by the council as well. She can never be Queen or regent, a post that does not exist here.

All three must show strong leadership skills and abilities to hold the posts. Even the Crown Prince can be replaced before his coronation if he proves to be feckless or incompetent. The Princess has responsibilities that go beyond producing children and must run quite a large household and represent the interests of women and girls. No small task list when you have very little real power. The King and Consort do not have absolute power either. Sovereignty lay with the people. Our Sovereign couple only represent it. King Iason and I are leaders but more important we are chief administrators.

Now I understand why they keep telling us to build strong relationships with those around us. Leadership is a lot easier when those around you are loyal to you as well as your office. It is sure a lot more fun too.

Lugo was just so taken aback by all this. I think he was a bit overwhelmed by Parga anyway, but to hear the second most powerful man in the kingdom be so honest with us boys was beyond his experience. I know from the look on his face, if his parents were still alive he would gladly stay here to make a place for himself based on his own abilities. A choice he just does not have. He has family and employees depending on him. He, like Iason and I have duties far greater than to each other, yet bound with us as well. I also saw him look at Dario. He was beginning to understand he will be all right and they will succeed. Dario may never be his lover but certainly his friend and as long he remembers the lessons of Alexander and Parga he will do just fine.

We were divided into two groups, I went with one and Iason the other. While the old men rode horses we boys all ran the 3 stadion from the castle to the headland. My group on the north and Iason's on the south. We got there a little before Admiral Pantaleon's flag ship and the others passed out of the gates. I don't

think anyone quite knew what to expect. The three pirates were under full sail and pulling hard on the oars making for the gates they were quite close perhaps 5 stadion. When the flagship rounded the gates, bearing hard on them we wondered what they expected. By now they must have seen the other three squadrons all closing on them. Our three ships were forming a line astern attack. It did not look as though they were intending on ramming them but it looked as though the pirates were intending to try ram the Admiral. Although I know these ships were all moving at a good speed, it appeared almost as it was in slow motion. Suddenly the flag slip pulled hard to the west and dropped its foresail. We could not see the fore deck because the main sail was blocking our view. The Pirate ship was correcting his course to intercept the Flagship when suddenly about 25 flaming arrows were launched from long bows, about half of them finding targets. Then just as fast as it lowered the foresail came up again, the flag ship moved out toward the open ocean in a maneuver designed to completely turn around. I could see about 6 men pulling on the massive tiller that extends behind the Flagship and the crews correcting the sail orientations. A good number of arrows hit their main sail and it was now on fire.

When the other two pirate ships saw what happened and that two more men of war were bearing down on them they dropped their sails. A preparation for battle? General Zokitos was with us and explained that the normal way these pirates attack is by boarding the other ship, that is the time tested way of fighting navel battles. Sometimes a combination of ramming and boarding is used. Pantaleon had changed those rules. Had the arrows not worked Admiral Pantaleon would use his new cannons next.

He wanted us to keep an eye on the other two pirates to see if they are surrendering or if it is just a faint to draw us in closer where the ships can be locked together with grapples. Always a problem for rowed galleys. They probably don't realize all of our ships are equipped with cannons and from close range they will be devastated by them.

By the time the flag ship came around the sails had burned and other fires were out but he was not sure of the fight. The flag ship moved in closer with only one quarter sail, to slow them down. We could see the two cannons on the bow sitting high and prominent, now that the foresails were down. They surrendered. "That is an example of not underestimating your adversary," Karyakos said as we walked back to the castle.

Lugo was just delighted with what he had seen. He was determined to head straight to the dungeon with the news. Any chance he could get to humiliate Mohammed before his former crew. All this was a stroke of luck for Venice, the four captured ships would allow us to send four of our navy ships to them in the next few weeks. The captured vessels would do for us until four new replacements could be built.

We all headed for the baths after we returned. I was struck with the variety of shapes and sizes in our genitals. We are not circumcised as the Jews and Muslims. A few of us in the baths are such and at first I thought it strange. I quickly realized that when erect or when my foreskin was pulled back we all looked the same and yet almost everyone looks just a bit different. Some are fat, some slim, some bulging the middle, some on either end. Some have large heads, other smaller. Some curve up, some down, some are straight, some bend to the left or right. A few boys have pubic hair, most of the older ones have, as well as, hair on their bodies in other places. Some like Ikaros are shaved and have no pubic hair showing. Ikaros has his body shaved so he looks like a woman.

The variety of testicles is almost as wide as the penises. They vary in size, amount of hair, some hang low other not. When fully erect the variation is even greater. Some are very long others shorter, but all the men are bigger than us boys. I also notice some when erect are so great their foreskin completely vanishes others only the tip is uncovered.

I have come to the conclusion that our ancestors were correct; the naked, youthful, male body is most beautiful and worthy of worship. I am greatly excited by them all. I also find the youthful bodies of the girls worthy of more than a second look. If it were not so we would be wanting for people.

(TN: This appears to be the end of this first book. We assume the entries or books between now and the fall of 1317 have been lost. Arden is now 16. The entries continue as if uninterrupted, so we assume the interim was written, as he picks up a number of thoughts obviously in reference to the missing entries.)

1317, 9th month, 20th day:

No sooner had Iason and I returned from the university and began readying for our afternoon duties than a loud commotion occurred in the outer rooms of our residence. Having my naked body pinned to the bed by my lover and sharing kisses of eminence passion, along with the joy of each others bodies, we were disturbed. I could hear Damao's distinct voice saying "No you may not," and another saying, "but I must."

We reluctantly broke our embrace and we pulled on long tunics with nothing else and moved to investigate. When we opened the door here were Drakon and Damao, toe to toe. "This is their privet time, your business must hold." Drakon was responding, "This is less business and more friendship, Damao." We interceded at that point. It must have been obvious by our dress or lack of it, we had been engaged in privet matters and from the red flush on Iason's body what those matters were. Not that all four of us had not shared passion before nor would we refrain from it in the future.

I looked at Drakon. "A personal matter Prince." At that point I could see his face clearly and he had been crying. I knew this must be something serious or Drakon would not have come this way and he would not have been crying. Drakon had learned his stone faced expression from Alexandros the Elder and now that he is in that position, adopted the same set of expressions when on business.

Iason took Ikaros' hand and pulled him into our chambers behind Drakon and myself, along with our mid day meal. I pulled Drakon to me and held him tightly, "Cry if you must, their is no same in friends showing emotions to one another." (Note: Maybe not in privet but great shame in public for males in this culture.)

I could see Ikaros had also been crying and combined with his sullen attitude of late, I took this to be more than some minor unpleasantness. Ikaros was slowly moving toward the door to our dressing room when Drakon stopped him. "This concerns all of us Ikaros. Now that the Crown Prince and Consort are officially bound, as is our custom since the time of Minos, it is time they learned the ways of sex with women. Your mentors will not teach you this for no one need to be taught how of procreate, it was built in by the gods. It has been the custom here for the chief steward to felicitate such liaisons. He is an old man, so has delegated that to me. This is most important for Iason since he must be told if the female is sister or closest cousin. It is important for all of us who grew up in the castle or are close related to those that live here."

"Non of us wants to sleep with our sisters now do we," Ikaros chimed in. Iason and I nodded in agreement.

"I know this is some in advance of the usual time but the situation is such, I have no choice but to act now. For Iason we have made a list of eligible young ladies who are more than willing to bear your bastard children. Once you make your selection the remainder, plus Iason's bastard sisters, composes the pool for Arden. You brother, are so beautiful and desirable that all and I include many to old for me are standing in line."

To great the choices the harder it is to choose, me thinks. They all laughed at this with me, knowing it was true.

"Now this is how the game is played for the royal couple. I show you the lists, you pick two or three to start and I arrange the necessary liaison. It must not take place here or in the female quarters. The Second Steward's apartments are well suited. Ikaros will show you how to go and come unobserved and without escort. He will make all the arrangements and from his experience tell you who among them make the best lovers."

"We thought this did not happen for at least another year until my betrothed is selected." Iason asked.

"True but these are not normal times. It is unlikely that any of the palace girls will be chosen anyway. This tends to be as much political as practical. You can only reject their choices for sound reason. I don't think it has ever happened. The girls in question know this and have considered it. Remember brothers these females are not just giving themselves to you they are filling their role as women and duty as palace girls to bare children. Some will of course wed, but those that do not and palace girls unlike others do have a choice, still desire to be mothers almost as much as we men desire to make them such."

As Drakon talked I could see this was a kind of game but one with some serious outcomes. Everyone knew the rules and knew what was happening but pretended not to know. The best any could hope for was that status of Royal Concubine probably one of several. The the least they expected was to be romanced and seduced, given gifts and privet attention. It is the job of the steward's office to record all births in the castle and parentage. As he said, he also provides the love nest. The men would know and if they wished, could be an active parent to the child. Prince Karyakos did, King Iason didn't. He advised Iason to take his sire's lead in this, I was to do what my heart told me was right.

Then he came around to why now, almost a year early. It was a very tearful telling with both him and Ikaros crying and Iason and I trying to comfort our brothers. We were both proud and appreciative that our brothers thought so well of us and each other to expose their inner most emotions. Drakon opened his book, he always carried a book with him. It is part of the job to take detailed notes and keep accurate lists. He showed us his notes about the recent deaths of children in the castle population. Most were in the 2 to six year old range and the numbers were most disturbing. Three quarters of the children in this year, mostly from fevers, fevers with read spots and fevers with breathing problems, fevers with dysentery. Sometimes several in one day. In the past two months both he and Ikaros had lost many of the children they had sired, 8 in total.

It is not that we are unaccustomed to death. That is all around us but when the one who dies is loved it is hard, when it is a loved child, even harder. The scholars have told us half of all those born are dead by 20 in other lands and 25 in ours. At first I did not understand why Uncle Iason did not want to parent his bastard children. I remembered his comments on the day of the Florentine invasion, about the shoulders of Atlas. I had seen him when Lysandros, Helladios or our sisters were sick. I understood why. I understood Father too. I know what I must do and I know what I must make Iason not do. This must be very hard on Father but I had not noticed. I feel I have failed in my duty as a son, not to have recognized his anguish.

Our peace was soon disturbed again, this time before we had a chance to finish our meal. Nikias, Joulous & Justus followed closely by Kastor and Polydeukus, Odo and four other pages came poring into the apartment all being chased by Kleitos. Apparently the boys had been up to some mischief around his horse training yard.

That afternoon we received a letter from our people in France. Our French Connection as we now called them, have been able to establish themselves as musicians in the French Court of Louis X. The letter began "Dearest Brothers: We arrived in France some three months ago and quickly secured positions as musicians in the French Court. This through the good offices of Bishop Georgios and the Doge." They go on to describe the French Court, the wonders of Paris and Rouen and so on, in glowing terms. They praised the high musical standards of music in France and the court specifically. They describe the differences in dress, customs social attitudes and so on. Often making light of the differences. They move into areas of intelligence saying things like: "we dearly miss our days with you in father's vineyards. Wine here is of poor quality. We are told the grape harvest has been only 1 to 2 fifths normal, since the spring of 1315, due to cold and very wet conditions. We are assured that once the rain stops wine will greatly improve in quality and quantity. Bread is very expensive and often made of rye, not the wheat we are accustomed to. This scarcity is due to the same wet and cold conditions. This summer the wetness seems to have abated and we find it warm. Father's fields would prosper under these conditions. We met a man in the street who sang several sad laments which I have transcribed into our notation for your Lyre." The words in the laments when translated out of poetic context said:

In the spring of 1315, unusually heavy rain began, the seasons they were cold. Throughout the spring and summer, it continued to rain and the temperature cool. Grain could not ripen. Grain was brought indoors in urns and pots. The straw and hay for the animals could not be cured and there was no fodder for the livestock.

The price of food began to rise. Salt, was difficult to obtain, the water could not be evaporated in the wet weather. In Lorraine, wheat prices grew by 320 percent, making bread unaffordable to peasants. Stores of grain for long-term emergencies were not overly great and limited to the lords and nobles. In spite of experiences and old lessons, populations were encouraged to rise and reserves were not kept in proportion to potential need. Even lower-than-average harvests meant some people would go hungry;

there is little margin for failure. The people began to harvest wild, edible roots, plants, grasses, nuts, and bark in the forests.

The English suffered as the French and the Germans. The French invaded Flanders, but being in the low country of the Netherlands, the fields were soaked and the army became so bogged down they were forced to retreat, burning their provisions where they left them, unable to carry them out.

In the spring of 1316, it continued to rain on a population deprived of energy and reserve to sustain itself. All, from nobles to peasants were affected, most of all the peasants, who represented 95% of the population. Oxen died from contaminated feed, horses less so. To provide some measure of relief, the future was mortgaged by slaughtering the draft animals; eating the seed grain; abandoning children to fend for themselves and, among old people, voluntarily refusing food in hopes of the younger generation surviving. There have been many incidents of cannibalism.

The spring of 1317 the wet weather hung on. Finally, in this summer the weather returned to its norm. The people are so weakened by diseases of the breath, and other sicknesses, and much of the seed stock had been eaten. The death toll is said to be between 10%–25% of many cities and towns.

“Oh brother we so miss our father’s olive groves and goat’s cheese. Swimming in the river with you and delights of the gymnasium.” This was a long tome having been written by both of them. I was glad they were at least getting enough to eat at the court. “Tell Father Georgios that many here prayed and few were answered. The faithful are greatly less so. But Salvio and I attend mass every Sunday. Tell him the wickedness grows as murder is common and lawlessness is ramped for the hungry. He should rejoice as his authority is not in danger of challenge as should our leadership.”

They ended on a positive note. They had written a small song that was full of rhythm and fun, it did not have words but when I looked at it closely the notes as transcribed spelled a message to us. “We love you brothers, we will return in one year. This place is greatly weakened. It will take 5 to 7 years to restore full bellies. Much unrest is and will happen.”

I thought the use of music as a code was excellent. Since few in France read Greek and fewer music and fewer still music written in our specific notation. We will write back quickly with our own coded message. I was not sure if this letter would have been read by the French or Italians on its way here, the seal had been tampered with or looked as such. Since the spelling is not always precise one would need to be a fluent speaker of Greek to make sense of the message.

I had an idea and after experimenting with it, found it worked quite well. I learned in Alchemy classes that if one uses the juice of a lemon on paper as ink it will become visible if heated quite hot but not hot enough to scorch. If we drew pictures such as our image of the Argo on the flap of the envelope, across the join, after it is sealed and then heated before it is opened we should see the lines match or not, showing if the flap had been opened. This must be done away from the wax seal, as not to melt it or its heat of application reveal the lines. Should the seal be tampered with by the application of heat that too may be revealed by making the little drawing visible. We think this intelligence business might just be a bit of a game, a fun game. We may put this knowledge to some useful purpose over time. Iason and I enjoy the alchemy part of our education greatly as much of it is doing, experimenting, not just listening.

Our mentors have told us over and over we do not need to be experts at anything but must be conversant with everything. The essence of leadership here is to know when, who and what is needed. I am still the best runner in the kingdom and Iason the best lover. We all have some talent at which we can excel.