

7 Preparations for Conflict

1312, the 9th month, 11th day:

More and more solders are arriving and our castle is filling up with people. Father postulates that if their is to be an invasion it will take place during the peak of the harvest season. This summer the conditions for growing were better than normal and I could see the fields, orchards and vineyards were nearing ready at the new moon not at the harvest moon. That is almost two weeks early. Those at higher elevations were not quite as ready but we do not have that many farms in those areas. The higher elevations are mostly forests and pastures for sheep and goats.

Uncle Iason divided the solders into two groups one group are the professionals that do not have farms. They will be left to populate the defensive positions along the coast. The others are to return to their homes, starting at the coast and moving inland to the east. They were instructed to work as teams, small groups of 6 or 8 assisting each other and their neighbors. As soon as the harvest is completed at one place they should move east assisting the next and assemble at our western frontier in 30 days time. This will relieve that part of the army now guarding the pass and they should return to the castle to strengthen this position.

1312, the 9th month, 15th day:

The harbor is filled with ships, all at anchor. These are merchant vessels, 35 in all. I was told this is the entire fleet of our trading or non military navy. As the ships are emptied they are moved off to dry docks for repairs or anchored off to the south side of the town for the next 90 days. Wooden ships, I am told, need annual cleaning and scraping to prevent damage from worms and barnacles. Some of the traders visited the King yesterday. Iason, myself and the other pages were standing at the ready. We had few messages to carry so we were able to observe all the proceedings. The merchants were concerned that they would lose markets and money. Uncle Iason was understanding, he assured them the threat was real and that the only way to protect their ships and cargo from pirates or hostile duchies was keeping them in port.

Most of our exports are food stuffs like wine, olives, olive oil, figs, dried lentils, chick peas and the like, they would not have much cargo until then anyway. Any cargo they may now have ready and in storage would be purchased by the state at today's prices. They need not deliver it to the castle until a later date. I could see they were less happy that the King specified today's prices and not some higher value.

My limited experience indicates this year's harvest will be larger than usual and if anything we should have surpluses. Neither of us have any idea how the economy of the state or castle works. I know the King collects taxes, that is one of my former father's jobs. I also know everyone complains about them. Abrith, always told me the taxes were not that great and if a farmer or other citizen did not have surplus to pay a few weeks labor in the state's service was sufficient.

We have been spending most of our nights with our mentors and chamber boys. Mostly we bring Ikaros with us to keep Dysme occupied while we share ourselves with our mentors. Ikaros and Dysme are also kept reasonably busy by our guardians. Uncle Iason insists that we spend some regular time with Ikaros and that all four of us boys join him and Father in their huge bed too. Iason and I just love to be in the middle. Taking a stuff cock in the ass while pushing yours into the pert ass of a lover is just the best ever.

1312, the 9th month, 18th day:

Half of our navy came into port today. I was quite surprised at the size of the ships. They are built along the lines of the famous longships of Portugal and classical Trimens. The Portuguese, our scholars told me adapted the design of the Viking Long Boats but with Mediterranean sail configurations. Viking design ships with square sails visit our port once in a while but not since I've lived here. Our ships have just returned from Venice where they were outfitted with a new weapon call a cannon. Archimedes told me one day these cannon would replace his machines of war. These cannon use something called gun powder which we are fortunate enough to have all of the components for locally.

I wondered how we could be sure the port is sealed if our fishing boats leave from here and the other fishing villages along the coast each day. Iason told me the other navy ships stand between the small fishing craft and any other boats or ships that happen along. The large fishing ships from other states, are not permitted to enter the harbor but can sell their catches to the navy which will bring it into town for them. He told me the word going around the castle is they won't do that, so the fish supply will be quite limited for the next 90 days. Since our population is small and since we have no state religion, like other places, people are not forced to substitute meat for fish on Friday. Our demand is not as great as in states where Christianity is forced on people. We do not eat meat or fish every day anyway. Mostly we have meat two and at best three times a week.

Now that the port and one land route to other places are closed preparations for war are and can be quite open. In the afternoon we reported to the council chamber as pages.

The local Bishop and leaders of the other religions had been summoned. They were less than happy to be called for a joint meeting with the King. Not that everyone one of them would not gladly meet the King, just that none of them want to meet with each other. I was mystified by this, that seemed to be their attitude. The Christians wanted nothing to do with the Moslems and held the Jews and Pagans in total disdain. The Moslems, who are very small in number, thought everyone else was beneath their contempt and the Pagans were suspicious of the others. They were civil to each other. The Jews were not at all fond of any of them but since they were not looking for converts, only to prevent pressure on themselves to convert, quite prepared to be civil with everyone. Before everything got started several of the scholars gave us boys this background. We all hoped that no messages were needed sent during the interesting parts.

While under the influence of our mothers all of us boys were forced to attend one religion or another. Since leaving them and entering Royal Service we are all free to worship as we wish and if we wish. No Jews or Moslems are visibly part of our service, since Uncle Iason refuses to make any accommodation for special dress, set times of prayer, fixed days of rest or restriction on food. In his service we all, well not Iason and I but everyone else, gets two days a week rest but not all the same days. For us Father, Uncle Iason, Iason and myself our guardians and a few others, we take rest when we can find it; since government goes on all day, everyday. This is so for the army and navy too. It was like that on the farm. Animals needed to be tended and crops grew on the schedule of the sun, moon and seasons not on man's. Uncle Iason refused to force shops and markets to close on specific days as demanded by the different religions.

Me thinks that if they could all agree on what that day or days should be Father and Uncle

lason might go along but since they can't or won't...

After giving everyone a warm welcome and thanking them for attending this hastily called little meeting, the King got to the business at hand. Over the past few months he had received several petitions from all of them requesting more or less the same things. "As to making only one of your faiths the official religious institutions of this state, the answer is the same. No."

"The citizens of this state are free people. One of those freedoms is their right to believe in what ever god or gods they so choose. For some of you, our practice of preventing any citizen below the age of 16 years from becoming a full member of your organizations stands. In the eyes of the state and our civil laws, birth do not confer automatic and irrevocable membership. This does not mean that your various rights of passage or marriages and so on are not recognized. It is that, except for girls over the age of 14, who can be bound in marriage against their will, citizens will and do have a choice which they may exercise as they deem fit at 16. Children below the age of 14 cannot be wed. Boys as you know cannot be forced into marriage below the age of 16. No man may be married to more than one man or woman at a time, except the King. Marriages between men and women or men and men, that you perform, are recognized by the state and may be dissolved by the state. The history of our neighboring states has shown that when one religious group is made official other groups are then persecuted, often violently. Islam and Christianity are the two most prone to this but not exclusively so. In this state, as you all know, almost everyone is part of the same clan."

The discussions went on for some time. The King did not give ground on any issue. He refused state support for any religious shrines or temples or churches. He did reaffirm tax or rent exemptions for them. Uncle lason reaffirmed the basic education of every child, in schools supported by the state. A policy he and Father had created a few months ago. This would begin in the spring. All children living in or around villages or towns or on estates would attend school for half a day 5 days a week. Any religious education must be confined to the home or place of worship and must not interfere with the state schools. Girls were to receive the same basic education as boys until age 12.

It got real interesting when Uncle lason got the parties talking or arguing with each other. I think he had prepared for this and maybe even caused it on purpose. I am not well read enough yet to fully understand all that was said. Leave it that the King refused to accept on behalf on the people any of them. First, because the origins of each is not, as commonly claimed, but much older. Second the Christians took most of their theology from the Jews, who took it from the Egyptians and Syrians. Islam from the Jews. The so called Pagans trace their roots before that and often to the same sources. He did not believe any of their self styled profits received any instructions directly from any god. An understanding of history proved this. Three, "...none of you can claim to be the true faith of anyone but your own believers." Four, all of you claim to be guides, yet all of you set strict rules so you are not Guides but Rules. The Christians, Moslems, Pagans and Jews are all hypocrites. None of them live the theology, only those parts that are convenient or enhance their power. He went on to chastise the Bishop for poor and highly selective translations of their sacred texts which were either written in Greek, Aramaic or Hebrew. He was strongly supported by the group of scholars in attendance.

The Bishop protested, he and his people are pious. "You and your minions may be so, but I have my doubts. Yes, so pious that the Bishops of Florence and other Duchies are preparing war on us because we refuse to: Accept your faith as our state religion and give you Bishop, more power and wealth in this kingdom than the citizens or me. They are displeased that we refuse to pay them and Avignon tribute. They are upset that we allow the Pagans, Jews and Moslems to practice their faith openly and freely, as we do you. They are jealous that we do

not allow slavery and we have no surf class here, that all citizens are free. They wish to institute their misguided ideas about class and the distribution of wealth and power. They assume that our land can support two or three times the population it now does and has historically, more workers to make them and by implication you, rich and powerful. That titles, power and office are not strictly inherited but earned. Even my office must be earned Bishop. The corruption and hypocrisy of Avignon and or Rome are legendary and disgusting as is the mess created by the Byzantines, fostered by the 4th crusade, supported by pious states like Venice. Lastly they believe stories, truly myths, that this kingdom holds great treasurers of gold and other things they wish to plunder. Some of those myths have been fostered by your minions, sir.”

They all protested. “How did Islam come to our land scholar?” The scholar reminded them of the Islamic pirates that often attacked us in the past. “None successfully”, he added. They used the excuse of spreading the faith by the sword. Their real goal was to plunder our perceived wealth and establish their power by forcing a foreign culture upon us, collect some form of tribute, take away slaves to bolster they own economy. Why I ask do any of your faithful even live in Parga?

Why is it the state has had to intervene several time in the past few years to prevent you from punishing, by death, those that happen to be born into your faith, and when adults, choose to reject it. What gives you or anyone else leave do such a thing. That seems to me little more than slavery with another name.” They did not answer.

“The Jews came here as traders and not to spread the faith, they do not seem to proselytize. Correct me if I am wrong, that is mostly based on the belief that only those of a specific blood line have been ‘chosen’. They came thinking this was a rich place that would allow them to live in a segregated society. It is neither. Why then are they still here Rabbi? Because Parga is a fair and just place to raise a family.

The Christians came with the Romans who wanted power and plunder. They were not successful in taking over the kingdom, forcing their laws on us or extracting any tribute. They were successful at settling a number of families here and in introducing their language, coin and bringing your faith Bishop. When they realized this was not a wealthy place and where their economy, built on slavery and control of land, would not work they left, assisted by Iason the First. The Pagans mostly were always here, having come with our ancestors who founded this state.

Keep in mind, that except for the Pagans, your dogmas are designed to support the idea of the divinity of the king or his absolute temporal authority. A concept that is not understood in our traditions. The old Greek City states, that we are descended from, were fond of overthrowing any king that became a tyrant. I am like you Bishop, Imam, Rabbi, I serve my people as a leader. Like you, if I offend them I too will be replaced and I might add, correctly so for all of us.

We are not a rich land but no one here goes without adequate food, we are all sheltered and all educated. We all work very hard and have a strong and rich culture, of which you are all a part. As great or less a part as any person chooses to be. Does this mean that everyone is delighted with their lot in life? No, it does not. Some are unhappy, some feel mistreated by any number of things or other people. Please take notice that they are free to express these concerns and discontents without fear of reprisal. This is a freedom that can not exist in a state with an official religion or a tyrannical leadership. In Avignon, Rome or anywhere else people are free to express themselves as long as it does not offend your dogmas or insult, real or perceived, anyone in authority or power.” (TN: The remainder of his passage and apparently

the next several are missing or unreadable.)