

I hope everyone is enjoying Arden's story. Feedback is always appreciated.

11 Prince Iason's Argonauts
By dnrock (dnrock@rock.com)

1312, the 10th month, 20th day:

In total, 111 boys and young men of 15 years or less and as young as 8 years, were rescued from the Florentine invasion force. The exact number of attackers or boys will never be known since so many were lost at sea.

We were told the Florentines believed that we would either just surrender or our small army would put up minimal resistance. They were prepared for a long siege on the castle but thought the country side and city would just capitulate. In fact, until they sent their probe attacks against our fishing villages they had no idea the seacoast was so mountainous and though it was like our neighbors rather flat. Had they bothered to ask any of the merchant sea captains that had visited our port they would have at least know how difficult it would be to enter. It appears that Father was right when he said, "fools chose what fiction to believe."

They believed we were the worst kind of barbarians that would torture and kill prisoners or enslave them. Some believed we practiced human sacrifice to demonic gods. They had been told the bishop had requested military assistance because the Christians were being slaughtered and killed. Some believed there was great treasure here and plunder would make them rich.

We learned much of this from the boys who realized in an instant these were lies and falsehoods of the first order. Many were incredulous when we told them sex with adults or others was not a requirement and they would never be forced, however, opportunities were abundant.

The remaining boys arrived in the courtyard, Iason and I personally greeted each and every one of them. Kleitos and Alexandros the Younger were at our sides along with our guardians. Alexandros told and retold his story and Kleitos recorded the name and age of every guest. The Palace boys would come and go collecting the new ones and assigning them a guide. Most of the Palace Boys would have two or three guests under their care. Any with wounds were sent to the physicians. About half had no clothing or what they had was so damaged as to be useless. We discovered few of them could read or write. Several appeared to be sick and were also sent to the physicians.

The first few days would be orientation and organization but after that some kind of useful work and study would be required to keep all these new boys occupied. Adonis and Drakon have been assigned to help us get things organized, as Iason and I have page duties to perform.

Prince Tertius and five other Knight Generals reported to the King and Council. None reported any real problems or incidents above the very trivial. All the non marine prisoners were being housed in tent camps, two to the north and two to the south. The dead from both sides have been cremated as is our custom. The captured enemy ships are now in our harbor and

undergoing repairs. The captured crews are carrying out those repairs. Those crews are living in a tent camp near the harbor.

Much discussion commenced and it was decided that the surrendered combatants would be employed in either ship repair or road building. They would be paid 1 silver coin/day of work and provided with food and shelter. They would be released pending the opening of our port in 25 days time, the completion of the repairs on the remaining vessels and their provision of additional vessels to carry away the soldiers. The 7 captured vessels can only carry 2/3's of the prisoners. We are also demanding 5000 gold Florins as reparations. I wondered how we would get this message to them, since Florence is at least a week's sail with favorable winds and no pirates.

Karyakos answered that before I could ask the question. "We expect one of their naval ships off our shores in the next day or two."

Prince Tertius spoke next. "I have one more matter to bring before you. Parga's Princes have recently exercised their historical right and granted asylum and protection to 111 boys, brought to our shores by the invaders. You will remember my grandfather, Iason the 5th, when the Crown Prince, established a boy's order to perform public services through out the land. We princes of today propose to create a modern band of Argonauts. Since they come to us by sea the name it is fitting. The Argonauts will be semi military in organization. They will be stationed at the Royal estates, spending 1/4 of the year at each. Being divided into four groups, each group will rotate at each season change." That announcement answered many questions we had.

Later Iason and I had a meeting with Tertius and Karyakos. I was surprised, we were brought to a small room with a table and several scribes and two scholars. The scholars laid out a proposed set of rules for the organization; its purpose, membership, rules for admission and so on. The princes all, form a governing council. The Crown Prince and Consort are the official head or patron but since we must attain the age of 16 to use the seal of office, the King's younger brother will act for the Prince's Committee of a whole until that time. They had lots of other legal stuff too but that is the heart of it. We decided to use the symbol of the Argo as our symbol and the colors of the Crown Prince as our colors. We appointed a number of mentors and officials, mostly retired military commanders and so on, to oversee everything.

One of the scholars gave us a copy of King Iason the 5th marching song. One he composed for his band of boys, his rules of conduct and so on, which will get us started. It was also decided to keep the whole group here at the castle until the Festival of Light, at the winter solstice is finished. Karyakos asked the scholars to prepare a proclamation for the King to sign.

I was just a bit concerned that we had promised any boy who did not wish to remain here to be allowed to leave. The scholar pointed out that membership in the Argonauts is voluntary and could be resigned at 18, once committed at 12 they were in it for the next 6 years. He suggested we amend that rule to allow members to transfer to the military at 16 and to apprentice in some specific trade at 14. We decided that if a boy wished to leave and had some place to go, we would not stop him and should give assistance.

Tertius asked if we agreed and if he should sign on our behalf. The scribes were busy writing so we had a little time. Father just sat quietly. We looked at each other but neither of us spoke. This was suddenly the reality of the massive responsibility we or I had taken on.

“Why do you hesitate now Arden, you showed no reluctance in besieging the King to award their protection to the princes of this kingdom?”

Iason and I looked at the table, we could not look him in the eye. “Talk between yourselves nephews, there is no shame in not knowing what the other thinks.” We both wanted to do it. We were both concerned that some mistake was possible and we were taking responsibility for 109 boys. Iason thought a moment, “they will not let us make a serious error and minor ones can be corrected.” We looked up and said as one, yes we agree, sign the document.

On reflection I do not know why we hesitated or why we were concerned in the least. They too are princes as are our little brothers. The King is automatically a member of our committee and Karyakos has all the power needed to make the proclamation himself. This must be another of their educational experiences and given the smiles on everyone’s face, scribes and scholars included, I guess we did well. I am sure of it as I overheard Tertius telling Karyakos, “I think my nephews have better mentors than my brothers had.”

“I can not judge that but me thinks better students perhaps,” was his reply and they both patted each other’s backs and laughed kissing more passionately than I would have thought. That of course got the attention of my boyhood. It also got me thinking about Iason’s and my relationship to our younger brothers.

We joined our new tribe, the Argonauts, in what is usually the soldiers dining room. It was quite a group too. Not only 109 boys but all 35 palace boys and some former palace boys as well. I was impressed. Everyone had been bathed and was reasonably dressed. Adonis and Drakon seemed to have everything under control. No sooner had we taken our seats, Damao flung open the great door and announced Princess Elpis. He was about to announce the three young princes but they did that for him, shouting: “Arden, Iason, brother,” as they raced past the Princess and bounded the length of the room to us. This received much laughter. Our mother was being escorted by Heron and Volos. I noticed she stopped to talk with several of the new boys, especially ones that had bandages.

Before she sat down she raised her hands, a signal for quiet. “I am not here as Princess but as the mother of my sons. Every boy needs a mother, even those over the age of 12.” She looked at us when she said that. “My husband and brothers-in-law will say you are now part of this family. A family is headed by a mother and a father not a King and Princess. I welcome you to your new family. No mother could be more proud of her sons than I am tonight, even the ones that don’t quite always behave. All of my male children are princes in my eyes.”

The room went wild, not that this many boys in one place is ever quite. It took just a few seconds for the translations but that was all. I knew our fathers had arrived when the eight year olds took off on a dead run. When the two most important men in the kingdom became visible a hush fell. It did not last as Karyakos carried the twins, one in each arm, clinging to his neck and kissing his cheeks and Uncle Iason, prince Nikias proudly telling everyone “this is my daddy, he is your daddy too.”

Uncle Iason rose and spoke a few words of welcome, in fact he repeated Karyakos, pointing out that is one of the privileges of his office. While he was speaking one of the pages came running into the hall and waited behind him with a large scroll in his hand.

The page handed the scroll to the king, who thanked him and pointed to us, indicating he should sit next to the princes. He then started the strangest set of motions. He bent down and looked under the table, he looked behind him, he pulled my tunic up, even looking briefly under his own kilt. Princess Elpis said in a loud voice, "Husband what is it that you are looking for?"

"I seek my trappings of office so I can read this important proclamation, good wife."

She got that motherly expression of mild exasperation on her face and said, "Husband you have left them at the door, as was our agreement when we married. No business of the state during our family time together."

"Ah yes, I did that promise make and true to my word I shall be." He held up the scroll. "This wife is family business and business of state." He looked more and now the boys including us were beginning to laugh and chuckle at this was comic theater. Uncle Iason threw up his hands and handed the scroll to the page. "You must read this as I am only a father and nothing more in this room." I did not know if this was completely planned or not but the page jumped up and unfurled the scroll.

"By Proclamation of the most Royal, King Iason the 7th." He pointed to the king. "Let it be known that from this day forth a new order of brotherhood and service has been created. That new order shall be known as The Crown Prince Iason's Argonauts. Membership in this order is open to all male wards of the crown age 10 and older." He folded the paper back to his chest so I knew this had been planned. The page looked at the audience. "Membership comes with very handsome uniforms that your mother has designed and are guaranteed to have all unmarried girls in the kingdom most desirous of your attention."

Iason interjected, "the pay is good too." Every one roared with laughter.

He held up the scroll again and continued to the end. Uncle Iason took the scroll back, kissed him on the top of the head and signaled for the food to be brought in. About half of the Palace Boys jumped to action. Karyakos and Uncle Iason went to the table where the 10 and 11 year olds were seated, to assist in serving them. My mentor has told me many times we teach the way we were taught and that the best way to teach is through example. Iason and I did not need to be told to assist our little brothers and mother. The example was probably worth dozens of speeches. Brothers help brothers, we are all brothers. Even more powerful, is the use of the Crown Prince not the King, as the leader-benefactor-protector of these boys and young men.

Our sleeping quarters, as are the quarters throughout the castle, are filled to overflowing as we now had six guests plus Ikaros, Dysme and four guardians. For the first few nights Iason and I slept together, as is our custom, but we slept alone. By the fourth our bed managed to attract a number of bodies for fun and pleasure.

While I am writing this text new boys are being instructed in the fundamentals of reading and writing in Greek. I must end this now, the amount and variety of naked boys is too great for me to concentrate.

1312, the 10th month, 21th day:

A signal from the headland observers came to indicate a Florentine ship was at the harbor entrance. One of the Knights went out in a fishing boat to meet with them. He refused entry but provided an inventory of captured ships, numbers of men and names of the surviving officers, proposed release date and the demand for 5000 gold florins. He also proposed that our merchant fleet could be chartered by the Florentines to transport the third of their army if they wished. The nearest Peruzzi bank is about two days sail, that is a week round trip and since the ship had other ports of call the envoy should come ashore and could be picked up on the 15 day of the 11 month. He came and is now staying in the Bishop's residence.

1312 the 10th month, 25th day:

The Florentine envoy came to address our Council. He is a rather interesting person but I think needs to learn much about us. I think Iason and I need to learn much about commerce and the world outside too. Now that he has seen first hand that we are not barbarians or demonic and has met with all the captured soldiers and sailors his tone seemed moderated. One of the older pages told us that is just diplomatic talk and has nothing to do with what the Florentines think. I puzzled this over in my mind. Iason and I talked about it as well. We noticed he was very careful to avoid some topics but most willing to go on at great length about others.

He was instant that Florence would not pay a ransom for the return of its captured ships or army. Karyakos pointed out that was his decision to make but reparations are not a ransom. Then added the Venation's or Dubrovnik's would probably purchase them from us since we had no need for them and our merchants could bring all the goods we required from either port. "What of the men," he asked?

"Most are not needed here as we have no need for mercenaries or any other employment, they will be free to go where ever the ships go. Perhaps the Venation's would employ them or perhaps, Genoa."

"Prince Karyakos, I thought slavery was against your laws? Would you sell these men into it?"

"Of course not, Envoy, I said we could sell the ships. We are not Turks or Sicilians we do not employ slaves or sell men into that status. It is not like any of them will be without coin, since they are being well paid by Florentine standard for their work while here. You have talked to them, are any but some of the officers dissatisfied?"

"I met none, that is true, never the less my Duke feels you should pay Florence 10 000 gold florins."

“Is that all he feels the privilege of defeating Florence is worth,” King Iason shot back?

“It is settled then Envoy,” Karyakos said, in a thoughtful tone of voice, “Florence will see no future trade with us, your merchants are no longer welcome here, goods made in Florence, carried on Florentine ships, distributed by Florentine merchants are henceforth ban from our shores. Florentine citizens are no longer welcome here and those few that live here now will accompany you when you leave.”

The envoy was prepared to have his number rejected but not prepared to have the matter closed off so abruptly. I could see he wanted to bargain with Karyakos but thought better of it and took his leave.

“He will be back and we will have our money too, I will not bargain as a woman in the market wanting a persimmon.” said Karyakos. “The last thing they desire is for Venice to acquire seven newly refitted naval ships with crews and marines. The trade with us is so small as to not matter. They don’t need it, but to deny it, no matter how small to Venice or Dubrovnik, is also on his agenda. Let him sit for 5 more days. When he starts to bargain again I will simply tell him, accept our terms or our price will rise at 1000 gold florins a day until he departs; at that moment the seven ships are on the auction block.”

One of the scholars spoke next. “We have given this much thought. As we see the situation, the Florentines fear that by paying any reparations they will lose face and that others will make like demands. The Turks are fond of holding on to ships and people for ransom or for demanding tribute from smaller states that are in some difficulty or another. In this instance your analysis is probably correct, we also think you should demand a Peace and Friendship Treaty with the Florentines which recognizes our independence. The treaty can be traded off for your proposed increases. They will not like it but they will do it. Seven captured Florentine ships sailing into Venice harbor and being auctioned off is a far greater embarrassment than paying reparations. In Florence and other places, image is as important as substance, perhaps even more.

A goodly amount of any reparations would be spent in Florence in any event. In fact, we do not even need to receive the florins here. They can just deliver proof of deposit. This should not be lost on the envoy when explained to him.”

“Is that wise? They could simply seize our assets at some future date, since they are such a capricious state anyway,” One of the knights asked.

“Yes they are and yes they can, only if substantial assets are available to be seized. Again this causes them an image problem. If they wish to be taken seriously as a trading nation, they must keep their word or at least appear to.” Karyakos went on to say. “We now have about 500 florins on deposit in Florence. We could easily move 4500 of the new florins to other banks, in other places, spreading it over a number of states. We then recall amounts equal to the new deposits so that all 5000 arrives here, just spread over time. It is much safer to send a number of smaller amounts than one large one. If everyone thinks this sum is on deposit in Florence they will be less willing to try their luck at plundering our local treasury or any ships they may believe carrying it to us.” Father continued.

“We have not seen the last of these kind of difficulties. Venice and Florence are rivals. Now that Florence has failed, Venice will try. They should have a clear example of what not to do. So they will attempt other subtler means. If we can arrange treaties with Florence and Dubrovnik another power on the rise, Venice will feel obliged to do the same.

At this time our navy is the second most powerful in the Adriatic and Ionian. In a few weeks everyone will know that. We must reach out to every state along the coast to establish friendly relations. We are small and poor and mostly self sufficient. We have little to offer anyone else but we need little from them. We must send a delegation with small gifts of wine for example to the heads of very state along the Adriatic and Ionian thanking them for respecting our recent port and border closure.

The Byzantines are weakening and the Ottomans are growing stronger. They will try us on for size one day but that day is probably well in the future. Should the Byzantines ever fall to those power hungry religious fanatics, we should prepare for invasion. They are as much religious fanatics as the Christians if not more so.” (Translators note: it was largely the result of the Venetian supported 4th Crusade in 1260 that was one of the major causes of Byzantine decline.)

King Iason spoke next. “Scholar we do have something of great value here that can be offered to others. We have you and the others along with fine philosophers, Ingegneres, artists, sculptures and musicians. Why not invite them to send students and scholars to our fine new Akadimeia. What better use of the reparation money than the building of just such an institution. That is how we will let the Florentines save some face. This is not a reparation but a donation to the building of the King Iason the 7th Free Universitaus and Akadimeia.

As a gift I think some of our fine wines is good and perhaps one or two books from Archimedes’ recently devised printing process.”

(Translators notes: Movable type printing, which allowed individual characters to be arranged to form words, is a separate invention from the printing press. Movable type printing was invented in China by Bi Sheng between 1041 and 1048 and in Germany by Gutenberg in the 1440s. Gutenberg perhaps did not know about Bi Sheng’s work but many silk and spice traders did. We do know that Marco Polo had already written two books, one in old French and one in Italian (lost) translated into Latin by this time. The Polo family was based in Venice. Polo’s work would have been know to Parga and much of the same information known to the Byzantines.

“Having previously worked as a professional ballerina, Gutenberg also made skillful use of the knowledge of metals he had learned as a craftsman.” That is a quote from Wikipedia. I fail to see how being a ballerina and a metals craftsman are connected, in such a way as to assist in inventing “type metal”. He was the first to make his type from an alloy of lead, tin, and antimony, which was critical for producing durable type that produced high-quality printed books, and proved to be more suitable for printing than the clay, wooden or bronze types used in East Asia. To create these lead types, Gutenberg used what some considered his most ingenious invention, a special matrix wherewith the molding of new movable types at short notice and with unprecedented precision.

Gutenberg is also credited with the introduction of an oil-based ink which was more durable than the previously used water-based inks. As printing material he used both vellum and paper, the latter having been introduced in Europe somewhat earlier from China by way of the Arabs, who had a paper mill in operation in Baghdad as early as 794.

Arden does not tell us anything about how this type of printing was done, the kind of ink used or where the paper came from or what the press or device might have looked like. We must assume the type was bronze and moveable or resettable, the paper imported and the ink water based. It is possible the paper was local but again we have no way to know. The ink could have been carbon black mixed with an emulsion of spirits and olive oil. This process may have used papyrus as well as paper or vellum.)

Each night we, the Argonauts and Palace Boys, have our evening meal together. I am very much pleased at how quickly the Argonauts are learning to speak Greek. The Palace Girls and women have been working very hard to produce clothing for them. Every boy now has two working tunics and one working kilt. The tunics are gray with a white letter Alpha sown over the left breast. The kilts are gray and quite short. I am told they will all have dress uniforms which are the royal colors with embroidered emblems, the Argo plus the prince's crown which is a gold loral wreath.

The solders have begun building themselves a new dining hall which will be even bigger than this one. The Argonauts can retain this hall for ourselves and we have been promised a new dormitory to sleep 50 in the new year. I am also told most of the older Palace Girls are impressed by the older Argonauts who seemed anything but shy to display their assets during the fittings. In a few days time we will divide the Argonauts into four houses. Alexandros the younger has joined our organizational committee: now made up of Iason, myself, Alexandros the younger, Alexandros the 2nd Steward and Drakon.

Each House is to have an advisor and two Knights as Patrons. The Patrons will administer the funding that is being provided by us Princes through the King's treasury. Each House is named for a master point on the compass: North, South, East and West. The Patrons and advisors are appointed by the Governing Council, the Princes. Once the houses are constituted the nu, sigma, epsilon or delta will be added to both uniforms.

We will be organized like Alexandros' army, units of 5 called Pempas or small squads, 2 small squads into units of 10, called Dathabam (squads) lead by a Dathapatish or squad leader, the units of five are called a demisquad leader. Each Dathabam has 8 boys, and two demisquad leaders or demi Dathapatishes and an eleventh man the Dathapatish. Each 5 elects his leader. The Dathapatish is appointed by the advisor and patrons. Each house is governed by an Eparchos, officer who is elected by the 5 Dathapatishes. The 15 additional boys to make up the needed 124 would be provided by the Patron Knights, one each and the Palace Boys who want a change or additional adventure.

(Translators note, putting this in modern English terms: I believe the 124 boys would equate to a modern company ±100 men. Their leader would be a Captain and each group of 10, lead by a Lieutenant and each group of 5 by a second Lieutenant. The Greek words Arden uses do not directly translate to this and since he was using Alexander's model, not the same as later Greek terms either. So far in his narrative he has not used many navy terms for officers except

Antiploiakhos or Commander. When he did use Commander it seems more as the one in command or in charge not the proper noun. He has not used Navarkhos (Admiral), or Ploiakhos (Captain) so far. I will translate them as indicated if he should use them.)

Each house would be a few boys short until the 10 and 11 year olds reached 12 and could leave their assigned palace families. (That must mean their assigned or surrogate mothers. While Arden does not elaborate on this, it appears that the under 12 boys were placed in Houses but lived in the palace until 12. They probably did things with what ever House was in palace rotation.)

Boys 16 and older will receive pay equal to half of a soldier's in the regular army. Boys 14 to 16 one quarter pay and boys 12 to 14 one eighth. Men 18 or older received pay equal to a soldier of equal rank. At 18 they could, stay on or move to the regular army or resign if they chose. At 16 boys could apply to groups like the King's Guards. If a boy showed some special talent he would be reassignment as an apprentice to a master at almost any time. If a boy proved to be both highly intelligent and motivated to academics he would be reassigned to study with the scholars. Members could also switch positions with Palace Boys.

Each night Iason and I join different groups of boys so we can get to know them better and learn about them. Having learned more of our language they are beginning to be more open in expressing their feelings, fears, joys and desires. I was more than shocked to learn that most had never had an opportunity to do so before. Almost none had homes or families to return to and the few that thought they still did were not keen on it. So be it then, I thought, we shall not force them.

Once these boys began to realize that not only were they among friends but brothers and that sex was the glue that would hold the brotherhood together, Iason and I were besieged with offers. We were most taken with the skills of every one. We reasoned that having been trained or beaten into obedience by their owners/masters, they knew little else. We discovered a suppleness of spirit that was most encouraging. What had been duty or training became willing desire and sharing for almost all. A few showed little interest in sex with other boys or men. We would loose their cocks to the ladies we were sure of that. A few had been so harshly treated that it would take more time for them to be completely comfortable with another male sharing more than lust with him. A goodly number had been trained as pleasure boys from a very young age. These boys knew little else in their lives and thought that the only reason they existed was a repository for some man's ejaculate. It would take some time to change that.

Each day we hold meetings after our meal. At these times we play games, sing songs, and develop our own internal rules of conduct. As example: no boy will masturbate unless isolated from companions, help is as close as the nearest boy. We play games where everyone would get naked, random pairs made up, then kissing and fondling would happen, then some athletic feat performed, followed by more sex play and so on.

We quickly applied the name Gymnasium to our dining hall, baths and when built, dormitory. When in these places the rule is naked. Now that the houses are formed up they can start working together as a team to provide some entertainment and friendly competition between.

