

Sorry for the slowness in posting. I am a consultant and once in a while need to do paid work, these past two weeks were just that. I trust you readers are enjoying this.

9 Conflict Preparations

1312, the 10th month, 3rd day:

More reports about small probe raids along the coast. All were repelled by our navy, none even reaching land. Two spies were captured trying to make their way through the eastern pass area. A small boat was captured inside the outer harbor and is being brought to shore for inspection. Unfortunately the men in it refused to surrender and could not be taken without some injuries on both sides. I thought this was quite strange. I resolved to ask Drakon if he could learn what such motivation was all about.

One important part of our education is music. It was clear that Alexandros suffered from a lack of it. He did not play but he did love to sing. He just didn't know very many songs. Our music tutors were busy helping him. I had learned much from my mother but also much since adopted.

Greek written history extends far back into Ancient times, it tells us music has always been a major part of our theater. From ancient times, mixed-gender choruses performed for entertainment, celebration and spiritual reasons. Instruments included the double-reed aulos and the plucked string instrument, the lyre, especially the special kind called a kithara and drums of different size and therefore tone and of course flutes and syrinx.

Music is an important part of our education, and boys are taught music starting at age six. The ancient musical literacy created a flowering of development; Greek music theory included the Greek musical modes, eventually became the basis for the Christians' religious music. He told us influences from the Western Roman Empire, and the Eastern Roman (TN: Byzantine) Empire greatly influenced our music as well.

Music today is extremely diverse, encompassing multiple cultural traditions within a wide geographic area, the old Roman Empire. All of the cultural groups incorporated into it already had musical traditions. Ours and he assumed others have survived but not necessarily uninfluenced. In other places, very little non-Christian music is preserved, due to suppression by the Church. Here we make strong efforts of preserve our past, even if others co-opted our singing and poetry for their own reasons.

Our tutor has developed a method of notation based on what he calls octaves or groups of 8 notes all in a pitch range. Given rhythm notations and the words he claims our heritage will be preserved. From the time of Pythagorus the mathematical basis of music has been know and our music has been recorded. Much of those recordings seem to have been lost or never preserved. That has now changed.

From other parts of the world we have a new instrument called a clavichord. Instruments such as, trumpets drums and other percussion, tone making devices were always part of our music, including bag pipes.

The only repertory of music outside of our state, which he knew to have survived from before 800 to the present day, is the plainsong liturgical music of the Roman and Eastern Churches. During the 9th century several important developments took place. First, there was a major effort by the Roman Church to unify the many chant and song traditions, and suppress many of them in favor of the Gregorian liturgy. Second, the earliest polyphonic music was sung, a form of parallel singing known as organum. He told us the Christians do not have musical instruments in their services like many of the Pagans do or like our theater. This parallel singing an octave, forth or fifth apart between men and boys or men and women is quite natural and practiced here for probably a thousand years. We also sing and play in grand polyphonic style sometimes with several counterpoints at once. He told us several styles of Organum have been developed by the Christians but they are little more than variations in style and notation, often little more than adding one counter point level, that we have practiced for thousands of years.

He told us that, should the Bishops have their way, our traditions would be eradicated here as it has been in other places, where they have established official status. He likens the suppression of music, art and theater by the Christians or the Romans before them as to the loss of the Library of Alexandria. What they can not or do not wish to appropriate to their own ends, they seek to destroy. One of his famous rhetorical questions is: "who then are the barbarians?"

Just before our evening meal Ikaros brought Alexandros a fine new kilt and tunic. He had fashioned them himself. Iason, Kleitos and I assisted in supporting Alexandros so Ikaros could dress him. That is the first time I got a good look at Alexandros' buttocks and they were truly a pleasure to gaze upon. I must say it stirred my penis to maximum readiness. He is still very thin but his bones are long and shoulders wide. His manhood looks all the larger as it extends out from the narrow, flat body. Once his kilt was wrapped around it was quite obvious this man had no need

of a brace. (TN: I take it he is talking about a cod pice. A term not used until the 15th century.) His kilt was still the length of a boy, mid way between the crotch and the knee. A man's length is just above the knee.

Six soldiers appeared at the door with a sedan chair device. The seat was slung between the poles. It also had a leather strap to keep his leg up. Four of these men were the biggest I think I had ever seen. They were the ones carrying the sling seat. The other two were normal sized and one walked ahead, the other behind. Once they departed Ikaros presented Kleitos with his new tunic. It was in the royal colors and like those of our guardians, it had the crest of the Crown Prince on both front and back. In an instant he was on his knees kissing our hands. This time I knew what to do but let Iason take the lead anyway. The six of us welcomed him into our new family with hugs, fondling and kisses.

When we entered the main hall almost everyone was already seated and all the adults were drinking wine. I was a bit surprised to see Alexandros the younger sitting between Thanatos and Ouranos and two new Ganymedes serving Karyakos and the King. I was just a shade jealous until Iason winked at me. These two were young Palace Boys and we knew them from our classes. Iason whispered to me that our mentors personally trained all the Palace Boys and these two would be sleeping with them as Kleitos was sleeping with us for the fortnight. We will have our share and opportunity, I realized.

The talk at the dinner table was mostly about the impending war. Several of the knights were expressing their anger at having to devote so much of our state's wealth to defense. We are not a rich place, they said, by even threatening war the Bishop of Florence and his cohorts seek to weaken us. Perhaps that is his plan.

So far intimidation, assassination and fomenting discontent has not worked. Instead of growing weaker we grow stronger in both material assets and resolve. It is they that employ mercenaries at great cost to their treasuries not us. They must either back down or attack. No one thought backing down was a strong possibility. When faith overpowers reason many brave and worthy men will die on both sides.

The true news of the night was Alexandros the Younger's adoption by Ouranos and Thanatos. Everyone cheered and congratulated all three of them. That also means Alexnadros will remain close to us for some time to come.

1312, the 10th month, 10th day:

Drakon sought us out during our mid day meal to explain why the two "frog men", the two captured in the harbor, did not wish to be captured. He was unable to explain why they were called this but told me Archimedes had labeled them such and to ask him.

The two men spoke only a dialect of French so none could communicate with them until translators could be found. The physicians had treated their wounds and they were made as comfortable as one ever gets in prison. They told the translator that they worked for Florence but the real power there is the Bishop. They were told how dangerous this work was and if caught "we would be tortured and placed in a dungeon so terrible that we would wish to be dead". Their mission was reconnaissance. They wondered why they were being kept alive and in such clean and spacious cells. The jailer told them they were being treated the same way all prisoners are. Both of them asked for a Christian priest and one was summoned.

I was outraged that such lies are being spread about us. Our tutor told us that torture and death are common among many states in the world, we are an exception. It was Iason the second that forbid torture and flogging. Crimes committed by citizens may have short prison terms but strict atonement follows. Justice here is a three part system. Admission or acceptance of the transgression, that is taking ownership, repentance or seeking forgiveness and atonement or restoration. If, for example, the guilty is not repetitive and refuses atonement the state must act. Banishment is preferred but death is always a possibility. Crimes against the state, such as assassination are punishable by death and those banished are sometimes put to death if they return. Royal Pardons are also a possibility.

One of the eastern border commanders with the title General, a knight named Zokitos, accompanied by a junior officer, who was obviously known to some of the pages, came before the council after having made a long and continuous ride. By stationing fresh mounts every Stathmos and riding at a good speed, he was able to make the 5 Stadion journey in one day. Being mostly down hill makes this possible; the return would be longer as the mounts would begin to fade before the next station would be reached.

(TN: Greeks measured distance and speed by the STATHMOS or the equivalent of one day's journey. This was, on average, an army's march of 15 to 17 miles per day. Great distances were measured by the Persian PARASANG, divided into 30 stadia (singular stadion).

The stadion was composed of 600 feet. The parasang was 3.45 miles; the stadion represented 600 Greek feet or

606.75 English feet (1/8 of the Roman mile). Your translator has determined Arden was using a Stathmos of about 20 US miles.)

He reported that: a delegation claiming to be from the Bishop of Avignon had approached the frontier crossing a little more than one day and a half ago. "The guards refused him and his people permission to cross. The envoy demanded access to our state and to his Bishop. Again the guards refused to let him pass. He proceeded to threaten that their eternal souls would be condemned to hell if they refused his order. They did not yield. He then commanded his military escort to force the gate open. The guards leaning on their drawn swords reminded the soldiers that once they crossed the line they would be dead men. Their captain laughed and shouted to his men that these two old men posed no threat. They begged him not to be so foolish and when he drew his sword and began to move around the pole that forms the gate, he was dropped dead by 3 long bow arrows. The two guards sheathed their swords and assisted the dead captain's men in retrieving his body.

The envoy was apoplectic for some minutes. He then demanded that the guards summon their commander. In no great hurry, one of the guards walked back to our first emplacements and made that request. By the time he returned the envoy had calmed himself down some. All the while I was watching this unfold from a hidden position among the archers. The guards did not know this and I forbid my men from making any signal of my presence. I wanted to see just how far this fool would go. It took some time for the messenger to reach me, since the messenger had to come on foot to my location. I determined to send the most junior officer on my staff, a young man most of you know. I chose Euthymios, who two years ago was a page in this court."

Euthymios rose and began speaking. "Sires, Knights, Pages I take great pleasure in reporting what I have to report." I could see from the look on his face that he was taking great personal satisfaction in his part. I saw a wide smile on Karyakos' face that indicated to me that he shared this young man's joy and probably knew of the personal reasons. Euthymios is a slightly built fellow but obviously one of great physical strength. He has smooth skin with no facial hair and a gentle soothing voice. "I rode slowly to the gate and dismounted, tying my horse to a near by post. The envoy was clearly visible to me but I could not see his face. When he looked up I knew the man in an instant. He was Father Giustina, the very Father Giustina you Sire, banished and declared persona on grata.

Giustina was momentarily speechless but gathered himself and approached the gate. 'Euthymios,' he said, 'how nice to see you again.' I wish, I could say the same, Father Giustina. 'Are you the most senior officer here,' he asked. Yes, I replied, I am the officer of rank here. His eyes began to glare at me. I knew this look and took delight in causing him such discomfort. 'Euthymios, I have just been appointed by the Bishop of Avignon to that office here and these men will not let me pass.'

That is so and they are following the orders of King Iason the 7th, as you are well aware. The borders and ports of this kingdom are sealed until the 15th day of the 11th month and it is the 8th day of the 10th month. Why do you think you should be treated any differently than anyone else seeking admittance?

'I am your new Bishop, traveling under the protection of the Bishop of Avignon.'

Well sir, you are a greater fool than I thought and the Bishop of Avignon is not much better. He carries no more influence here than any other priest and you carry even less. I was present in the court when you were banished from this kingdom and declared persona non grata. To return here is an automatic death sentence, you of all people should know that.

'You can not stop me and you must honor the safe passage I travel under. To harm me will be of great offense to the Pope.'

Your titles and authority mean nothing here sir, you of all should know that. At this point I raised my voice so all could hear. You are not worthy of the office you have been appointed to. You rape altar boys, falsely claiming that your priestly position give you that right. You raped me and forced me to have sex with you in the sanctuary of all places, against my will and that alone sir is reason enough to prevent your passing.

He looked at the ground knowing it was true. 'You must let me pass peacefully as my safe conduct documents demand.' I looked over at the blood on the ground and at the dead soldier. No one crossed this line between now and the 15th day of the 11th month and lives to talk about it. You were told that already and his blood is on your hands, priest. Let me see your letter.

He handed it over. It said, as he claimed, he was appointed as Bishop of this place and he should be accorded all respect and assistance, including safe passage from Avignon to his posting. I took the letter into the guard house and finding a quill and ink wrote on the back of it: King Iason the 7th has already declared this man persona non grata in his kingdom and this priest shall not be admitted to it for any reason. His safe passage can not be assured. This request is denied. I signed it, Junior Lieutenant Euthymios. I wrote in Latin but signed my name and rank in Greek."

Uncle Jason and Father were almost beside themselves with joy at hearing this. "I returned and handed him his letter. I asked if he carried any dispatches for the King or the present Bishop. Saying I would be happy to deliver them personally. I further told him that if he had a real death wish to step over the line and I would personally make it come true. He then replied, 'you foolish boy you have learned nothing since serving as an alter boy. I lead an army so powerful you will be crushed in an afternoon.' This he said in a very loud voice. I replied even louder. Good, bring on your army but you will not lead it. I know you to be a coward who will only follow, sending your men to certain death, as you did your captain. It was at that point he issued a threat to me saying when he is done my body would be roasted as well as my King's, like suckling pigs. I must say it took all of my strength and training to resist running him through on the spot.

He motioned to one of his priests who came forward and handed me these letters." Euthymios placed them on the table.

"You have done well, very well. Preventing this fool from becoming a martyr is as important to us as keeping him out." Uncle Jason looked around and smiled and nodded his head as a signal to all that we could set aside custom and express ourselves. Something we all did with much shouting and cheering.

"I know you two are very tired after your long ride. I can not thank you enough for the swift and accurate report. Before you go what are the weather conditions?"

"Sire, the snow has been falling every day for the past several weeks now and it moves closer to the pass. The shepherds have all moved their flocks to winter pastures."

At this they took their leave for some food and much deserved rest. Father sent a page to summon Prince Tertius' Squire. When he arrived the pages were dismissed and told to go practice our sports. We thought this odd but did as requested.

Our sports include boxing (pygme/pygmachia), wrestling (pale), pankration (regulated full-contact fighting, similar to today's mixed martial arts), running events: the diaulos, hippos, dolichos, and hoplitodromos), as well as a pentathlon, consisting of wrestling, stadion, long jump, javelin throw, discus throw, archery. I am very good at running, the greater the distance the better I like it.

We take most of our sports from fabled Olympic games. Partly fabled because some 5th century ruler banned them in attempting to make Christianity the state religion. The Olympic Games were held in honor of Zeus. Our tutors told us the Olympic games originally contained one event: the Stadion (or "stead") race. The Diaulos, or 2-stade race, was introduced in 724 BCE, during the 14th Olympic games. The Dolichos was introduced in 720 BCE. The last running event added to the Olympic program was the Hoplitodromos, or "Hoplite race," in 520 BCE. The runners would run in full or partial armor, carrying a shield and additionally equipped either with greaves or a helmet. The event is a practice in displaying military capacities to emulated speed and stamina needed for warfare. Due to the weight of the armor, it is easy for runners to drop their shields or trip over fallen competitors. We don't often run in armor, not us boys anyway, we run naked, its lots more fun.

Boxing as we do it uses soft leather covered gloves over our fingers. The purpose is skill and stamina, not hurting one another. I like wrestling too, it is so much fun to press my body against another and feel him pressing against me. We do these things naked except for a kynodesme to restrain the penis.

We often swim in the lake behind the Castle too.

This evening after our meal: Pyrros, Volos, Damao, Heron, Ikaros and Dysme joined Kleitos, Jason and myself for non stop sex. Somehow Drakon managed to secure the main castle baths for us to use. These baths are a very large pool of warm water surrounded by a terrace with benches and soft cushions spread around. We were told the baths are a copy of the main gymnasium in Corinth. We would have brought Alexandros but his new fathers thought it best he stay with them until his leg is completely healed.

After frolicking in the bath Jason and I took Kleitos up to one of the benches. Jason and I did not plan any of this but we both seemed to communicate. As if one we moved Kleitos between, I kissing his face and Jason his back we gently pressed him between us. Kleitos is a good student if nothing else and he had my penis in his mouth and presenting his buttocks to Jason at the same. I lay on the bench my legs draped over the sides and Kleitos got on his knees never taking his lips from my penis. Jason stood behind him and I could feel each of his thrusts and Kleitos' mouth took more of my erection with each until his nose was pressed against my skin. Before long my hips were pressing up to meet his oncoming oral cavity and Jason's thrusts synchronized with mine to give Kleitos the maximum pleasure we were capable of. I looked around and in the dim light could see the others similarly engaged, with Volos filling Ikaros' anus and Pyrros filling Volos', Dysme was being filled by Damao and him by Heron.

Iason ejaculated filling Kleitos and on his signal we switched positions with my erection fill Kleitos and Iason pressing into his mouth. Kleitos delivered his sperm to the marble bench, several loads of it during the process. Iason scooped up some on his fingers and after feeding it to me took some himself and gave the last to its producer.

Following this we all entered the pool again but this time much subdued in activity with kissing and fondling each other. We repaired to the bed chamber where Iason and I lay with Dysme and Ikaros while Pyrrros, Volos, Damao and Heron repeatedly filled Kleitos' ass.

I rose early in the morning to write this. My comrades and lovers are all piled together in our great bed. It then occurred to me that all four of our guardians were together in the same bed as my lover and new brother. I looked into the entry room and received a broad smile and gentle good morning from Hesiodos, one of Uncle Jason's personal guardians.

1312 the 10th month, 11th day:

At our morning lessons it was obvious Kleitos was in some discomfort sitting on the hard benches; the permanent smile on his face indicated all had done well by him. This family building business is good me thinks and I look forward to much more of it.

At the council meeting Father opened the discussions by reading the dispatched letter addressed to King Iason the 7th. It was long and in two parts. The first part was the announcement of the new bishop's appointment. The present bishop is being recalled to Avignon. The second part was more troubling. It stated that this kingdom had been outside the family of the church for much too long a time and that he expected us to become a member of the family under the prevue of the Duke of Florence. The new bishop and the Florentine army accompanying him would see to a smooth transition. Karyakos set the document down. All in the room were silent.

"What say you to that," the king asked?

To many disingenuous comments were made to record.

Karyakos gained everyone's attention. "We also have a letter here for the bishop." He called a page and sent it on its way. "I have not read this. I suspect the bishop will be calling on us this very day." That got chuckles from everyone. "Our scholars believe that part of our letter is real and part is not. The text is written by two different hands although both from the same school of writing. The seal is just a bit problematic. While it appears to be real the signature is questionable.

We think our best approach to this is sending our own envoy to Avignon. That envoy should be the bishop himself. He has business there as do we. We see this as an internal church matter. Iason and I have given this much thought and we do not believe the Bishop of Avignon wishes a war between any of his vassal states and ourselves. We are not worth the cost to him. You should also know that the Bishop of Florence is a relative of the Bishop of Avignon. His involvement in this whole affair is unseemly and we believe a power grab on his part to weaken his cousin and strengthen his own position for the next appointment. We do not believe Avignon has recalled or replaced our bishop and if they have it is the result of lies and false accusations of an ecclesiastical nature. In addition, we will send an envoy to Venice, being a rival of Florence, some support may be forthcoming from the Doge. Since our frontiers are closed we will need to use two of our Navy's ships. I doubt that we can act quickly enough to forestall Florence's impending attack by sea. I do think we can influence the impending saluter on land.

I strongly suspect that the military leaders of this Florentine expeditionary force have been grossly misled about several things. First, our resolve to fight. Second, the nature of the terrain they face. Third, the size and readiness of our army.

Prince Tertius and Sir Zokitos will leave at first light. They will request a face to face meeting with the Florentine military commander and attempt to talk sense to him, as one commander to another. If, as we suspect, they intend to attack about 5 days before the high tide, they must do so by the 14th or 15th day. It is now the 11th day. The meeting can be held on the 13th. day, we may still avoid a tragic loss of brave and worthy men."

They discussed his idea. Not all were in favor at first but all agreed in the end that Prince Tertius must try. Toward the end of the meeting a messenger arrived seeking immediate audience, his report was the Florentines had begun moving the forces up the valley and that snow was now on the ground in the pass. The second was a page announcing the arrival of the local bishop seeking audience with the King and Council.

The meeting ended, the knights left the room, the scribes, scholars and pages, less Iason and myself, were asked to hold in the outer chamber lest they be needed. The bishop and his second in command, the assistant bishop, were shown in. Iason and I were asked to sit to one side and observe. We understood that to mean watch, listen, learn

and keep quiet. Once seated the bishop mentioned that when he and Iason the 6th would meet, Uncle and Father were often seated just as Iason and I are. I know he said that for the benefit of his much younger assistant.

The bishop was livid, showing us the letter he had received from the Bishop of Florence. What was most interesting was the letter demanded he come not to Avignon but to Florence to answer charges of incompetence and heresy. He claimed the charges were false and Uncle Iason and Father agreed they were. Karyakos suggested he go immediately to Avignon and demand clarification and retraction of this falsehood. "In fact we too have been given a loathsome message," he said showing the bishop the letter addressed to us.

The scribes were brought in to make true copies of these letters for our local archives as the originals would be taken by the bishop to Avignon along with copies of many decrees, orders, publications and so on to demonstrate the falseness of this. Uncle Iason suggested appointing the bishop as official envoy. The bishop thought that might put him in an awkward position but suggested one of the scholars who was fluent in many languages. The scholars were summoned and asked to select among themselves the best candidate to accompany the bishop. One of Archimedes' students, skilled in painting and sculpture, and one of the scholarly students would also accompany him. The Bishop was invited to add one of his young priests to the party, which he did. They would leave on the next afternoon's high tide.

"Rule number one," the bishop said, looking at Iason and I, "Never embarrass and always protect your superior, a lesson that fool has obviously never learned. I dare say nor has the Bishop of Florence. I am sure he has not told Avignon of Florence's, or his by implication, intentions related to this state. I doubt that Father Giustina even went to Avignon, he did not have time to do that. I doubt that the Church would make such an appointment after his conduct, revealed in my letter about it and his banishment. As you can see the letters I have received tell a slightly different story but one no more plausible. Rule number two," he looked at us again, "if you are fabricating anything make sure it is absolutely consistent and plausible."

Uncle Iason related the incident at the border to the Bishop. He had known Euthymios as a boy and page. "Thank God that fool stayed put for Euthymios would have killed him and being unarmed placed a stain on the boy's otherwise unblemished soul."

Much discussion continued about what powers and representations the scholar-envoy should make to the Holy Sea. Once our business had been completed Karyakos invited the Bishop, Father Francisus and his assistant Father Georgios to share an evening meal with the scholar Demokritos and his assistant Olympos. We would all dine in the family dining room with the Princess and her people. Iason and I attended his younger brother, who at 8 years was more interested in being with his older brothers than anything else. Uncle Iason suggested that we get to know Father Georgios and Olympos as well as we could. I took this to mean they were likely to be important people in the kingdom's future as Iason and I would be. From comments made by the Bishop, our fathers got to know him when they were princes.

The political side of this royalty business was slowly becoming clearer to me. These men would never be our close friends but they would be important advisors or power brokers to us in the future. Mutual respect and true friendship were not required but would make things simpler as the kingdom faced the unknown difficulties of the future. We were by default the future leaders of our clan as well as our government. We knew that once we had established our own personal loyalty base, among the Palace Boys and the Coalhurst Boys, we would start to widen its base with the different religious groups, social groups like merchants and senior clan families.

Since we already had access to Olympos we concentrated on Father Georgios, as best we could, given Prince Nikias's continuous talk of battles and fighting.