

LORDS OF THE

HEARTH

Campaign 42

Historia Calamitatum

Turn 5 Newsfax
1121-1125 AD



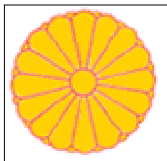
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Next Turn Due:

Japan

The Insei Government of Japan



Ruler: Shirikawa, In No Cho, on behalf of Emperor Toba
Capital: Heian
Religion: Shinto/Buddhist

The vexed Jinsuke Affair continued to dominate all business in the Imperial capital. The assassination of just one man had plunged the Empire into civil war and, as Shirikawa wandered through the elaborate gardens of the Yasaka Shrine, his mind invariably crept back to the question of the Mikado's personal safety for it was not certain that the Minamoto, under their treacherous and audacious daimyo, would not sweep down from the north, out of Toyama, to besiege the city. Shirikawa dreaded even to think what would happen if the Emperor fell into Minamoto hands.

Feeling constrained by the pressure of this situation and disappointed that the Minamoto had proved such unreliable allies, Shirikawa concluded that there was no honourable - nor expedient - option but to reveal the results of the recent investigation by the Imperial Government. So, in due course, the following missive was sent forth throughout all the islands of Nippon.

"To the clans and people of Japan,

The Imperial Government has determined, after a lengthy and thorough investigation, that the murder of the Minamoto Taisho, Jinsuke, was paid for by Lord Yoshichika himself and it was at Yoshichika's orders that the Fujiwara clan were falsely incriminated.

"In light of this and in the name of the Mikado, we declare Yoshichika to be a traitor to his clan and base criminal, and an oath-breaker besides through his perfidious and unjustified attack upon the Fujiwara clan. We call upon him to atone for his crimes personally and immediately through seppuku. Only in this way can his and his clan's lost honour be regained.

"We further call upon the elders of the Minamoto clan to appoint a new Daimyo for their clan - a Daimyo from the honourable line of Yoshiie, untainted by the crimes of Yoshichika - and for the peaceful and prompt withdrawal of Minamoto forces from the Kwanto and the city of Edo. If this is done, in the Imperial view, the matter will be upon Yoshichika's head alone and the Minamoto clan will not be held liable provided the new Daimyo pays reasonable restitution and swears upon his personal honour to uphold the treaty between the Minamoto and Fujiwara clans, unjustly transgressed by the wretched Yoshichika.

"Furthermore, the Emperor declares the late Lord Fujiwara Tadzane was an honourable man who went to his end bravely and courageously knowing himself to be wronged. It is to his credit that he did not choose the easier path of acceding to Yoshichika's false accusations in order to save himself from a dishonourable death by crucifixion. It is such actions that truly define honour, that it comes not from what others think of a man but what that man knows of himself. Shirakawa.

In No Cho for the Mikado, Toba, Seventy-Fourth Emperor since Jimmu and scion of Amaterasu"

The theory was that this proclamation would drive all of Japan to unite in rejection of Yoshichika's bald-faced stab at power but it was not to be. Far from uniting people, more questions were raised. Could the investigators *truly* be above reproach? Could they deliver an impartial investigation? Given that their enquiries were guided by the In No Cho, who was a virtual prisoner of the Fujiwara, objectivity did not seem likely. And even if the Fujiwara were truly innocent, why did the blame automatically fall on Yoshichika? The possible rôle of the Taira in all of this had been overlooked by all participants...

Amidst this air of paranoia, a treaty of alliance was concluded between the Taira and Fujiwara under terms which, effectively, carved up most of Japan between them. Unsurprisingly, this fostered the work scandalmongers who muttered that perhaps the Minamoto had not only been the victim of an assassination attempt but of a wider plot to deprive them of their rightful lands.

In somewhat happier news, the Empress (who was actually a Minamoto herself) bore two sons, the first in 1122 and the second in the following year. Over and above that, the Insei Government was able to report that all the clans - even the Minamoto! - had paid or overpaid their *teikoku no zeikin!*

The Fujiwara Kampaku

Ruler: Fujiwara Toranaga, Imperial Kampaku on behalf of Emperor Toba, Daimyo of the Fujiwara

Capital: Heian

Religion: Shinto

The regent, Nakamori, had many things to contend with - the loss of the Kwanto had badly dented the fortunes of the Fujiwara; the ignominious death of Lord Tadzane without a clear heir had left the clan in limbo; and it seemed likely that the Minamoto would swoop down on Yamato and the Imperial capital at any time - the loss of this, the Fujiwara heartland and the seat of the Emperor, would surely herald the final fall of Fujiwara power.

With such less-than-cheerful thoughts uppermost in his mind, Nakamori saw it was time to strengthen the clan against the storm that would soon descend. First, he ordered that some three thousand Fujiwari bushi be equipped with long *yari*, fine iron-and-lacquer armour and lofty *kabuto* helmets. This new heavily-armed force was to be the clan's spearhead in the coming conflict with the Minamoto yet, however impressive the new Fujiwara looked, it was not likely to win any wars on its own. So, Nakamori turned to his western neighbours, the reclusive Taira, in search of a new ally and found them most receptive - the Winter of 1120-21 saw a remarkable amount of diplomatic activity between the clans which culminated, in February of 1121, in a most impressive treaty by which each clan bound itself to defend the other. It was a radical step for the cultured and proud urban Fujiwara aristocracy to turn to the muddy, provincial Taira for aid.

The treaty was extensive and detailed but, apart from its defensive conditions, it arranged for the whole island of Kyushu, which the Fujiwara currently owned, to be handed over to the Taira - but only after the Kwanto and Toyama were brought under Fujiwara control. In addition, the Imperial Kampaku granted the distant, island of Hokkaido to the Taira (no great concession, given that the worthless place was inhabited mainly by the hairy Ainu devils) and made arrangements for a number of marriages between the clans. Fujiwara Toranaga, the daimyo

and currently in his minority, was to be wed to Taira Hideko, daughter of daimyo Mosimori while vague plans were laid for a female Fujiwara to marry one of the son's of the Taira heir Yorimoto at some future date.

As luck would have it, the planned marriage between Hideko and Toranaga never took place for she died in 1123 at the age of thirteen; the Taira elders, not to be beaten by death, sent Yorimoto's eldest daughter, Chieko, to Heian in 1125 (when she was fourteen) so as to ensure that this vital political alliance might still be sealed by a marriage between the two clans.

As to the war against the Minamoto, Nakamori refused to surrender the initiative to the enemy so, rather than sit back and await an attack on Yamato, he dispatched Ishiro and Fujiwara Shoken to liberate the Kwanto and its great city of Edo. Ishiro was to be taisho, or general, in command of the expedition and disposed of a force which was quite sizeable by Fujiwara standards: about fifteen-hundred each of ashigaru and samurai; the recently-equipped force of three thousand heavily-armed samurai; nearly two thousand horsemen and a small train of engineers. From April to May, they crossed over in Aichi and, as June opened, advanced into the Kwanto... (*For details of events, see the Minamoto fax entry*)

In theory, the Fujiwara attack ought to have been backed by a large supporting contingent from the Taira but they got their wires crossed and headed off into Toyama instead. (*For that too, see the Minamoto fax entry*)

The only other news of import amongst the Fujiwara came when Lord Toranaga reached the age of manhood - fifteen - in 1122 and assumed leadership over his clan and the high office of Kampaku. His advent to power was particularly interesting because, as some people pointed out, Toranaga had been the half-brother of the late Tadzane. Had Tadzane lived, he would almost certainly have ensured that one of his own children assumed the post of daimyo and Kampaku. Therefore, it could be said that Toranaga was an indirect beneficiary of the Minamoto treachery and the dishonourable slaying of Tadzane...

In any case, having executed his duty to the clan, Sensei Nakamori took his leave of his lord's service and returned to his old monastery where he could spend what remained of his life in quiet contemplation and prayer.

The Minamoto Clan



Ruler: Minamoto Yoshichika, *the Dark Lord*, Regent for and Protector of Minamoto Sokaku, Daimyo of the Minamoto

Capital: Sakata

Religion: Shinto

Lord Yoshichika was not at all amused by the grotesque libels which the agents of the Fujiwara and the Cloistered Government were spreading. His foes had been so successful in spreading their filthy canards that even some of his own followers had begun referring to him as "The Dark Lord". Yet, the more thoughtful elements of Japanese society - and particularly those who were affiliated to the Minamoto - questioned the veracity of the Insei investigation: how could one trust this false "government", which existed only through the tolerance of the Fujiwara, be expected to deliver a just and unbiased judgment on affairs? It was altogether too convenient that, as soon as something happened which appeared to incriminate the Kampaku, the In No Sho popped up with myriad excuses to vindicate the Fujiwara and blame the Minamoto.

All the same, there were internal issues within the clan. The recent rebellions by Michio and Kaemon had indicated a broader discontent with Lord Yoshichika's rule. He had assumed leadership of the clan under a cloud following the tragic and untimely death of his nephew and now, with his name and honour perhaps permanently tainted by the Jinsuke Affair, it seemed possible that the disgruntled members of the clan might take steps to remove him permanently. Indeed, in January of 1121, elements of his own army staged an impromptu show of defiance by announcing loudly that they would not follow a "dishonourable treaty-breaker" and, for a while, it looked as though the situation might degenerate; it was only when Yoshi intervened, demonstrating the considerable personal magnetism for which he was well-known, that order was restored. Yet, the abortive mutiny has shown there were obviously elements of the clan who might move to unseat the daimyo if given the opportunity. To forestall this, Lord Yoshi announced that he was abdicating as daimyo! In his place, he would set his great-nephew, the fifteen year old Minamoto Sokaku, son of Yoshiie. In an unprecedented step, though, Yoshichika would remain as *regent* on behalf of the new daimyo! A pretty pass, indeed, for no-one believed that a young man of Sokaku's age should need a regent.

In any case, Regent Yoshichika ordered that preparations be laid for the coming war with the Fujiwara and their Taira allies. Five new strongholds were established at various strategic points in the Kwanto while Minamoto Tanaka was sent forth with several chests of Chinese silver coinage to hire whatever mercenaries were to be had. In no time at all, more than two thousand landless samurai and bushi were hired to serve the Minamoto clan. The irony, of course, was that some of these men had been displaced from Fujiwara-owned estates by the actions of the Minamoto and now they would fight in the frontline to break any Fujiwara attack.

And, sure enough, the Fujiwara did attack. From June to July of 1121, their army under Ichiro - numbering perhaps seven thousand footmen and less than two thousand horse - crossed into the Kwanto. By August of that year, first contact was made with the slightly bigger defending army under wily Yoshichika himself. At their disposal, the Minamoto had about four-and-a-half thousand samurai footmen, a thousand ashigaru skirmishers, maybe fifteen hundred of Yoshichika's personal retainers, all armed and armoured far more heavily than ordinary samurai and, to support this formidable armament, another fifteen hundred lancers and a thousand mounted archers. Nevertheless, Ichiro was not discouraged by the disparity in numbers - nor by the very obvious difference in quality between his own men, untested in battle and made soft by life in the "world of the shining prince"¹, and the battle-hardened veterans of the Minamoto who had earned a fearful reputation for their deeds in battle against the wild barbarians of the untamed northern regions. Stung by the shame of the army's failure when last it met the Minamoto and driven by a fierce desire to see the murderous traitor Yoshichika's head atop a lance, Ichiro ordered that battle be joined as soon as possible!

The armies assembled for battle on a sloping plain in Kouzouke province, about twenty miles east of Mt. Arame, in the north of the Kwanto during the last week of August. The Fujiwara deployed quite carelessly for, being inexperienced in the ways of war, they had no real grasp of "group tactics" and expected that the whole affair would degenerate into a series of personal duels between individual samurai; the Minamoto, on the other hand, kept their men together in tightly-organised and well-drilled units. The battle opened about halfway through the Hour of the Serpent when Yoshichika, having formed his army up for an attack, ordered a general advance...

Taisho Ichiro and his officers espied this and were most impressed by the unparalleled discipline of the Minamoto army. The ordinary soldiers were less impressed and rather more terrified as they beheld the cadenced enemy regiments advancing on them, the lacquer of their armour a shiny black with Minamoto emblems painted on in a dark red. The ashigaru conscripts, who formed a large proportion of the Fujiwara army, were particularly affected by this and seemed disinclined to stick around to fight it out. Only the intervention and threats of Ichiro's deputy, Fujiwara Shoken, and a squadron of lancers convinced the peasant scum to stay and fight.



Lord Minamoto
Yoshichika in battle

For the Fujiwara taisho, retreat in the face of this dreadful enemy was not without its attractions but he knew that he could not quit this field until blood had been spilled. Once before, after his Lord Tadzane had been captured by the Minamoto scum, he had allowed himself to be swayed by the weak spirits of his men and had left the field, and his daimyo, in the hands of the foe without even contesting it. That would not happen again. Even defeat and death would be better than simply running away... Catching sight of the personal banner of Minamoto Yoshichika marking the enemy's leader's position at the head of his army, the taisho's fury burst like a dam. He drew his sword, kicked his heels into his horse's flanks and, screaming "FORWARD!" at the top of his lungs, charged off, flipping down the iron mask that would protect his face in battle.

The battle was not particularly long. The Fujiwara army ambled forward with the ashigaru on the left and samurai in the centre and on the right, apparently preferring to meet the advancing Minamoto instead of standing on the defensive. Lord Yoshichika had given directions to his horse archers before the battle had ever begun, ordering them to target the slow-moving and indifferently-motivated enemy ashigaru. These orders were duly carried out and, despite attempts by Shoken and his cavalry to drive the enemy horsemen away, the Fujiwara ashigaru were able to take perhaps ten minutes battering from the arrows before they simply routed from the field.

Meanwhile, in the centre, the samurai on both sides slipped off their yumi bows and quickly poured a few volleys on the enemy before actually closing for combat. As warriors came close to each other, any idea of maintaining formation was lost; the lines intermingled and the battle degenerated into a lot of individual duels; men cried out their names, their lineage and the deeds of their ancestors as they met in bloody but honourable battle and Ichiro of the Fujiwara personally took the heads of two Minamoto samurai! Yet, the battle was largely one-sided. The veteran Minamoto were much more effective fighters than the Fujiwara and, despite leaving a thousand of Minamoto dead or wounded on the field, the morale of the Kampaku's army broke and it was driven from the field. Before the end of the Hour of the Horse, it was all over and Yoshichika could boast of another great victory for his clan. Worse, as the Fujiwara were reforming west of Mt. Arame, they were informed that Minamoto Takana was approaching from the north with his army of ronin. Rather than risk being trapped between these two Minamoto armies, Ichiro withdrew into Aichi to await developments and reinforcements.

The Minamoto could celebrate their successes but the happy times were not destined to last long. In May of 1122, while his army sat encamped near Edo, a couple of figures clad from head-to-toe in black snuck through the lines around the Minamoto camp and past the less-than-zealous sentries whose heads were clouded by too much *sake* and overconfidence following their recent victory. Inside the camp, these intruders had no difficulty in moving around undetected, keeping to the shadows and dodging the crowded campfires, until they reached a well-guarded area that was separated from the rest of the camp by a series of silk sheets suspended between a fence

¹ i.e., the Imperial Capital.

of bamboo poles to form a screen. The ninja had found what they sought. Behind those screens was Lord Yoshichika...

The ninja waited patiently until it was almost the Hour of the Tiger. Between them and their target stood four of Yoshi's retainers. The infiltrators know that the guards had been on duty for some time and would be tired. Too, these guards would expect to be relieved soon and that would probably breed a certain slackness. The best time to strike at these sentries would be when their defences had dropped to their lowest through a combination of fatigue and laxity. Sure enough, just a short while before the changing of the guard, the ninjas sprang from their hiding place in the shadows. A hail of shuriken put two of the guards down and the others were slain by the flashing blades of the two black-clad apparitions as they sailed past, cut through the silk screen and burst into the sleeping Lord Yoshichika's private encampment.

Yoshichika had not survived this long - for he was almost sixty - by being unprepared. Asleep when the ninja attacked, he awoke hearing the death rattles of his guards and was struggling to draw his blade when the assassins burst through and fell upon him. With a scream of anger and still only half-risen from the ground where he'd been sleeping, he jammed his katana into the gut of the first attacker but the second was upon him and hacked him down before he could do anything to defend himself. Prostrate and grievously wounded before the ninja, Yoshichika commended his soul to Buddha and was saved only by the arrival of more guards. One quick-thinking samurai, seeing the assassin stand sword raised above the taisho, drew and threw his *tanto* through the air in fluid moment; it struck hard into the ninja's right shoulder and, although it didn't kill him, it prevented him from slaying Yoshichika. The other guards rushed in and cut the wounded assassin down. So, the Dark Lord Yoshichika was saved but wounded, very seriously wounded. So severe were His Lordship's injuries that the leaders of the army had to lodge him in a local Buddhist temple to be cared for by a large staff of monks and doctors.

This ferocious attack, so similar to the slaying of Minamoto Jinsuke, caused many to question the findings of the investigation which had laid the blame at Yoshichika's door. In any case, one might have expected that Yoshichika's travails would end after the assassination attempt but that was not to be. After spending the better part of eighteen months recuperating from his wounds, Yoshichika was beginning to feel ready to assume command over the clan's forces once more. At his command, and despite the warning of the doctors that he ought to remain under their care a while longer, a cortège consisting of a palanquin and thirty-six samurai was arranged to take the Dark Lord the short distance from his current lodgings to one of the local Minamoto forts. The trip was pleasant and uneventful enough, or so it seemed. Departing the temple, the small procession wound its way through the narrow paths between the rich paddy-fields that made the Kwanto such a valuable region to hold. Looking out of his palanquin at the hundreds and hundreds of muddy peasants who toiled in the fields to produce the rice which was almost Japan's sole currency, Yoshichika felt great satisfaction at having brought these people beneath his clan's rule. The wealth of the Kwanto would surely propel the Minamoto forward to the front rank of Japanese politics, no longer to be a provincial clan but soon to hold the whole Empire in their hands...

Such happy thoughts were soon swept away for, as the palanquin passed along a particularly narrow part of the path, with paddy-fields on either sides and scores of peasants travelling, arrows came out of nowhere and the scream "AMBUSH!" went up. At least three scores of the peasant in the fields had come charging up to assail Lord Yoshi's guards while a few others remained back, knee-deep in the paddies, and used bows to pick off guardsmen! The Dark Lord barely had time to apprehend what was going on before the porters who bore his palanquin were cut down by arrows. The palanquin pitched onto its side, throwing Yoshi from his seat. It took several moments and much pain for him to get upright and struggle out, sword still sheathed and himself much disoriented. Rising out of the upended box, he had the chance to behold that all his guards lay dead and the attackers stood surrounding his palanquin before someone smacked him a mighty blow across the back of the head with the shaft of a yari lance. He sprawled into unconsciousness and his assailants immediately dragged him entirely out of the palanquin, secured his swords, bound his hands and feet and charged off, on foot, down the narrow pathway between the fields bearing their captive with them. This was all reported later by the many peasants who witnessed it though the final location to which these bandits spirited His Lordship away was not ascertained. It was a dark situation for daimyo Sokaku who had never been intended to be a "real" leader for the clan but now found himself cast for just that rôle since his cunning uncle was gone.

In other news, Yoshichika had sent one of his concubines - Chosan Sakai - to carry out some diplomatic missions in the north. Sakai, although she enjoyed the Lord's favour, was not the great beauty she had once been and was seldom invited to share his bed. Yet, Yoshichika was convinced that she had great diplomatic talents and could beguile those whom she met. Her first stop was Hokkaido - a horrendous place even by the rusticated and provincial standards of the Minamoto - where she tried to convince the local Japanese settlers and the hairy Ainu barbarians to align with Yoshichika and join in overthrowing the effete and womanish Fujiwara. The locals were not impressed; neither the Japanese nor the Ainu cared to listen to anything she had to say - though they grudgingly accepted her gifts. She departed the island with a clear message from all the leaders of Hokkaido: they viewed the Minamoto clan as an enemy and would not support them.

Her next stop, Akita, was even worse. The local clans in that area were kin to the Minamoto and had, in the past, been allied to them, though the past couple of decades had seen a loosening of the ties. The local daimyo

accepted Sakai's gifts and listened politely to her awkward explanation of the advantages of closer alliance with the Minamoto. At the conclusion of the audience, the daimyo calmly told his hatamoto that the Minamoto envoy should be executed. So it was said and so it was done. Her head, preserved in brine, was sent to Lord Yoshichika but, since he'd been kidnapped by this point, it didn't reach him.

The Taira Clan



Ruler: Taira Yorimoto, Daimyo of the Taira
Capital: none
Religion: Shinto

Early in 1121, the Taira domains were gripped by the most important piece of news to be heard in many a long year: an alliance had been hatched with the Fujiwara! To cement it, Lord Mosimori had agreed to marry his little daughter, Hideko, to the Fujiwara daimyo as soon as both were of a suitable age. This was a most unexpected development for the Taira had traditionally been rivals of the Fujiwara, working to undermine them and restore direct Imperial rule via Insei. But the rewards they were to receive in return for their assistance were handsome enough to tempt the most recalcitrant: the whole of Kyushu, including its great port of Kumamoto, was to be handed over to the Taira, as was the northernmost region of Japan, Hokkaido. This was all to happen only after Toyama and the Kwanto had been gained or regained by the Fujiwara.

As soon as the campaigning season of 1121 opened, the daimyo's son, Yorimoto, set out at the head of a strong contingent of Taira warriors - nearly five thousand wealthy samurai wearing the finest armour and armed with blades forged by the most skilled craftsmen; supporting them were two thousand provincial samurai with swords and bow; a thousand lancers and five hundred horse archers. They were issued new war banners of yellow silk featuring delicate representations of the clan's emblem - the butterfly - and their lacquer armour was painted yellow and some men even marked their names and lineage on their armour alongside the butterfly mon. At the head of this eager army, Yorimoto set out to attack Toyama! As it happens, he *ought* to have proceeded to the Kwanto to support the Fujiwara but communications seemed to break down and the unfortunate young taisho went off in altogether the wrong direction.

While the war was being prosecuted in the north, many misfortunes befell the Taira. First, Yorimoto's seven year old son Kaoru died of influenza within a month of his father's departure for the war. In April of the following year, the daimyo himself died suddenly after contracting a fever; his faithful retainer, Kozu Hitomaro, decided that it was better to follow Lord Mosimori into death than to live without his lord and undertook the ritual act of seppuku. Lord Yorimoto was informed of his father's demise while still in Toyama and quietly assumed the mantle of daimyo of the Taira. So many tragedies already but it was not over yet - in the Summer of 1123, Lady Taira Hideko, thirteen year old daughter of Lord Mosimori (and, thus, sister of Yorimoto), died of malaria contracted during a pilgrimage to a distant shrine. With her death, the planned marriage with Lord Toranaga, designed to cement relations between the Taira and Fujiwara, stalled. Fortunately, a replacement bride was available in the form of Yorimoto's own daughter, Chieko.

As to the war itself, in June of 1121, the Taira began to range up from Yamato into the Minamoto-owned region of Toyama. By the start of 1122, Yorimoto had brought up his entire army and was ready to begin subduing the place; very little resistance was met - largely because the Minamoto army was too busy defending the rich plains of the Kwanto to bother protecting worthless peripheral territories - and by Midsummer of 1122, the Yellow Butterfly banner of the Taira flew all over a subdued Toyama. Yorimoto felt quite satisfied about his modest victory until messengers arrived to explain that he should have moved eastwards to support the Fujiwara advance on Edo. Oops, thought the new daimyo of the Taira.

The Far East

The Great Chinese War 1101-?

March-June 1121: Yeliuy Tian-zo stood, with some of his officers and chieftains, atop a modest hillock that rose out of the midst of a mass of neglected paddy fields and contemplated the scene. Here and there across the vista, abandoned or burnt-out farmsteads and hamlets could be made out and, much rarer, those which were still inhabited by the Chinese peasants who vied against all odds to make a living in this No-Man's-Land between the Liao and the Sung. Yet, these things were of little interest for the Khan of the Jurchen, the Liao Emperor of China; his attention was drawn to the horizon where the impressive defences of the Sung-held city of Chang-Ning-Fu began - well-placed and well-maintained approach forts commanded the outlying routes to the city; behind them were a series of ditches, moats and earthen ramparts; then, finally, there were the city walls.

If there was one thing the Chinese did well, it was wall-building, thought the Khan. These defences were magnificent and extensive - far better than anything his own engineers could hope to create - and yet Chang-Ning-Fu was, by Chinese standards, not a particularly great or important city. Well, in spite of the excellent fortifications, Yeliuy had decided to strike here and strike hard: the conflict of the last twenty years had demonstrated beyond a doubt that the Chinese were incapable of fighting the Khitan in the open; now they had to be shown that the Khitan were capable of overwhelming China's fortified cities and that there was no wall so great or insurmountable that it could shelter the Sung from Liao vengeance.

"We will attack," the Khan said decisively. "But first get me a scribe for I have a message to give to the people in that city..."

The following day, this message written in vermilion ink, was delivered to the Governor of Chang-Ning-Fu by a Khitan herald under a banner of truce:

"From Liao Yeliuy Tian-Zo, Emperor of China, to the one who governs at Chang-Ning-Fu in the name of the Sung, greetings!

"My son has been struck down by the most vile treachery and at the urging of your masters in Kai-Feng. I have said before that the transgressions of the ruler shall be the responsibility of the people, who make his rule possible, which means anyone who holds to the Sung banner. I have it in mind to build a monument to my beloved son in Hupei. It will be a grand construction and its foundation will be the skulls of ten thousand Sung. That is my price for this treachery, the murder of my son.

"It is for you, the people and rulers of of Chang Ning Fu, to decide right now whether you will provide a portion of that price. I say to you now that you have but one chance to open your gates and take the knee to the Liao. If you do not then we will come. Your daughters will be the whores of my men. Your sons will be raised on spears and planted as a crop on the road to Kai-Feng. Your city will be left with not one structure standing higher than the shortest of my men. I will have no mercy for you and a thousand years hence, the people who come after you will speak in hushed voices of the vengeance of the Liao and the price paid by the city of Chang-Ning-Fu.

"Look to your south and you will see that the great cities of Kuei-Chou and T'an-Chou and Lung-Hsing-Fu have all opened their gates and have been spared. No Chinese who has abandoned the cause of the Sung and submitted to Liao rule has paid the price of blood. We are not capricious in our cruelty. Your submission and loyalty will be repaid with benign rule. Consider this. And consider the complete inability of Kai-Feng to drive me from your walls. Consider that now, for the first time in this war, the Liao require a true blood price.

I give you three days. If at the end of that time you have not surrendered - you will not be given a second chance."

Needless to say, this message sent a chill through the denizens of the city and the Governor seriously considered surrendering outright. His deliberation on the relative merits of taking the knee before Tian-zo was broken only by the intervention of none other than General Di Qing who happened to be present in the city with a large contingent of the Imperial Guard. With his familiar silver face-mask and unending and stubborn refusal to accept defeat, Di had become the embodiment not just of the Sung régime's warlike policy but of the unbroken spirit of the Chinese people in the face of foreign aggression. The gallant General and his cadre of devoted Sung loyalist officers removed the civilian Governor of Chang-Ning-Fu from power and established direct military rule for the duration of the current crisis. The morale of the people, during this time, fluctuated wildly; on the one hand, they retained a very strong confidence in General Di and the city walls but, on the other, they knew the painful truth that the Sung had never defeated a determined Liao army.

In any case, the three days passed and the Liao messenger returned to hear the Chinese reply. At General Di's orders, as soon as the Khitan herald came within bowshot of the outer defences, he was driven off by volleys of arrows - that was the only reply the Sung garrison would give to the Liao demands for surrender.

As April opened, the morale of the Sung took a battering when the infamous Khitan chieftain Boon Min arrived in Anhui with about eight thousand extra troops, many of whom carried with them the paraphernalia and apparatus that marked them out not as soldiers but as engineers! The armies were quickly reorganised by Yeliuy who moved off from the city in a northerly direction with more than ten thousand cavalry; Boon Min, with more than five thousand Chinese sappers and engineers, moved to begin siege operations against the walls of Chang-Ning-Fu.

While Boon Min was left with the relatively straightforward job of besieging the city, Yeliuy's large mounted force marched north to subdue Honan once more, arriving there by the end of June.

Around Chang-Ning-Fu, the Liao forces first conscripted the local Chinese peasants and set them to digging a series of parallels around the city and its defences, providing cover against Sung arrows; the sappers, meanwhile, got to work building a couple of quite fearsome Hsuan Feng trebuchets for use against the main city walls. This was how the besiegers passed April; during this month, they took a very relaxed attitude to the business in which they were engaged. Of course, the Liao had the misfortune not to know that General Di and his division were present within the city so Boon Min, though an excellent soldier and leader, expected to meet no serious opposition from the city garrison, who were mostly an indifferent and irregular militia force. This overconfidence on the part of the Liao led to disaster when, during the first week of May, Boon Min signalled that the assault should begin on the first of the Sung approach forts; when it fell, the other forts would inevitably follow, then the city walls would be reduced by Liao siege engines and, finally, the city would be taken.

So, in the dark hours before dawn, a Liao force of Chinese sappers and Han conscript infantry, all led by Khitan officers, assembled in the trenches in readiness to storm the fort. Other engineers stayed back, out of bowshot, and arranged their small rock- and bolt-throwers with which to discomfit the Sung troops. As dawn broke on an overcast day, the attack began. A solitary Sung soldier, standing sentry behind the fort's battlements, was the first to see the enemy columns snaking out of the trenches and rushing forward to begin the assault. He screeched a warning to his comrades and charged for the great alarm bell which would warn the whole city that an attack had begun; he rang it vigorously for several seconds before a bolt launched from a Liao ballista caught him and put an end to him.

From the Liao perspective, the assault went very well to begin with. The initial rush of men managed to get their ladders onto the fort and swept over the battlements but, to their amazement, the Sung troops in the fort did not run or surrender but counterattacked in force and easily put the Liao attackers to flight! Boon Min was dumbstruck! Approach forts like this were normally held by no more than fifty or so local militiamen but, unbelievably, there seemed to be several hundred Sung soldiers holding the place and they wore uniforms and plumed helmets that marked them out as members of the Imperial Guard! Boon tore at his hair as he realised the gravity of the mistake that had been made here! He had expected to outnumber the local garrison forces by a factor of more than five to one but, if there were elements of the Imperial Guard present, it probably indicated that Chang-Ning-Fu was defended by an entire Chinese field army. To be sure, the Sung were not great soldiers and even their greatest leader - the legendary Di Qing - could not match Boon's qualities as a general *but* Boon's forces was small in number and, since it consisted of nothing more than a siege train, was simply not capable of facing the enemy in battle.

While the Liao tried to extricate themselves from what could be a very messy combat, General Di, who observed the initial enemy probes from the walls of the city, signalled that his entire division should immediately sally forth and drive the barbarians back. While the attack was being prepared, several batteries of Sung rockets mounted on the city walls rushed to open fire on the Khitan. The accuracy and potency of these strange missiles left much to be desired but they worked on the enemy's nerves and caused much consternation in Liao ranks, hindering Boon Min's efforts to rally his men.

An hour later, General Di personally led a thousand Sung infantry and three thousand cavalry, all of the Imperial Guard, in a wild charge from the city. The Liao sappers turned and ran at the sight of the enemy; Boon Min and his officers didn't waste any further time trying to rally the army but joined in the general flight. Di's infantry, all of whom wore very heavy armour, were too slow and tired too easily to have much of an effect on the fleeing enemy force (although they had a high time ransacking the Liao camp and burning the catapults they had built) but his cavalry, once they got clear of the siege line, slaughtered all the Liao forces they could find. Indeed, for a fortnight after the attack, General Di personally directed his cavalry squadrons as they hunted high and low throughout Anhui. To Di's delight - and Boon's chagrin - the Liao defeat at Chang-Ning-Fu became the catalyst for a popular revolt in Anhui. Many of the local Han peasants rushed to take up arms and join with General Di's forces; others merrily took a very bloody vengeance against the region's ruling class who, on the whole, had collaborated with the Liao occupiers.

In any case, by the end of May, the Sung had re-established control over Anhui and Boon Min had been forced to flee back to Hupei with hardly a single member of his command left. His shame was made so much more complete when Princess Lay-Leng, the widow of the late John Yeliuy Dashi, publicly berated Boon for his failure, before the assembled elders and nobles of the Khitan nation and Jurchen tribes. The ignominy of the Liao was salvaged only by Yeliuy's reconquest of Honan and by some success that the allied Khan, Chingis Yew, enjoyed in Funiu.

But the war wasn't just being waged in the north. In the far southwest, a Champan army crossed the frontier into the rugged and sultry forests of Lingnan. It numbered about ten thousand infantry and five thousand horse, under the veteran Madi Vasavaj who had so recently smashed Annam into the ground.

July-Sept 1121: Predictably, the large Cham army in Lingnan experienced absolutely no trouble in smacking around the local provincial forces. The conquerors, though, were most disappointed with what they found; having grown up with stories ringing in their ears about the limitless wealth and prestige of the Chinese, it was a matter of some disgruntlement when they saw that Lingnan was a rather poor region, certainly not as rich as their own homelands in the south or even Annam which they had so recently overrun. In any event, no sooner was the conquest of the region completed than a Cham naval contingent arrived off the coast and dumped some three thousand tribal infantry to reinforce Lord Vasavaj. That done, the flotilla quickly struck out for the Pearl River estuary...

Up in the Huang Ho Valley, the Sung were doomed to take yet more losses from the filthy barbarian invaders - the Uighurs this time. Smarting from the terrible losses they had sustained in the abortive conquest of Hopei and generally feeling very sorry for themselves, the Uighurs had opted not to prosecute an offensive war against for the time being. Instead, all the Khagan's attention was fixed on the isolated city of Lo-Yang, the last Sung outpost in Houma. Taking a leaf out of the Liao book, Khagan Temu Lin sent an embassy to demand the surrender of the Governor of Lo-Yang - a dozen Uighur noblemen went forth, dressed in furs and silks and mounted on the finest horses the steppe could produce, with jewel-encrusted and gold-embellished saddles and swords; why, even the sophisticated Chinese bureaucrats and scholars who administered the city had to admit to feeling a certain awe at the obvious majesty and striking appearance of these barbarians.

Be that as it may, the Governor of Lo-Yang (who was one of the new breed of military aristocrats and definitely *not* a scholar or bureaucrat) was not willing to entertain the offer of the Weiwuer barbarians (viz., that the city gates should be opened and the Chinese forces surrender immediately). The leader of the embassy, a tall and handsome young Uighur warrior-nobleman named Chi Muchu, heard the Governor's rejection with equanimity and said, simply, that the city had passed up its chance to bow to the Khagan peacefully so now it would have to be shown the error of its ways. The embassy quit the city unmolested and meandered back to the Uighur camp leaving the Governor and his administrators to contemplate how they could defend themselves... Their garrison was small but the walls were outstandingly strong and made it unlikely that the barbarians could take the city by storm; of course, the Uighurs were known to have a tiny riverine flotilla - no more than a couple of boats really - and it was conceivable that they could blockade the city's harbour and starve it into submission but, with the Imperial Navy extremely active on the Huang Ho, this seemed an unlikely proposition.

Overall, the Sung defenders could not guess what the Uighurs would do to capture the city but they believed they had covered against all reasonable possibilities and that the city could hold off any attacks. Yet, Temu Lin, fully intending to live up to his soubriquet of *The Treacherous*, had no intention of attacking Lo-Yang. As usual, just as in Xinghou two decades earlier and Ch'ang-An just a few years ago, he had something else - something perfectly devious - hidden up his sleeve...

The duty of keeping the city's fixed defences in their proper order rested, ultimately, with the Captain of the City Guard. It was he and his small cadre of military bureaucrats who drew up the rotas, designated people's posts and kept a careful eye out to ensure that all orders issued to perimeter guards and sentries were carried out to the full. As it happened, late on a moonless night in July, a band of ruffians attacked the Captain of the Guard as he made his rounds; they slew those who accompanied the Captain and dragged him off, kicking and screaming, into the shadowy maze of the city's myriad alleys and back streets.

With it being so late at night and there being so few witnesses to the assault, the Sung authorities were not even aware that the man who held the city's defences in his hands had been kidnapped - nor would they be aware until morning. It would be best not to dwell on what the assailants did to their victim, in a dank cellar deep in the recesses of Lo-Yang's poorest neighbourhood, but whatever they did was very effective for, with the Captain's coerced connivance, Uighur agents were able to stage a virtual repeat of their activities in Ch'ang-An by opening some old, half-rusted sally portes in a particularly poorly patrolled part of the defences. Once more, in a daring *coup de main*, thousands of Uighur soldiers were in the city before the Sung knew what was happening. Sung barracks were set alight, the gates and armouries seized and the Governor's Residence surrounded. Sung capitulation was almost immediate.

Temu Lin, despite his advancing years (for he was almost sixty!), insisted on making a triumphal entry at the head of his personal guard. He rode through the streets, lined by nervous Chinese who kowtowed to the all-conquering Khagan as he passed, and finally arrived at the Governor's Residence which, he announced, was now the Khagan's Residence. There, the Uighur nobility and the city administrators were all assembled and, before their eyes, that recalcitrant Governor, who had refused to surrender, was quickly and efficiently beheaded. It was the same, simple message that Temu Lin gave to any place he conquered: those who opposed him died; those who served him lived.

Anyway, with the fall of Lo-Yang, the Khagan was happy to settle back and await developments elsewhere in China...

And, at that moment, in Honan, messages were just arriving at Tian-zo's camp telling him of the rout of Boon Min's army. At first, the Khan of the Jurchen could not believe what had happened. He refused to countenance

the possibility that he could have sent his whole siege apparatus to assault a city defended by the cream of the Sung army. Worse, this sorry state of affairs left Tian-zo and the main army cut off from their capital and heartland in Hupei. The only possible link between Honan and Liao-controlled territory was through Tangchou which wasn't even properly conquered yet (though an allied army from Hubei was, at this time, entering the area to conquer the Chinese). The best option, thought Tian-zo, was probably to ride, hell-for-leather through Anhui, getting back to Hanyang before either Di's army or the Sung Navy could stage an attack. So that was exactly what Yeliuy did, dodging its way around the heavier Sung army in Anhui with ease, and coming to Hanyang at the very end of the year.

As touched on, Chingis Yew, Xiong Nu Khan of Hubei and ally of the Jurchen, spent the period between July and September moving into Tangchou where he began a campaign of subjugation which lasted on into the following year. In response, General Di, from his headquarters in Chang-Ning-Fu, spent several days consulting with advisors and weighing up the options before deciding, with a heavy heart, that he could not intervene in Tangchou because, to do so, he would need to leave the important region Anhui completely undefended.

General Di's caution was most sagacious for, in September of 1121, a Sri Vijayan pirate fleet - sixteen coastal ships under the Raja of Johor - showed up in the Grand Canal. The Malays dropped anchor just outside the harbour of Chang-Ning-Fu and took a look around. They had been led to expect that the place would be besieged and that the presence of their fleet would convince the locals to surrender but, so far as the salty sea-dogs could discern, there was *no* siege. The Raja realised that his presence here was, in the first place, not going to achieve anything and, in the second, would soon attract the attention of the Sung fleet so he quickly turned his ships around and bugged out...

April-June 1122: Anyone who thought they'd seen the last of the Sri Vijayans was disappointed. Simultaneously, two Malay fleets arrived in Chinese waters: one, under Hukumantaring Doom Fang, entered the Yellow Sea and spent the period from April through to July terrorising Shangtung; the other, nearly twenty coastal ships under the pirate Tukang Pos, actually slipped up the Huang Ho and into the vicinity of Kai-Feng!

Tukang and his rogues expected to meet little or no resistance from the Sung navy and even hoped they might even slip into the harbour of Kai-Feng and cause some confusion by burning the ships at anchor there and generally being rascally. Sadly, luck was not with them. They emerged from the Grand Canal and made directly westwards along the Huang Ho toward the Sung Imperial capital but they had sailed for barely half-a-day when thirty Sung ships appeared out of the west; ten of these ships were light, riverine junks while the rest were significantly larger warships. The Sung squadron, as chance would have it, was commanded by none other than the Imperial Minister of Personnel, Su Sung, who was eager to avenge his previous failure to handle his naval command effectively.

Tukang decided to cut-and-run in the face of this large enemy force whose presence he had not foreseen but fortune did not favour him. Although the Malay ships were extremely manoeuvrable and could easily outrun the larger Chinese vessels, they first had to reverse course² and that would take some time. Su Sung, seeing that the Malays were trying to swing their craft around, realised that it was their intention to escape so he signalled for the light junks to increase their speed and cut off the Malay escape. The ten Sung junks sailed on and several of them managed to overtake the Malays and, by turning obliquely, made it very difficult for the pirates to manoeuvre in the river's narrow confines.

In spite of Tukang's undoubted excellence as a mariner, he could do nothing to prevent the Chinese from impeding his getaway. His only option was to order his sailors to try to fight their way through the Sung ships but time was against the Sri Vijayans, as every minute that they tarried brought the larger Chinese ships closer. A little success was had as a couple of Sung junks went up in flames and another was overrun by well-armed Malays who slaughtered the crew to man but these were fleeting victories and, eventually, it became clear that there could be no escape for the main body of the Chinese squadron had closed to within missile range of the little Malay flotilla. In a moment, the combatants were launching a rain of fire-arrows and stink bombs at each other and the Sri Vijayans realised, to their horror, that the Chinese ships were carrying a complement of marines, all of whom wore the distinctive uniform of the Sung Imperial Guard!

The Sri Vijayans fought bravely against a larger, better-armed force which had, by luck, caught them in a difficult position. A defeat followed that bordered on annihilation. All the Sri Vijayans - almost twenty in number - were burnt or sunk and very, very few Malays survived, even as prisoners. A week later, as Minister Su Sung was being fêted in the capital for his glorious victory in defence of the Chinese Motherland, the bloated and vitiated body of Tukang Pos was fished from the great river by a Han peasant who delivered it to the local magistrate and received three silver coins by way of reward.

South of the Huang Ho, things didn't go quite so well for the Sung. Chingis Yew, Khan of the Hsuing Nu nomads who had settled in Hubei and close ally of Yeliuy Tian-zo, continued his conquest of Tangchou, meeting no real

² i.e, the Malays are sailing west along the Huang Ho; to escape the Sung, they must turn to the east.

resistance from a terrified population who, except for a brief occupation in 1107, had avoided the wars currently wracking China. The local aristocrats, who were mostly the old-fashioned scholarly type and not the tough new military nobles, fled the area and made for Pien-Chinh.

Yet, there was more to Chingis than either the Sung or the Liao expected. He now controlled a broad swathe of north-central China - Hubei, Funiu and Tangchou - and he was not at all happy to play second fiddle to Tian-zo. Against his better judgment, Chingis had left the freedom of the steppe and had followed the Khitan tribes into the crowded confines of China, far from the places where his ancestors had lived and hunted and died. On the whole, the tribes of Hsuing Nu had profited from this migration and from the alliance with Tian-zo but there was a danger that the Khitan would come to treat them not as allies but as subjects; too, the recent setback the Liao had suffered at Chang-Ning Fu dented Khitan prestige in the eyes of the Hsuing Nu tribes and this was at a time when the size of Chingis' personal domain was increasing exponentially. The nail in the coffin of the alliance came in June of 1122 when Chingis announced that he would, henceforth, no longer respect his people's confederation with the Khitan. Instead, he was going to form a new state on the lands he had conquered - his people would no longer be circumscribed in Hubei but would rule as aristocrats over a broad domain populated by many Chinese peasants and served by educated Chinese bureaucrats.

On top of all that, the Khan of Hubei (as he now styled himself) decided to Sinicise the name of his tribe. Instead of being known as the Hsuing Nu, they would be called the Xiong Nu (Chingis was said to have been influenced in his decision to rename the tribe by one of his scores of Chinese concubines). It was not clear what the Khan hoped to achieve by this but, since all the other steppe tribes were thinking up pseudo-Chinese names, he may just have been jumping on the bandwagon.

And, down in the boring southern theatre, the Cham army advanced into Lingsi and the banks of the Pearl River. They were pleased to note that it was considerably wealthier and more populated than Lingnan.

July-October 1122: Staying in the south, the Champans spent the late Summer and early Autumn subduing Lingsi and cutting off the city of Ch'ing-Chiang.

On the Yellow Sea, Doom Fang's Sri Vijayan pirate fleet put ashore in Yen and plundered the area into the ground until October when, having stolen everything - right down to the last pig! - the Sri Vijayans mounted up and sailed away. The local folk had been on the frontline of the war a couple of decade's earlier but, since the action had shifted down to the Yangtze Valley, they'd been hoping that everything would pass them by. They were mistaken.

In Hupei, poor old Yeliu Tian-zo was left with the growing feeling that the initiative was slipping from his fingers. The Sung had demonstrated that they could maintain absolute control of China's river network; this, in turn, meant that they could descend on Hanyang at any time. At the same time, there was a Sung land army to the east in Anhui - on its own, it wasn't much to worry about but there was no telling what it could achieve if it worked in conjunction with the triumphant Sung fleet; finally, there was Chingis Yew, the wild card who might even throw in his lot with the Sung.

Too many unpredictable elements had entered into this war. The victory of Liao could no longer be guaranteed, so Tian-zo did some quite uncharacteristic: he opted for a diplomatic solution. Leaving most of his army under the command of Lay-Leng, widow of Tian-zo's son John, the Liao Emperor and his most faithful lieutenant, Boon Min, set out for Hubei and the camp of Chingis Yew in September 1122. They rode under a sacred banner of truce which not even the most barbaric of the steppe tribes would violate and, soon after crossing into Chingis' territory, were intercepted and escorted with great respect and not a little pomp into the presence of the Xiong Nu Khan of Hubei.

Yeliu Tian-zo could not really be called a skilful diplomat (unless your definition of "skilful diplomat" was someone who was loud, rude, arrogant and had a tendency to pick fights with the opposing side's negotiators) but he and Chingis had much in common - both were steppe lords with great ambitions to conquer China and both were afflicted by fears about the future of their own dynasties. So, in Chingis' great velvet yurt on a piece of land that had once been the hunting park of a Sung princeling, the two Khans talked long into the night about where the future would lead them and what benefits Chingis would gain from supporting the Liao. They broke up near dawn without reaching agreement but, after sleeping all day long, met again in the evening and argued and talked while they dined on roasted mutton and drank Chinese wine. The same process was repeated most days throughout the whole of the Winter of 1122 until, finally, the sides agreed on a mutually satisfactory formula...

The Xiong Nu Khanate would not take up arms against the Liao and Chingis would receive the hand of Lay-Leng (Tian-zo's daughter-in-law, the widow of his murdered son). The two of them would be married as soon as was feasible as a mark of the peaceful intent of the two tribes *but* the Xiong Nu and the Liao would not truly be united as allies until Tian-zo's grandson - the eight year old Li-Kai - was married to Chingis' ten year old daughter Ssima. This presented the Liao Emperor with some concern because, even amongst the steppe tribes, an eight year old was probably too young for marriage; too, Li-Kai was showing all the signs of being a perfect cretin (surprising, since his mother and father were both outstanding individuals in all respects) and Tian-zo was getting nervous about what could happen if his idiot, weakling grandson ended up married to a strong-willed woman who might

dominate him... But his back was to the wall and he had either to seize this opportunity to bring Chingis back into the fold or risk war not only against the Chinese but against his erstwhile confederates.

April-August 1123: The Sri Vijayans spent this time ravaging Lu'an, an exercise some people might have called pointless since most everything of value in that region had been looted already by the armies of Sung and Liao that swept across it. Anyway, having filched what little they could find, the Malays bugged out and headed back to Golden Sri Vijaya to spend their loot.

In the Yangtze Valley, Tian-zo returned home and resumed command of the Khitan armies to await a possible Sung naval assault on Hanyang. He would stare out at the mighty Yangtze, a highway for Sung forces cutting straight through the heart of his realm, and dream that one day the Liao might master this element as adeptly as they had mastered the horse and saddle. In the meantime, he could do little but sit back on the defensive and lick his wounds. Rats.

Down in the southwest, the defenders of Ch'ing-Chiang³ were upset to see a Cham fleet appear in the Pearl River cutting off all flow of supplies into the city. Blockaded by both land and water, it was only a matter of time until it fell to the Hindu besiegers. Sure enough, in July of 1123, the Governor was forced to send out his representatives to negotiate the surrender. Madi Vasavaj, feeling generous after his recent spate of magnificent victories, gave the tiny Sung garrison some very magnanimous terms and even allowed the Governor safe conduct into Thai territory!

With that, things quietened down in China while everyone gathered energy for the next round of the war.

The Sung Empire

Ruler: Sung Qinzong, the Divine Emperor, The Son of Heaven, the Celestial One

Capital: Kaifeng

Religion: Buddhist

The unexpected successes in the war were accompanied by unexpected diplomatic successes: the Regent, Chen Dong, was not really overflowing with soldierly skills and realised that he could best serve the Empire by heading north to the much-neglected "holdout" province of Bao Ding. It had been allowed to drift away during the dark days when Kai-Feng had been cut off on the landward side Empire but had, through luck or some other agency, managed to avoid the terrible fate of conquest by the Khitan. It also happened to be home to a great number of fortifications and a large local militia force. Indeed, the Regent's main goal in visiting the region was to secure its valuable military resources for the empire. With next to no effort, the magnates of Bao Ding, who had enjoyed virtual independence, were induced to return to the Sung fold and to pay homage to the new Emperor.

Tragically, the Regent died of a fever in the Summer of 1123, which was quite convenient because Sung Qinzong - now at the ripe old age of 15 - chose this moment to step into his patrimony and begin exercising Imperial power. The young Emperor was an incredibly handsome and magnetic lad; the peasants and commoners absolutely adored him and Qinzong, apparently happy to indulge the masses, gladly allowed himself to be borne through the streets of Kai-Feng so that all the masses could behold the Celestial Emperor and kowtow before him. This offended some of the more conservative elements in the Sung Court who thought that Imperial dignity ought to preclude an Emperor from flaunting himself before the eyes of filthy low-class scum. Qinzong didn't see it that way; though barely more than a child, he believed fiercely (as his father had before him) that the future of China could only be secured if the goodwill and commitment of the people could be secured. It was important, therefore, that they should see His Celestial Majesty and realise that he was not merely a monarch but the embodiment of China and of all that China might be.

Funnily enough, it seemed to work. Although the Emperor displayed no great military genius nor the cunning words of a diplomat, he was truly beloved by his people - and even more so given that the first victories over the Liao had come during his reign! Surely this was a sign that Qinzong could finish the task his father had started and that, with the favour of the gods and his ancestors, he might restore China's glory!

And, apart from that, the only other interesting thing of note came when General Di, training his veteran Guardsmen in Anhui, developed a new form of hand-to-hand combat based on the use of the lance or spear. He called this style Shan Shou - the Eagle Claw system - and insisted on teaching it to all his subordinate officers who, in turn, were meant to teach it to their men.

The Liao Empire

Ruler: Yeliu Tian-zo, Khan of the Jurchen, Liao Emperor of China

h is now a port of the Pearl River.



Capital: Hanyang (in Hupei)
Religion: Buddhist

Defeat in Anhui and rebellion from the Hsuing Nu allies - these were the developments that took up the Liao Emperor's attention! There was hard diplomacy with the mutinous Khan of Hubei and much talk of dynastic marriages to cement the Khan's into the ruling family of the Liao Empire. An agreement was reached under which Chingis promised to remain neutral in the short-term but, in return for his own marriage to Lay-Leng and his daughter's marriage to Tian-zo's grandson, he would eventually integrate the Khanate into the Liao Empire completely.

The problem with the arrangement was that Tian-zo's grandson was mentally deficient. He was only eleven in 1125 and yet obviously far less bright than a child of his age ought to be. Too, he was sick - his body wracked by epilepsy - and he seemed unable or unwilling to learn the lessons of statecraft and war which ought to have been second nature to the grandson and heir of a Khitan warlord! Tian-zo was left to pull his beard and worry for the future of his bloodline...

Lay-Leng, for her part, was left in command of the defences of the capital and governance of the realm while her father-in-law went off on his excursion to Hubei. She proved very competent at directing the armies and organising defensive measures but, in government, was too fond of appointing her favourites to ministerial and administrative positions which were beyond their abilities and completely failed to oversee many important aspects of the administration of the Empire. On the whole, this was not fatal - the Chinese bureaucrats didn't exactly need a Khitan barbarian to tell them how to govern! - but it was worthy of note.

The Xiong Nu Khanate of Hubei

Ruler: Chingis Yew, Khan of Hubei
Capital: None
Religion: Asiatic Pagan

The leader of the Hsuing Nu nomads revolted against his Khitan allies in September 1122 and promptly adopted a new name for his tribal grouping - the Xiong Nu which, to Chingis' uncultured barbarian ears, sounded much more Chinese than the old moniker. Over the Winter of 1122/23, Tian-zo himself came on an embassy to Hubei to beg for the continued friendship and arrangements were made. (*See Liao entry of the Great Chinese War for details*)

The Khaganate of the Uighurs

Ruler: Temu Lin, *the Treacherous*, Khagan of the Uighurs, Emperor of the Tanguts
Capital: Xinghou
Religion: Asiatic Pagan

The big news for the Uighurs was the fall of Lo-Yang. Temu Lin and his followers, with much amusement, contrasted the ease with which they had captured two of the Sung Empire's most pre-eminent cities with the miserable failure of the Liao to achieve anything against Chang-Ning-Fu.

Indeed, the Khagan was so encouraged by his successes that he began to give serious thought to whether he, too, ought to lay claim to the Throne of China - after all, China now had Liao and Sung dynasties, both claiming to be the rightful rulers of the Empire and bearers of Heaven's Mandate; there was even a small movement that believed the Thais of Nan Chao were now the inheritors of the Imperial Mantle. No concrete decision was taken but the Khagan seemed quite taken with the idea of proclaiming himself head of the Huihu dynasty and the new Emperor of China.

Old Temu Lin was brought back down to earth in 1125 when, in Kansu, out on the edge of the Uighur Khaganate, the peasants rose in revolt, showing up the difficulties the Uighurs were having in ruling a wide domain. The local folk in Kansu realised that representatives of the Khagan rarely, if ever, showed their faces in the area and that their tribute and taxes were, for the most part, pocketed by the provincial aristocrats and overlords instead of being sent to the Khagan. That being so, they reckoned that the Uighurs would not notice or care if the region simply threw off the final vestiges of Temu Lin's suzerainty.

The Korean Kingdom of Silla



Ruler: Yejong Wang, King of Silla
Capital: Kai-Ching
Religion: Buddhist

Korea remained peaceful and isolated, aloof from the slaughter, chaos and conflict in neighbouring lands. The officers of the government and court, listening to the tales their merchants brought out of

China and Japan, were thankful that, by a mixture of luck and skilful policy, the Wang Kings had managed to keep the Koreans from sharing the fate of the Chinese.

As usual, all of the monarch's attention and considerable energy was fixed on internal matters. In the rugged frontier province of Anshan, large allotments of freshly-cleared farmland were doled out to the great noble houses and much peasant labour was poured into sweeping away forests and draining marshes to support the ever-growing population. In the capital itself, many of the scions of these land-owning aristocratic clans were promoted to offices and ministries in the civil service.

Apart from that, the only real activity amongst the Koreans came in the form a concerted diplomatic effort directed towards gaining the favour of the Manchurian tribesmen of Sikhote. They had recently agreed to become allies of the Kingdom of Silla but that was not enough for King Yejong, who coveted their prosperous little region. So, a diplomatic visit was undertaken by the King himself - with his two sons, Crown Prince Shang Ti Wang and Prince Shan Hai Ching Wang, no less! - and efforts made to incorporate the region fully into the Kingdom.

At first, the native Khans were anything but impressed by the overtures of the weakling Koreans but things took a better turn when Yejong offered to marry both his sons to women from Sikhote. Now, the Koreans might be gutless, city-dwelling poltroons but they were also very rich and the tribal leaders, being canny folk, realised that close political association with them would probably bring some considerable wealth into the hands of the people Sikhote. Too, if both the Princes of Silla were to take wives from Sikhote, it was almost certain that the Korean Crown would eventually pass into the hands of someone who was half-Manchurian... In effect, Korea would be handed over to the Manchurians! So, after much discussion, Yejong's entreaties met with acceptance and, in 1125, Sikhote was fully incorporated as the northernmost province of the Kingdom of Silla. In the aftermath, a few of the more forward-thinking khans and chieftains contemplated abandoning their home in the north and moving to the Korean capital so as to be closer to the centre of power.

The Thai Kingdom of Nan Chao

Ruler: Hsien Tsung, Thai King of Nan-Chao

Capital: T'ai-Li

Religion: Buddhist

Slept.

The Malla Kingdom of Nepal

Ruler: Mahendra Malla, King of Nepal

Capital: Kathmandu

Religion: Hindu

Slept.

Southeast Asia

The Hindu Kingdom of Champa

Ruler: Jaya Indravarman II, King of the Cham

Capital: Vijaya

Religion: Hindu

Spurred on by the ease with which he had prostrated the Anamese and feeling that the current weakness of the Sung was something to be seized upon, Jaya Indravarman decreed that his dignity and honour could no longer brook the insults he had received from the Chinese regions of Lingsi and Lingnan. The pathetic provincial rulers, hanging on the periphery of their decaying empire, would be shown the fate that awaited anyone who disparaged the emissaries of the King of Champa. Three thousand new archers were raised and sent north to reinforce Lord Vasavaj's already powerful army. (*The Champan adventures can be found under The Great Chinese War.*)

At home, less martial endeavours were undertaken. There was a minor expansion of the existing irrigation network around Vijaya which helped increase the revenues and rice yields from the King's personal estates. Further to the north, more than a thousand labourers were set to continue work on clearing more land for the great coast-hugging postal road that was to run from Vijaya to Thang Long. And, in that latter city, efforts continued to win the locals over to Hinduism; Brahmin priests wandered through the Buddhist districts proclaiming loudly that anyone who converted would receive rewards - promotion to a higher caste, tax concessions, even offices in the new Champan-controlled administration - but it was all to little effect. Hardly a single new convert was won for Hinduism. Nor was this lack of respect for Hindu belief restricted to the conquered Buddhist lands of the north - at home, even in Cochin and around Vijaya, there was a marked decline in the estimation paid to the

Brahmins and some heterodox thinkers even suggested that the cult of the Deva Raja of neighbouring Kambuja might be an appropriate model for Champans...

In His Majesty's household, there was a mixture of good and bad news. Two new children were delivered, a daughter in 1121 and a son in 1123, but this was offset by the death of the Queen from malaria in 1124.

The Khmer Empire of Kambuja

Ruler: Jayavarman IV, the Deva Raja, God-Emperor of the Khmer

Capital: Angkor Borei

Religion: Hindu

The Deva Raja slept long and deep and dreamt a great dream. He dreamt of the verdant rice fields around the great wood-built city of Angkor Borei, and of the many happy people of his Empire. They worshipped him as a divine entity, the physical manifestation of Shiva, and this was good. Yet something came to spoil his idyllic creation - a mysterious blight growing from the banks of the Mekong. Under its merciless touch, the sacred waters of the temples turned black with corruption. In his dream, the Deva Raja witnessed his precious people lying amongst rancid paddy fields, their bodies bloated and decomposing. The horror of it brought the God_King out of his slumber.

Each night, the dream would come again; for eight nights, the Deva Raja was tormented by visions of death and for eight days he fretted over the meaning of it all. Swarms of advisors sought to find some logic in the dreams or to uncover a hidden portent, other than the obvious. A dozen explanations were offered and the visions showed no signs of abating. On the ninth night, the dream did not frighten the Emperor into wakefulness. Instead, a warm and glowing cumulus of living fire spread forth from the jungle. Dancing across foetid fields came three Naga⁴, and on their backs they bore a great stone, worn smooth by the ever-flowing waters of the river. The God-King recognised it instantly. It was Shivalinga, Before the Naga and their sacred burden, the blight receded and men and women, lying dead and rotten, were given the breath of life and their bodies restored to wholeness and health. The Naga pursued the hateful corruption back to the river and, setting the great stone on the banks, they plunged into the deep-flowing waters that were their home.

The Deva Raja needed no advisor to tell him what this all signified. The Naga represented the Three Perfections of Shiva: Parameshvara, Parashakti and Parashiva. The vision made clear that there was a danger growing, and that it would spread death and destruction across Kambuja. Yet it could be checked by the power of the God-Made-Flesh... *If* he would but heed the warning. Of course, the Deva Raja's advisors, naturally, agreed with the God_King's interpretation, relieved that their beloved ruler and deity was not upset by their lack of prescience.

In recognition of the significance of his prophesying dreams, the Deva Raja commanded that a shrine be constructed on the spot where the Naga had deposited their Shivalinga, by the banks of the Mekong. The God_King intended that this place should become the centre of a mighty temple-fortress complex and that it would be called Banteay Naga.

Casting a critical eye over the more martial aspects of the Empire, the Deva Raja concluded that the Imperial forces were not adequate to face whatever evil was about to afflict the land. That being so, a thousand of His Majesty's noblemen were formed into a new division - all were superb horsemen, equipped with only the finest mounts and armour - and to each bold cavalier two squires were given, armed in a somewhat lighter fashion, who would attend to the nobleman's needs while on campaign and ride beside him into battle.

In the more prosaic matters of governance, His Majesty abandoned all efforts at extracting tribute from the hill tribes of Hmong. The pittance of revenue that Khmer administrators gathered didn't begin to offset the costs of sending people there to gather the tribute in the first place; too, the Hmong tribes were a bellicose people and the continued extraction of money would surely drive them to hostility in the long-term.

Back at Preah Khan and Angkor Borei, the great urban centres of the Empire, the walls and moats were improved and expanded; new approach forts were established and a corps of three thousand sappers was set to garrison the capital so that, by 1125, the Deva Raja could behold the defences of his capital and feel confident that there wasn't army in the region that could have hoped to take these cities. Whatever evils were to befall Kambuja, they would find the Deva Raja or his subjects unprepared.

Further south, in Rhan Pang, there was a marked increase in mercantile and industrial activity at the town of Oc Eo, at the mouth of the great Mekong. For the past few decades, local peasants had slowly been drawn to the

⁴ Naga are a type of Buddhist serpent deities. Although not a major part of modern "orthodox" Buddhist theology, they are hugely significant in Buddhist folklore. See also: See: <http://www.iol.ie/~taeger/bio/ngodesses.html>, <http://www.buddhism.nidirect.co.uk/naga.htm> and <http://www.illuminatedlantern.com/snakes/page2.html>

town and its environs in droves to serve the needs of the mercantile class; priests and monks had come, too, to set up their places of worship for the good of the people's souls and in the hope of gaining the patronage of the rich traders who sailed the high seas in search of commerce and fortune. By the end of 1125, the town had grown to the point where the God-King was compelled to dispatch a Governor and civil servants to oversee the administration of the city and regulate the trade that passed through it and from to Sung China and distant Java.

In family matters, things were less than good for the God-King. His eldest son died in 1121, at the age 23, after being bitten by a venomous snake. This caused much sadness throughout the realm except, it must be noted, on the part of the Deva Raja's brother - Pakele - who showed nothing but joy at the death of his nephew and competitor as heir. The acquisition of a beautiful new slave-girl as wife for the God-King did nothing to lift his spirits, nor did the birth of a couple of daughters in 1121 and 1122.

The Malay Empire of Sri Vijaya



Ruler: Nyalatengorak, *The Flaming Skull*, Malayu Great King of Sri Vijaya

Capital: Sri Vijaya

Religion: Buddhist

The most important thing for the Malays was to spend all the excellent loot they'd picked up in China. Huge sums of gold, torn from the dying corpse of China, were poured into nearly every aspect of life in Sri Vijaya - better weapons for the Great King's warriors; higher wages for shipwrights to attract more competent workers; the hiring of many more bureaucrats and administrators... If it moved, the King threw money at it! Except for the scholars, of course. They had to make do with a pittance - barely more than some spare change - which Nyalatengorak gave them, apparently, as an afterthought.

With the loot dished out to all and sundry, the Great King's next goal was to secure yet *more* loot so several expeditions were kitted out - an allied force of sixteen warships, under the Hindu Raja of Johor, was to head up the Yangtze towards Chang-Ning-Fu; a flotilla under that infamous buccaneer, Tukang Pos, was to raid up the Grand Canal and strike at the Sung capital; the largest fleet, more than eighty ships under the Crown Prince Hukumantaring Doom Fang, would sail around the Yellow Sea coast and wreak havoc there! (*See the Great Chinese War for details of what the Sri Vijayans got up to!*).

In other news, a very great number of Malay colonists were sent off from the capital to the northern coast of Aceh where, on the Nicobar Sea, they built a new port complex where Sri Vijayan ships could moor and careen, load and unload cargo, undergo customs inspections and so on. In effect, the Great King had constructed a whole new entrepôt for trade from India. And the name of this new port? Skullvijaya!⁵ It was only a modest city at the moment but perhaps, one day, it would grow to match Sri Vijaya itself. Or, there again, maybe not.

And while this was going on, Buddhist monks were frantically active in Utara. The local animists and tribesmen, for some reason, began responding in large numbers to the teachings and overtures of Buddhist clergy who had come up from the south to bring enlightenment to the ignorant. In the period between 1121 and 1125, the Buddhist monks converted almost as many people in Utara as they had during the whole of the preceding two decades combined! By the end, maybe a third of the natives had embraced the teachings Buddha (some rejected their traditional beliefs entirely while others neatly combined Buddhist teachings and local tribal beliefs).

For the ruling families of the Kingdom, there was some sad news. The King's daughter, the charming Sakahati, was married off to the eldest son of the Raja of Johor in 1121 but, scarcely two years later, she died quite suddenly from a fever.

The Salendra Kingdom of Java

Ruler: Jayabhaya I Salendra, King of Java

Capital: Sunda

Religion: Buddhist

Things in Java were even quieter than in Pagan! A whole bunch of new fields were brought into use in Pajajaran leading to the production of much more rice to feed the area's burgeoning populations. Too, eight new forts were built and garrisoned by order of the King, although His Majesty did not explain whether these defences were geared to protect Java from foreign invasion or from domestic unrest.

The Kingdom of Pagan

Ruler: Kyanzittha, King of Pagan

⁵ Yeah, I know. But you think I'm gonna argue with Tom? He invented the game!

Capital: Pagan
Religion: Buddhist

Quiet times for Pagan. 1121 saw the arrival of a Khmer ambassador by the name of Siembaýla; for some reason, there were certain errors of protocol and this gentleman was initially introduced as a vassal of the Deva Raja instead of as a formal emissary from Angkor Borei. In any case, the mistake was soon cleared up and Siembaýla was able to asseverate the goodwill and peaceful intent of the Divine Emperor of the Khmer.

Down in Mon, the bustling east coast town of Chaiya was granted a charter confirming its status as a city and port, under the protection and suzerainty of the King of Pagan; in short order, a royal governor was appointed to superintend the city.

In diplomatic news, the King sent the leading lights of his court - Bohmu Aung and Amo Tung - off to perform diplomatic duties in Sagaing and Manipur, respectively. Although both of these gentlemen were quite remarkable and talented, in their own indiosyncratic ways, neither was particularly gifted as a diplomat. Bohmu managed to infuriate the hill tribesmen of Sagaing with his haughty, condescending attitude and his attempts to intimidate the locals by threatening that, should they fail to bow before the King of Pagan, they would likely be invaded, just like Kayah. Amo annoyed the Burmese tribes of Manipur so badly that they wanted to kill him and, in fact, he only escaped because the daughter of one of the leading chieftains fell in love with him and warned him of her father's plans. Hijinks ensued and Amo escaped back to the capital with his skin, but not his reputation, intact.

While his ministers were messing up his carefully-laid political initiatives, the King himself was engaged in altogether more wholesome activities. Many thousands of the King's personal slaves were manumitted, granted the status of free peasants and given allotments of land to farm. The point of this exercise, ostensibly, was to reduce the Kingdom's dependence on the labour of slaves but its effects were quite limited. Apart from this, His Majesty continued the process - started a decade earlier - of stacking the civil service and military with officers drawn from the households of those noblemen who were known to be particularly loyal to the Crown.

India

Vikramaditya's War against the Chandelas⁶

January-September 1121: The situation in Central India had changed - now the Chandelas were about to take the offensive while the army of the Chalukyas, under their brilliant Raja Vikramaditya, skulked in Satava at the northern end of the Deccan plateau. The Chalukyas had tried hard to finish the Chandelas off but they had failed completely and Vikram was unwilling to waste more of his limited resources chasing the decisive victory which had so far eluded him. The Chandelas, on the other hand, under their Raja Burman, were fired up to take vengeance on the enemies who had invaded and occupied their lands and stood ready to liberate the disputed province of Kakatiya. The Cholas of the south, meanwhile, had decided to assist their neighbour, Vikramaditya, by sending a column of troops north to help defend Manyakheta.

That was the state of things at the start of 1121 but, of course, this war was never going to be a straightforward affair...

In February of 1121, Raja Burman Chandela was struck down by the blade of an assassin while preparing for the commencement of this year's campaign season. (*See Chandela entry for details!*) With the death of the Raja and no clear heir, the whole state looked for a few weeks as though it stood on the verge of collapse. Burman's clan was a large one and he left many distant relatives, with their own powerful retinues, who hoped to claim the crown for themselves. Faced with the possible splintering of the nation into a number of different and mutually hostile factions, Burman's widow, Rani Pulkita, decided to raise her own claim to the throne (this was not so strange - in addition to being Burman's wife, she was also his cousin, the daughter of the Raja of Kakatiya and the sister of Vikramaditya's wife). Some Princes of the Chandela clan objected to Pulkita's emergence as their new leader but she was supported by a very large force of mercenaries which her husband had hired for the war against the Chalukyas and, by the end of March, had cowed all opposition. As April opened, it was Pulkita who led the massed armies of Khajuraho to liberate Kakatiya...

April through to June saw a flurry of activity as Vikram rushed down from the plateau with about four thousand infantry and six thousand cavalry to defend Kakatiya and repulse Pulkita's invasion. He had conjectured that the

⁶ I have used the terms "Chalukya" and "Kalyani" fairly interchangeably in the Newsfax; for anyone who's thrown by this, the former term refers to the King's clan/ dynasty while the latter term refers to the actual kingdom which the dynasty rules. A comparable example would be the interchangeable use of "Hapsburg" and "Austria".

armies of the Chandelas would be comparable to his own so it was a shock to behold the size of Pulkita's host: twelve thousand infantry of all kinds (inc. five thousand mercenaries) and eight thousand cavalry, a quarter of whom were light mounted archers.

Numbers definitely favoured the Chandelas but Vikramaditya was a confident man, certain that his own excellent martial capabilities would more than compensate for his lack of numbers. In normal times, he might have been correct but the Chandelas turned out to have quite excellent intelligence - whenever and wherever Vikram's army moved, enemy scouts and spies would report his location; his numbers were always known in Pulkita's camp; worst of all, the brilliant Chandelan agents were even able to funnel false information back into Vikram's hands! And it was on this canvas that the campaign for Kakatiya took place. Over the Summer, a score of small battles and skirmishes beyond number had taken place and, without exception, the Chalukyas had the worst of it. Their losses mounted and mounted, with desertion taking an ever growing toll and anyone who left the safety of the camp falling prey to roving bands of Chandelans, so that, as August came to a close, the Chalukya Raja had lost well over half his total effectives and was obliged to retire to Karnata in disgrace. Pulkita, meanwhile, could point to her victory and the liberation of her home province of Kakatiya as evidence of her own competence to rule (even though, in point of fact, she was an extremely poor commander who had saved from total defeat only by weight of numbers and the overwhelming superiority of her intelligence services).

While this excitement was taking place, a most unexpected development took place. Raja Samirjit of Kakatiya - who had nominally been in the service of Virkam despite defecting from his cause once before - had popped up in Kosala, apparently sent to stir up dissent amongst the local princes .But, upon hearing that his beloved daughter had become Rani of Khajuraho, he had ridden straight to Warangal to pledge himself, once more, a loyal servant of the Chandela clan (of which he was, in fact, a member).

Rani Pulkita was naturally pleased to hear of her father's return to the fold, not least because he was probably the only general in this part of India who could match the martial brilliance of Vikram.

April-September 1122: As the campaigning season opened, Pulkita marched her army into Karnata, up onto the Deccan plateau, towards the Kalyani Chalukya capital, Manyakheta. Unfortunately for Pulkita, Vikramaditya was a much more active leader than she; while she and her men had rested in Kakatiya at the end of 1121 and beginning of 1122, Vikram had vigorously reorganised his mauled army, recruited some replacement troops, dragged stragglers back into the ranks and generally brought the army up to a higher state of readiness. On top of that, a Cholan army had crossed from Vengi into Karnata so that Vikram now had an extra four thousand cavalry (equally split between lancers and archers) and four thousand Tamil infantry (three-quarters of whom were spearmen and the rest bow-armed skirmishers). Thus, despite his severe losses in Kakatiya the previous year, Vikram could boast a formidable army that was only slightly smaller than Pulkita's.

It was early June by the time the Chandelas had pressed up from the plains of Kakatiya. As in the previous year, Chandela spies proved they were second-to-none and provided excellent details of the composition and location of the enemy; this advantage was at least partially offset by the preponderance of light horsemen in the Cholan-Chalukyan force and the fact that Vikram, fighting in his homeland, had an intimate knowledge of the area's terrain and could count on the firm support of the local peasantry. Yet, Pulkita's network of spies allowed her a single unqualified advantage in that she was able, by subtle and devious means, to spread disinformation in Vikramaditya's camp to mislead him about her attentions.

It was by just this tactic - the judicious use of false information - that Vikram and his allies were induced to concentrate their armies in the immediate vicinity of the capital city, for Pulkita's agents had let it be known that she intended to march directly on Manyakheta to bring about a final battle. But, in fact, Pulkita ignored the capital, marching instead southwest across Karnata, merrily despoiling and burning as she went. Irrespective of her personal lack of military nous, she understood that much could be achieved if she could interpose her army on the lines of communication between Vikramaditya and his Tamil allies in the south of India so her goal, rather than simply hacking away at the Chalukyan capital, was to draw Vikram southwards to a ground of her choosing where he would have to fight to protect his routes to his Tamil allies.

Eventually, it dawned on Vikramaditya that he had been deceived and that his capital was not the target of the invader. He ordered his forces to break camp and led them down the well-worn road south of the capital. If the Chandelas would not attack directly, Vikram would go and winkle the devils out! Yet, Pulkita had something up her sleeve. Her widespread web of spies and agents kept her informed, in meticulous detail, of the numbers and route of march of the combined Chola-Chalukya army and her scouts had provided an excellent description of the topography of the land. With such information, she was able to pick a salutary spot for an ambush and arrayed her Khajurahi army on a ridge, just west of the road from Manyakheta, near a moderately-sized town called Mehubnagar. The Rani knew it would not be possible to take the approaching army completely by surprise but she believed her screen of light cavalry could keep her exact location hidden from the enemy until it was too late and that she would be able to spring an attack on the approaching Chalukya army before it was properly prepared and that, in this way, she could gain a potentially decisive advantage.

During the first week of August, with the monsoon rains turning the whole of the Deccan into a morass of mud, the mounted vanguard of the exhausted Chola-Chalukya army, under the command of Crown Prince Someshwara, came into contact with Chandela outriders. Some skirmishes followed, mostly pointless and indecisive affair; Someshwara, aware now that the enemy was somewhere ahead of him, probed ahead again and again but gained no concrete report that he could bring to his father. For his part, Vikramaditya exercised his full brilliance as a general and fully understood what his sister-in-law was attempting; Pulkita was nearby, he knew, and battle would surely follow soon. Nevertheless, with his scouts bested by the enemy and Chandela spies apparently hiding in every tree, his advance was effectively blind and he could do nothing but try to make sure his army would be ready when the enemy finally attacked. As luck would have it, the Raja did not have long to wait.

On a typically wet monsoon day in mid-August 1122, Vikramaditya's force, still in its marching column, came within sight of the army of Rani Chandela Pulkita of Khajuraho about fifteen hundred yards away. Atop the ridge that Pulkita had picked out, the Khajurahis had deployed for battle (they, enjoying superior intelligence, had been warned of the Chalukya approach and had been able to quit their camp and prepare for battle ahead of time). Vikram and his junior commanders rushed to deploy their regiments before the Khajurahis could begin the attack - but he did not have much time for, even as he ordered his men to leave the road and form their line of battle on open ground, Pulkita had ordered her men to advance!

Under the banner of the Chandelas, Rani Pulkita led an army that was broadly the same as the one she had commanded in Kakatiya the previous year. Its losses in that campaign had been light and had largely been absorbed by the corps of mercenaries she employed. Serving as her chief aide was General Mandar, a middle-aged veteran of the recent wars. Opposing her, Vikram had a modest force of two thousand spearmen, around four thousand mercenary horse archers, a bare five hundred lancers and his personal household regiments of six hundred armoured spearmen and six hundred horse archers (all the mounted forces came under the command of his able son, Crown Prince Someshwara). Assisting Vikramaditya was an allied Tamil army under General Keeran - four thousand horse and four thousand foot.

Vikram was able to get his brilliantly disciplined household infantry into position quite quickly, placing them as a block between the advancing Chandelas and the main body of his army which was still in column on the road, but they were a heavy and immobile force, not good for manoeuvring on the muddy ground. A more fleet enemy could probably bypass them entirely. Too, they were fairly small in number, despite their excellent equipment and famous skill-at-arms, so it was not beyond the pale that they might be overwhelmed in the first rush. Well, Vikram was no coward. He had lived his whole life as a soldier and he was not about to stop now - he stood with his personal regiment, sword in hand and shield strapped to his arm, and promised himself that he would sooner die here than retreat again. It turned out retreat would not be necessary - limited numbers of enemy skirmishers pressed on towards Vikram's regiment but, from all appearances, the main Chandela battleline was breaking up before it had even quit the ridge!

The great and terrible ambush which Rani Pulkita had planned had, in the end, come to nothing. A mixture of extremely bad weather and her own inability to keep a firm control over her army had led to the whole plan breaking down within minutes of coming into first contact with the enemy. As the Rani looked on in horror, some regiments simply halted, others waltzed off in the wrong direction (perhaps confused as to what their actual target should be or perhaps just following the whim of their commander); only a bare few pressed on towards the Chalukyas in accordance with the battle plan and they were too few in number to make much impact. Why, even the mercenary cavalry (which the Rani had kept under her personal command on the right of the battleline) could not charge across the muddy ground and only managed to plod very slowly off the ridge and vaguely head in the direction of the enemy.

The confusion amongst the Chandelas allowed the Chalukya-Chola army the time they needed to form their lines. A few of the Khajurahi units stuck to the plan their queen had laid out and pressed forward towards the enemy but their attacks were uncoordinated and piecemeal so they were driven back with little difficulty as more and more troops (and particularly the allied Tamils) formed up into battle formation and joined Vikram's household infantry on the field. The only truly determined attack came a full two hours after the two armies had sighted each other - some two and a half thousand mercenary troops under the Khajurahi General Mandar stomped across the muddy field, crashed into the Tamil line and struggled with them, in the teeming rain, for thirty minutes before their morale gave out and they fled the field. Other Chandela foot regiments were caught unsupported and in the open by the very light Chalukya and Chola horse archers, whose small and nimble mounts were not troubled by the sucking mud in the way that chargers were. These unfortunate infantrymen could move only very slowly, whether advancing or retreating, and suffered grievously from the bows of the enemy.

But the worst had been saved for last. As Rani Pulkita watched, she saw her whole battle plan turning to disaster. There was no other course but to drive her heavy mercenary horsemen forward in a frontal assault on the Tamils. In spite of the horrific condition of the ground and the difficulty that heavier horses would experience when travelling across such boggy terrain, the mercenaries had enough faith in Pulkita to follow her but they hadn't got halfway towards their objective before they came under sustained arrow fire from Chola skirmishers, both mounted and on foot. The mercenaries panicked and many tried to flee but only succeeded in getting bogged

down further. Her Majesty desperately tried to rally her cavalry but was struck from her horse in the confusion and, as she lay prostrate in the mud of the field, she was trampled to death by her own troops!

The *Battle of Mehbubnagar* had begun with much promise but had turned into a catastrophe of unforeseeable proportions. General Mandar, having recovered from his earlier failure, desperately tried to rally what was left of the army and led them off the field to relative safety. The army left behind most of its mercenary contingents and a large number of native Khajurahi troops but more still were lost during the weeks following the battle as they deserted the ranks and fled back home. Perhaps the most important loss, though, was that of Rani Pulkita herself whose leadership had, by turns, prevented civil war in Khajuraho and liberated Kakatiya but had finally come to grief here on the plains of the Deccan.

The battered remnants of the army marched back down to Kakatiya where, to everyone's surprise, Pulkita's father, Samirjit, had proclaimed himself the new Raja of Khajuraho and Head of the Chandela Clan. The Chalukyas, following their victory, were in no mood to pursue the enemy and contented themselves with returning to Manyakheta and enjoying another brief respite from the horror of this interminable war.⁷

The Pala Kingdom of Bengal

Ruler: Rampala "The Great", Maharaja of Bengal

Capital: Bihar

Religion: Buddhist

As usual, the Maharaja kept away from the eyes of his subjects, overseeing matters of state and government from the depths of his great palace in Bihar. Apart from his usual pursuits of administering his teeming realm, high in Rampala's mind was the question of a successor. He had three sons but they ranged in age from two to nine years of age and, so, were too young to be considered for the Crown. This had left the Maharaja to fall back on his eldest daughter - the Princess Hema Malini - who, whatever her other failings, was now fourteen and was the appropriate age to begin acting as the heir to the throne (indeed, she had already been proclaimed heir in 1116).

Yet, as the Princess had matured, Rampala and others at Court had begun to realise that she was perhaps not the ideal choice as successor. She lacked any great intellect or nous and had neither flair nor inclination for matters of state or war; to make matters worse, the girl who was being earmarked as the future Maharani of Bengal was not even particularly attractive but retained a very chubby frame, acne-marked skin and a slowness of wit that rendered conversation with her a chore. Nevertheless, until such times as one of the Maharaja's other children (preferably a male one) came of age, she was the closest thing to an heir that the Pala dynasty possessed.

In another of the great families of the realm, the Lord Protector General Mushara, who had masterminded the destruction of the Sena armies two decades earlier, died in 1123 at the age of fifty-seven. His death, from a massive heart attack, came suddenly but was not entirely surprising given his advancing years and the way that his predilection for feasting, drinking and debauchery had weakened his once strong body. In theory, General Mushara should have been succeeded by his eldest son, for the office of Lord Protector had been made hereditary by the Maharaja shortly after the last war, but since Mushara's son had no more potential than Rampala's daughter, this small matter of law was swept aside.

In other matters, great wide stretches of the countryside around Bihar were irrigated, new storehouses were built to hold the bounty of the fertile paddies and everywhere the population seemed to be growing. In a time of such growth, the military was also augmented as His Majesty ordered that some three thousand new cavalrymen be raised to serve under the Royal Banner. This augmentation of the army meant that the Palas were now able to call upon the largest mounted army in the whole of India.

Down in Kalinga, Buddhist monks and priests carried out missionary work amongst the Hindu nobles. Initially, the great similarities and close historical relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism fired the missionaries with enthusiasm for, they reckoned, it would surely be easy to convince the Hindus to embrace a religion that was so analogous to their own. By a quirk of fate, the opposite turned out to be true: the natives of Kalinga, in general, did not view Buddhism as a real religion but as a philosophical offshoot of Hinduism which could offer little or nothing that was not already found in Hindu religious teachings.

⁷ GM comment is required: Pulkita was a very poor military leader and had far too many troops under her command (even the presence of a second general did not ameliorate the situation). During the battle in Kakatiya, this "command and control" shortfall was not a problem because the negative modifiers were more than made up for by positive modifiers gained from superior cavalry and intelligence plus the fact that Kakatiya was friendly to the Chandelas. In Karnata, the Chandelas no longer enjoyed either cavalry superiority or a friendly local population so not even their excellent BA rolls erased the negative modifiers they accrued.

The Sena Kingdom of Assam

Ruler: Sena Rahamjit, Raja of Assam

Capital: none

Religion: Hindu

Slept.

The Tamil Empire of the Cholas

Ruler: Chola Nagarajan Maharaja, the King of Kings, Emperor of the South

Capital: Trivandrum

Religion: Hindu

The Regent's first act in 1121 was to sign a new defensive treaty with the Chalukyas of Kalyana. The two states had, in previous decades, enjoyed a fairly cool relationship but the previous Maharaja, Gajadhar, had worked hard to improve links with the powerful empire of Vikramaditya. His second act was to translate this treaty in deeds by sending a large contingent of Tamil soldiers north, to help defend the territory of the Chalukyas from the violent attention of the vengeful Chandelas.

Continuing to maintain the traditional Cholan interest in Seylan, the Regent assembled a diplomatic mission under the minister Arivu. Arivu found, upon reaching the strife-riven island, that the northern and southern parts of the island were now, for all practical purposes, at war with each other.⁸ The Cholan emissaries saw a great opportunity to gain Seylan's allegiance by exploiting the northern Tamils' ancient fear of domination by the Sinhalese Kings of the south. Vague promises of Chola protection were given and, in return, annual tribute was wrung out of the Tamil Princes of the island.

These were the only major political activities that the Regent undertook and, in 1123, when the new Maharaja came of age, he peacefully stepped down from his office and handed all the reins of state over to Nagarajan Chola. The ex-Regent, Arathan Cholanadan, remained at court and in the service of his new Maharaja (who, being young and inexperienced, was glad to have a practised politician close to hand, and especially one whose faithfulness had already been proven).

Away from the lofty heights of the Imperial Court, the massive urban centres of southern India grew yet further as both Mangalobohu and the capital, Trivandrum, benefited from the impressive volume of trade flowing into the Empire of the Cholas. Members of all castes were profiting, to a greater or lesser extent, by moving into cities - for the lowly Sudra serving class, there was the chance of a change in occupation and of learning a lucrative trade while the comparatively prosperous farmers of the Vaisya class embraced the chance to engage in commerce. Even the Kshatriya aristocracy, who already had enormous holdings in the rural hinterland, found that they had something to gain from investing their money in purchasing land and buildings in the city which could then be rented out to the lower castes. Boom times in southern India....

The Chalukyan Kingdom of Kalyana



Vikramaditya VI
Chalukya

Ruler: Chalukya Vikramaditya VI, Raja of Kalyana, Head of the Clan of the Chalukyas

Capital: Manyakheta

Religion: Hindu

The war, the war - that was *almost* all Vikramaditya could think about. So much of the kingdom's reserves of gold and manpower were poured away to raise new regiments for the war that there was scarcely a coin or a man to spare for any other purpose, but the Raja felt that an end to the war might possibly be in sight so, somehow or other, several hundred labourers and engineers were dragged away from military tasks and set to work on Vikramaditya's ambitious road-building scheme with which he planned to link the northern and southern parts of the Deccan.

In more militaristic matters, the fortifications of the great ports of Sindabur and Manjurur, on the Malabar Coast, were extended. Given that these cities were quite far from the cockpit of the current war, there was something of a fuss - did Vikram have so little confidence that he actually expected these cities to come under attack by the Chandelas? Or did he, perhaps, expect treachery from his Paramara or Chola neighbours? Whatever his reasons, the fortification programme made the people of the Malabar Coast feel distinctly nervous.

⁸ The regions of Seylan (Tamil) and Sri Lanka (Sinhala) are now At War (AW) with each other.

Fortunately, it turned out there was no need for any anxiety. After the 1122 campaign, the war settled down into a calm stalemate. The Chandelas of Khajuraho were in disarray following the death of Pulkita and the flight of their army from Mehbubnagar; the Kalyani army was in tatters after two years of hard fighting in Kakatiya and Karnata. There was nothing to do but wait and shepherd all available resources for the next cycle of bloodletting. Crown Prince Someshwara was delighted by this lull which he used to pursue his literary activities. In particular, His Highness was keen to continue work on a Sanskrit encyclopaedia of the finer things in life - art, architecture, love, erotica, food, dance and more - which had been his pet project for more than a decade (indeed, he had started the preliminary work during his imprisonment in Warangal). Sadly, the war and the need to attend to his princely duties had held him back from his task so he welcomed, with great enthusiasm, the break in the war and zealously threw himself into his research. Between 1123 and 1125, he filled the great palace in Manyakheta with books, manuscripts and attractive young concubines, all of which he would draw upon, in different ways, during his research. And while such great and important things were taking place elsewhere, something interesting was about to happen in a very unlikely place...

Well, one fine day during the dry season of 1121, an elderly Adivasi happened to be foraging for berries in a range of densely forested hills far from his home village. Ordinarily, an old man would not have gone out seeking food nor venture so far from home but these were not ordinary times - the accursed Rajputs were squeezing the tribes dry with demands to supply taxes, tribute and labour to support their war against some other band of Rajputs⁹ - and there was simply not enough game or fruit in the forest to keep everyone fed and pay the tribe's tribute in full.

This old tribesman, tired by a day of futile searching, came to the bank of a stream that flowed down out of the high hills. He drank from the clear water to slake his devilish thirst and washed his face and feet to refresh himself and then he sat and, as he sat, he noticed that fish were fairly abundant here so he set his mind to catch some; he would bring home a nice catch of fish instead of a sack of berries! He took a dead tree branch from nearby and used his little knife to fashion himself a wooden spear on which to impale his victims. Then, into the stream he waded where a couple of hours patient work brought him a handsome haul of eight fish but, standing up to his knees in the flowing water, his eyes caught something glinting on the stony riverbed. Groping around in the water with his hands, he was able to collect several small, bright yellow rocks. The Adivasi were not fools and the old man knew perfectly well that, in this river, he had found a new source of *gold*. For centuries beyond memory, his tribe had collected what gold and silver they could find and had used it to fashion jewellery of great beauty for themselves. Yet, even if the old man were not a fool, still he did not quite comprehend the extent of what he had just discovered...

A full year passed during which the local tribesmen made numerous excursions to the little stream where gold was to be found in unusual abundance. Following the course of the stream up into the hills, they found a number of decent-sized gold deposits not far below the ground and were quick to exploit this boon. Much of the mineral wealth they extracted was used for simple ornamentation, fashioned into earrings, necklaces or nose rings, but some was used to purchase goods from traders and more was kept aside to pay the backbreaking taxes of the Rajputs. But, of course, the sudden appearance of all this treasure amongst a bunch of half-naked, jungle-dwelling outcaste savages did *not* go unnoticed by local Chalukya officials. In fact, fearing that the tribesmen had turned to banditry and had stolen all this gold, officers of Raja Vikramaditya were soon stomping all over Belur interrogating every Adivasi they could lay their hands on. In no time at all, they uncovered the full story of the new deposit of alluvial gold - the Adivasi, after all, were not a deceitful folk and felt that they had nothing to hide.

By the end of 1122, the Raja's officers had explored the area where gold had been found and had traced the stream back to its roots in the hills. The realm's foremost metallurgists were summoned to Belur where they carried out detailed surveys for His Majesty and, in due course, reported that they had uncovered an incredibly rich gold field (actually, a series of large gold fields) in an area known as Kolar. The experts declared that it was easily the largest deposit of gold that they had ever seen - probably the richest in all India!

But the Raja was not the only person to be interested in the wealth of Belur. Many people had been dispossessed by the war in the east and they flocked to Belur as soon as they heard of its newfound wealth - after all, why should people toil in the fields of Karnata, perhaps risking death at the hands of the invading Khajurahis, when they could go west and dig up incredible riches with their own hands? Too, for people from the lower castes, a move to Belur offered a unique prize: they would have the ability to exploit and abuse the local Adivasia tribesmen! Given that the low caste farmers and servants lived in perpetual servitude to those above them, the chance to grab wealth and power in a backward and hitherto-neglected province was a powerful incentive to abandon one's home in Karnata. So, without permission from their landlords or Raja, off they went to Belur to dig themselves up some gold!

By the end of 1125, so many new immigrants had arrived in Belur that the largest town in the area - Taradavadi - had been swollen to nearly twice its previous size. The whole of the countryside where the gold fields lay was alive with mining operations - some were no more than individuals sifting the streams for alluvial deposits; others were run by entrepreneurs who had dug deep mine shafts and now employed scores or hundreds of local labourers to dig the gold out. The losers in all of this were the Adivasi who were often tricked into servitude by the more savvy incomers. Those tribesmen who did not find themselves labouring in the mines for a few copper coins were, often, pushed off their land and simply retreated deeper into forests where they hoped to find some kind of peace and to be spared the attentions of the Kalyani migrants.

The Chandelas of Khajuraho

Ruler: Chandela Samirjit, Raja of Khajuraho and Kakatiya, Head of the Clan of the Chandelas

⁹ Despite the popular misconception, the Rajputs are *not* just the inhabitants of the Rajputana region. They are actually a distinct race of kshatriyas - aristocrats and warriors - who, by the C12th, formed the ruling dynasty of many of the Indian states - the Chauhans, Gahadwalas, Paramaras, Chandelas and Chalukyas were all Rajputs. The group arose some time between the Hunnic invasions of India and the mid-C7th and it has been suggested that they are not "Indian" at all but were probably, in origin, Scythian immigrants who took on certain aspects of Hindu culture.

Capital: Warangal
Religion: Hindu

The Raja took his personal security seriously and always travelled with an escort of bodyguards, even when he was only moving from one part of his palace to another. Yet, if one were observant, holes could be discerned in even the most thorough of shields...

As it happens, a number of men spent January observing the Raja, trailing his entourage wherever they went and unobtrusively following them. They discerned that, once a week on the same day, the Raja and his bodyguards would trail down from the enormous royal palace complex to an expensive brothel that Burman favoured. While en route to the brothel, he was typically well-guarded but once inside, he was effectively defenceless. With this knowledge, the murderous intriguers set to work! They did not bother trying to bribe the brothel's owner or trying to insinuate a female agent into the place; instead, they went for a much more direct approach...

In the last week of February, everything happened typically - the day of Burman's weekly trip to the bordello came and he, escorted by his men, rode down, in the early evening, to seek the charms of the most beautiful and compliant women that money could buy. While the Raja went inside, his guards waited in the front courtyard of this grand bordello, passing the time by gambling and gossiping about the coming campaign.

An hour or more passed. Burman was now in the finest room in the house, reclining on a heap of silken cushions and enjoying wine and the tender ministrations of a teenaged slave while, before him, two other girls, young and ravishing, danced in clothes that were not close to sufficient to cover them. In the furthest corner of the room, a single blind musician played on a sitar. When one could experience such wonderful times as these, mused Burman, it was a tragedy that they should end and that one should be forced to go to war, to seek death on a muddy battlefield when one could seek the delights of love with a shapely young girl.

So swathed in the girls was Burman that he did not hear a couple of faint clinks, of metal on stone, coming from the room's very large (and very open) balcony. The sound was that of two grappling hooks landing on the balcony; attached to the hooks were long, strong ropes which hung down to the extensive gardens at the back of the brothel - a place that none of his guards had bothered to secure or, even, to reconnoitre!

Four men quietly climbed up, two on each rope, blades between their teeth, and in seconds they were on the balcony with nothing between them and their quarry. They hurtled into the room, pulled a girl from Burman's arms before he even realised what was happening, and plunged their blades into his chest. The screams of the three terrified girls tore through the night alerting the guards below who, in defiance of all tradition, burst into the bordello and made for their Raja's chamber only to find him dead, the girls terrified and the assassins gone. Like his father, ten years earlier, Burman had been taken by the treacherous and murderous plots of his foes.

The murder of the Raja cast a long, dark shadow. He had been the lynchpin which had held the Chandela cause together after the original conquest by the Chalukyas decades earlier; it was around Burman that all resistance to the enemy invasion had focused; without him, it was not clear that there was anyone fit to lead or motivate the dynasty. Indeed, now that Burman was dead, there was no obvious successor for he had no children of his own. This successory confusion gave hope to every distant minor nobleman with a drop of Chandela blood in his veins. It seemed that everyone entertained ambitions to become the next Raja, hoped to seize the vacant throne; but, knowing that the kingdom was far from safe and that the Chalukyas would jump to take advantage of any internal disorder, no-one was especially eager to make the first move. Ambitious though they were, few people were stupid enough to want to risk civil war at this time.

All this uncertainty helped Rani Pulkita, the widow of Raja Burman. She was not exactly lacking in ambition, even though she was deficient in certain other areas, and, besides being Burman's wife, was also his cousin and, so, had a tenuous claim to leadership of the Chandela clan in her own right. When she stepped forward and proclaimed herself ruler of the state, it could almost have been the spark which lit the fire of civil war, for very few of the great nobles were willing to follow Pulkita's leadership. Plots were hatched in an effort to end the Rani's reign before it even began; intrigues were laid down about a possible assassination or about a sudden attack on Warangal by rebel nobles who might seize and depose the Rani before wider civil war could break out. Only one thing forestalled all this - the army which Burman had raised, and which was predominantly made up of mercenaries and religious fanatics, opted to follow Pulkita and she, secure in her military powerbase, proclaimed that she would march against any noble who did not immediately present himself at Warangal to proclaim his loyalty to her. This forcefulness seemed to have the desired effect and, before March was over, the nobility was cowed into obedience.

Sadly for the Kingdom and clan, Pulkita was unable to bring victory in the war and, in fact, died in battle in Karnata in 1122. With her death, the vexed successory question was raised again but, this time, Pulkita's father, Raja Samirjit of Kakatiya, claimed the throne. To say the least, Samirjit had a spotted history, as far as many were concerned. He was a member of the Chandela clan, a cousin of Raja Burman but, due to some complicated marital arrangements over the past couple of decades, he had given one daughter to Burman as wife and another to Vikramaditya! Indeed, he had once been a very close ally of Vikramaditya but had defected from

Vikram's camp to help the Chandelas only to defect back again. Now, finally, he had come back *again* to assume leadership over the clan and, perhaps, salvage the kingdom from the rocky shoals of war. His ascendance to the throne did not fill many people with joy but there was no doubt that he was a quite brilliant war leader and diplomat.

The Paramara Kingdom of Malwa

Ruler: Paramara Naravarma, Raja of Malwa, The Chakravarti, Head of the Clan of the Paramaras

Capital: Dhar

Religion: Hindu

Slept.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Amber Kingdom of Chauhan Ajameru

Ruler: Chauhan Ajaipal, Raja of Ajmer

Capital: Ajmer

Religion: Hindu

It was time to take the war to the enemy! For too long, the wretched Ghaznavis had held Ajmer to hostage, forcing the proud Chauhans to sit back awaiting an onslaught that never came. Now the Mahometan foe would be taught a lesson! The Raja remained in the immediate vicinity of his desert capital with the lion's share of the army while a small force, numbering barely more than two thousand of the Kingdom's finest and swiftest horsemen, was assembled under the famous General Arjuna. The General struck out for Sind March of 1121 and did not come back to Ajmer until October of 1123; when he did finally return, he brought with him a train of loot taken from Edrosia and many heartening tales of his men's courage and acumen in the face of the enemy. The Kingdom was in the midst of celebrating this great raid when even more astonishing news came: Masud of Ghazan, the nemesis of Hinduism, was *dead* and his empire stood teetering on the brink of collapse! The Raja exulted, of course, but drew certain lessons from the fate of his rival... (*See the Ghaznavid entry for details of the war*).

On the diplomatic front, Ajaipal's increasingly nervous emissary, Awantivarman, visited Dhar where he politely but firmly insisted that the Paramaras must fulfil their treaty responsibilities to Ajmer and mobilise immediately to assist in throwing back the Ghaznavi dogs. Awantivarman made numerous but subtle references to the campaigns of Paramara Bhoja who, less than a century earlier, had led the armies of Malwa to victory over the navi invader. Surely Naravarma would not prove to be less mettlesome than his illustrious ancestor...



Prithviraj Chauhan

In other matters, a great gift of coin and rice was received at Ajmer from the Raja of Kanauj - this, apparently, was part of the repayment that Kanauj owed for its unauthorised courting of Vatsa but some wondered whether the wily Gahadwalas were really just trying to prop the Chauhans up to maintain a block against further Muslim encroachments into India. Curiously enough, the Raja's eldest son and heir, Prithviraj, seemed to have set up home in Kanauj; he had been resident in the city for quite some time, living unobtrusively, and now took a local wife and had three children with her - a daughter in 1121 and sons in 1123 and 1125.

The Gahadwala Kingdom of Kanauj

Ruler: Gahadwala Dalavayi, Raja of Kanauj

Capital: Kanauj

Religion: Hindu

The seemingly ceaseless aggression of the Ghaznavids in northwest India was giving the Raja of Kanauj much food for thought. Understandings, of a sort, had been reached with Masud of Ghazna but nothing had been formalised. Fearing the worst, Chandraveda ordered that new fortifications be aid down in Rajput, Uttar Pradesh and Jaunpur, defending the densely-populated northern bank of the Holy River against any possible Mahometan incursions. South of the Ganges, the Kanauji fortress in Vatsa was strengthened and expanded to make a more consequential obstacle to an invader.

In such perilous times as these, it was important that the Kingdom's many allied and confederate states - such as Chandela, Jihhoti and Vatsa - should be drawn into a closer orbit around Kanauj so His Majesty, along with the Crown Prince Dalavayi, struck out on a grand diplomatic tour of these subjects states. With them, they brought wonderful gifts - intricately carved statuettes of ivory, jewellery and diadems of silver and gold, fine silks and rare, fragrant unguents - to shower on the rulers and great nobles of these kindred regions, to demonstrate in a material fashion the benefits that the Gahadwala clan would rain down on those who embraced their realm.

The first stop on this tour was Vatsa, a controversial place for it had once been in league with the Chauhans of Ajmer. The local grandees welcomed the silver-tongued Chandraveda with unconcealed glee, received his rich gifts and merrily pledged their personal forces and retinues to the service of Kanauj. The lords and princes of Vatsa had come to believe that there must soon be a great war with the Mahometans; as soon as Ajaimeru fell - and that would surely be soon - the rapacious Ghaznavids would turn their attentions to the rich, populous and fertile lands of the Ganges Valley and, when that happened, Vatsa would be glad to have the support of the Raja of Kanauj and the innumerable warriors of his army.

From Vatsa, where the royal entourage passed the whole of 1121, Chandraveda passed into the more rugged province of Jihjhoti which, a few years earlier, had been ravaged by great forest fires. The native princes were not usually well-disposed to external forces, into which category they placed the Raja of Kanauj. Yet, the wife of Chandraveda's brother came from the region and so the Gahadwala clan enjoyed some personal popularity with the local nobles; too, by virtue of their decades-old political relationship with Kanauj, their province was enjoying unwonted economic growth - the town of Mahoda, for example, was expanding so rapidly that it would soon need to be considered a city. On top of that, the Raja Chandraveda had brought his customary assemblage of gifts which were generously distributed to the native princes which endeared him to them even further. So, the whole of 1122 was passed in close dialogue with the lords of Jihjhoti and, by the end of that year, they had been induced to agree to join completely with the Kingdom of the Gahadwalas of Kanauj.

During his time in Jihjhoti, Chandraveda had contracted dysentery and was becoming sicker and weaker as time went by but, in 1123, he moved into what was to be the final leg of his diplomatic excursion - the trip to Chandela, where the local Raja, Nayaka Chandela, was amongst the closest of the Gahadwalas' allies. The Chandela Raja and his princes were extremely inclined to nestle closer to the Kanauji state - unlike their co-religionists in Vatsa, it was not the Ghaznavids that they feared but the massive power of neighbouring Bengal. By the end of the year, Chandraveda had easily steered the Raja of Chandela into entering freely and completely into the Kingdom. It was to be His Majesty's last great achievement for, in September of 1123, Chandraveda finally died after almost a whole year of declining health.

The death of the Raja, while very tragic, did not seem to carry any particular meaning until, in December of 1123, officers of the Royal Household uncovered a strange conspiracy right in the heart of the capital city! A band of low-caste miscreants and Untouchables were discovered to be living incognito in an area of the city normally inhabited only by servants of the Royal Family, having disguised themselves as royal servants and palace workers. Under the gentle attention of the torturer, these interlopers revealed that they were actually renegades from Tarain - Hindus who had converted to Islam! - and, what's more, they alleged that they had been sent to Kanauj at the instigation of the Ghaznavids! Such allegations might have been dismissed but that a careful search of the men's accommodation turned up a quantity of silver coin minted in Ghazna, several bottles of slow-acting poison and a few coded documents written in the Turkic dialect of the Ghaznavids. Could they have been behind the Raja's death? Perhaps not, since the would-be assassins were in the capital city while the Raja was out in the provinces, beyond their reach, but it made people wonder all the same...

In any event, the late Raja would be remembered for a peaceful reign, during which he oversaw a gradual strengthening of the bonds which held the realm together, the improvement of the Kingdom's western defences and the expansion of the country's economy. He would, perhaps, never be remembered as a truly great ruler but his people lamented his passing and flocked in great numbers to the Holy City of Benares where they bathed in the waters of Mother Ganges and prayed for the safe rebirth of their most enlightened Raja. He was quietly succeeded by his beloved brother, the Crown Prince Dalavayi (you know, the fellow with the cleft palate), whose well-known military abilities made him a popular choice in these benighted times.

The first act of the new Gahadwala Raja of Kanauj was to elevate his twin sons - Rama and Lakshman - to the hurly-burly of court life, politics and the business of state. The eminently popular Rama was appointed Crown Prince and heir to the throne. Sadly for all, Dalavayi's wife, Rani, died in 1125 from a terrible parasitic illness, an event that dampened the spirits of all the family.

Finally, as compensation for their earlier annexation of Vatsa, a shipment of much gold, grain and rice was sent from Kanauj to Ajaimeru where its coming was met with much gladness.

Central Asia

The Sultanate of Ghazna



Ruler: Osman-ud-Dawlah, Regent on behalf of Mehmed I, Sultan of Ghazna

Capital: Lahore

Religion: Sunni Islam

Masud seemed to be fairly nervous. He had moved his capital into India, had effectively abandoned the ancient heart of his empire in favour of a move towards richer lands but now, as he looked at his army's pitiful record over the past two decades of war, he came to wonder whether he had miscalculated. His capital city was perilously close to hostile territory and he, for all that he might talk about his dauntlessness and martial ability, seemed to lack either the courage or the will to fight the Hindu Rajas whom he had sworn to destroy.

As if to reflect his trepidation, an extremely passive policy was adopted. Instead of marching into India, as the Sultans of previous generations had, Masud ordered that Delhi should be prepared for a siege and stocked with plentiful provisions. At the same time, the frontier provinces of Sukkur and Tarain were fortified - the former with perhaps half a dozen new forts and strongholds to defend important strategic points while the latter province was bolstered with almost twenty such castles. Down in Karachi, the heretofore undefended city of Karachi received its first contingent of garrison troops and the construction of a small defensive wall, a ditch and a few approach forts; it was not much but it bolstered the confidence of the local citizens who included many very fine Ghaznavi, Persian and Afghan scholars.

While these preparations were being made, Ghaznavid agents secured the services of over nine thousand mercenaries who were massed at Delhi. This led some bright sparks to conclude that the Sultan would finally lead an assault that would crack Ajmer wide open - after all, those dirty Chauhan dogs were so much weaker and poorer than the Ghaznavids so they could probably not be expected to put up much of a fight. But Masud had no such plans. He insisted that he would sit, with an army that numbered about twenty five thousand, on the defensive in Tarain waiting for the Chauhans to attack him! Indeed, so certain was he that the foe would attack that he directed all his scouts and spies to sniff out the direction from which the enemy would come!

The Sultan's generals tore their beards at such foolishness. While the Sultan crouched like a poltroon in Tarain, the whole of the Indus Valley was left effectively defenceless and, as if that were not bad enough, the delay in moving against Ajmer did nothing but make the enemy stronger. Every day that passed brought the likelihood of Gahadwala or Paramara intervention closer; every day that the Ghaznavi army waited in Tarain for an attack that would and could never come gave the Rajas time to build their forces and develop the resolution to resist Muslim encroachments!

Nor were the generals alone in being outraged by the Sultan's inaction. To pay for this war, taxes had been raised to ruinous proportions - certainly far greater than most people could pay - and the Sultanate's tax collectors showed no tenderness towards the people. All over the empire, hired men under the green peacock banner of Masud would descend on villages taking all the gold and silver they could find and leaving no food but the barest minimum to allow the peasants to subsist. From the hills of Afghanistan and the rich new domains of Tarain, the story was the same and the peasants, whether Muslim or Hindu, suffered terribly. The merchants, too, endured great financial losses as they watched the Sultan's men seize a whole year's profits in a single day.

To rub salt into the wound, the Imams and Mullahs, Shi'a and Sunni alike, received a decree from the Sultan's hand ordering them to make public statements of support for these increased taxes. The clergy were reminded that Masud had carried Islam into India, having settled the Faithful in Tarain to establish a permanent Islamic presence in the land. Indeed, many Muslims had profited from this war and would continue to profit in the future. The empire's holy men were not very convinced by His Majesty's reasoning. In the first instance, no-one saw any evidence that Masud was committed to expanding into India; in the second, most of those who had gained land and money from settling in Tarain were members of the lower orders of society - in effect, the Sultan had given land to people who didn't deserve it; third, finally and most importantly, no matter how much the clergy supported higher taxation and no matter how much they implored the people to meet the Sultan's demands, no sermon could undo the hard damage that was being done to the economy; when the people were left with insufficient food and not enough money to buy more, no prayer could take away their hunger; when merchants had no money to buy the goods in which they traded, no quotation from the Koran could fill the gap it created in the economy.

A fairly severe economic depression gripped the empire from 1121 onwards and revolts accompanied it. At the urging of the city's merchants, many of whom had been ruined by the depression, the inhabitants of the old imperial capital of Ghazna, so recently abandoned by His Majesty, rose in arms, overthrew the governor and closed the city gates. The mutineers declared that they would not allow any representative of Masud to enter their city and called upon the generals to overthrow him and restore order to the empire. In the ruggedly beautiful region of Kashmir, the peasant-farmers also rose up in protest at the oppressive taxation and its deleterious effect on the economy; it was a matter of some surprise to the rebels that their feudal overlords, far from trying to suppress the revolt, actively encouraged it and lent their leadership to it! In Afghanistan and Bauluch, the angry tribes likewise rose up against Masud. The inhabitants of these areas had a long tradition of being very antagonistic towards their Ghaznavid rulers so it was hardly a surprise that now, with over-taxation and economic distress leaving their families hungry and their storage houses empty, they were amongst the first, and were certainly the most eager, to draw their weapons and proclaim their enmity to the Sultan.

But internal enemies were not the only threat to the Sultanate. In March of 1121, while Ajaipal Chauhan prepared for a siege in Ajmer and Masud of Ghazna made ready to defend Delhi, General Arjuna slipped out of the Amber Kingdom with a pitiable two thousand cavalry. His goal was to make Masud bleed. By April, he had led his cavalry

into Sind, where support for the heretical Masud was waning quite severely because of the depression, and, before June was over, the whole province had been subjugated with minimal resistance. By chance, the Ghaznavid minister Artaq happened to be in Sind, pressing the flesh of local dignitaries and endeavouring to persuade the province's Shi'ite princes *not* to revolt in protest at the exacting financial demands their suzerain had placed upon them. Imagine poor Artaq's surprise as he and his retinue were seized by a party of Ajmeri cavalymen and placed under arrest. Anyhow, from Sind, Arjuna moved down the eastern bank of the Indus into Edrosia which, like Sind, was subjugated in short order.

News of Arjuna's antics was brought to the Sultan in Delhi but he refused to leave, refused to be drawn away from Tarain and insisted that the move was just a feint to leave Delhi and the environs vulnerable. This Muslim inaction gave Arjuna a free hand to plunder and harrow Edrosia in a way that had rarely been seen in any Indian war. For a full year and a half - from the end of 1121 until the Summer of 1123 - Arjuna's men rode roughshod over the province, looting and burning and driving the locals from their farms and homes. Anything of value was stolen by the Hindus who noted that this attack was taking place in just retaliation for the crimes and villainy of the Muslims in Tarain and elsewhere. But, besides theft, there was much wanton and unprovoked destruction: crops were burnt in the fields, fruit trees were cut down, flocks of goats and sheep were slaughtered while cows were liberated from the unclean Mahometans. Towns and villages by the score were burnt to the ground, their denizens left destitute and homeless; the intricate system of irrigation ditches linked to the great River Indus were deliberately sabotaged by the Hindus with whole Muslim villages being coopted at the point of a sword to destroy these valuable assets! The whole point of the exercise was not merely to get loot nor even to terrorise the Muslims or to take revenge for the cruelties which the Scourge of Allah had visited on the Brahmins of Tarain but to turn the province into a desert. It was cold comfort that the Hindus were too civilised to engage in wholesale murder - very few of the locals were actually killed outright by Arjuna's men though many died of hunger or exposure after being driven from their abodes.

By July of 1123, Arjuna's now glory-covered band had achieved all they could achieve and set out for home. It was at exactly this point that the Sultan, still in Tarain, decided that no offensive was coming and that his army should react to the late Hindu incursions. Slowly, by way of Sahis and Sukkur, the huge Ghaznavid army (slowed by its preponderance of heavy troops) lumbered towards Sind but, while the force wintered in Sukkur, waiting for the weather to clear before they could reoccupy Sind, the Sultan Masud III, the Scourge of Allah, died. Though quite sudden, it could not entirely be called an unexpected event for Masud's health had been in a decline for several years; too much time had the would-be conqueror of Hindustan wasted enjoying the rich wines of Persia and the fond embraces of the many new concubines and eunuchs who had been taken from their homes in Tarain to adorn the Sultan's harem.

His Majesty's demise plunged the empire into even greater chaos and stripped it even of Masud's weak leadership. The heir to the throne, Masud's young son Mehmed, was only eleven years and, in any case, it was rare for a Ghaznavid Sultan to be succeeded by his son¹⁰. Everyone expected that a civil war would follow, that some general or great nobleman would stride forward and proclaim himself Sultan but, thankfully, this was not to be. No-one really had enough backing in the empire to make a serious stab at the throne - especially since the capital had been moved to Lahore, a place that had much loyalty to the Sultan's clan but where the other noble houses of Ghazna were less established and had a far weaker powerbase. The Sultan's trusted minister, Osman-ud-Dawlah, grabbed the initiative quite suddenly and unexpectedly. He quit the capital, where he had been overseeing the running of the government apparatus, and rushed to Sind where he assumed command of the army in the name of Sultan Mehmed II! The army, unlike the rest of society, had all been well-paid and well-fed by Masud so they were not minded to resist Osman's demands and the new Boy-Sultan was acclaimed by the army with Osman installed as the Grand Vizier and Regent.

As 1124 opened, the Vizier quietly continued the job his late master had begun by completing the liberation of Sind before marching down to Edrosia to wipe out any vestiges of Hindu control. This done, he marched right back to Tarain for he well remembered the injunctions of the dead Masud that, no matter what happened, the army must always return to Tarain to defend it against the Hindus...

The only other news, as if all this were not enough, came when Artaq died while in the custody of the Chauhans of Ajmer in 1125.

The Beylik of Baluchistan

Ruler: Lakhud, Khaireddin of Siahan

Capital: None

Religion: Sunni Islam

Slept.

¹⁰ Primogeniture just never caught on amongst the Ghaznavids.

The Seljuk Great Sultanate



Ruler: Qhanum Anahid, Regent on behalf of Malik Shah II, the Great Sultan of all Islam, Qhaqhan of the Seljuqs, Shahanshan of Persia, King of the East and the West

Capital: Isfahan

Religion: Sunni Islam

The Qhanum was beset by many issues, many pressing concerns that demanded her attention and energies, but one stood out above all other: Khwarizim. Her beloved husband, now passed to the Gardens of Heaven, had conquered the land two decades earlier, crushing the late Shah Qutb al-Din Muhammed on the field of Ashgaban, but the Shah's heir and many of his most loyal supporters had fled to the steppe, finally returning to reclaim their land and freedom after Berk Yaruk's death. The young pretender to the Khwarizimi throne, Ala al-Din Aziz, was keen to negotiate a peace settlement with the Sultanate, to secure some – any – sort of arrangement that would leave him free to rule Khiva and the surrounding region...

Yet Anahid had other ideas. The lands of Khwarizim were too rich, too important, to be left outside the Sultanate's control. Too, with her son only eleven years old and at least half-a-decade away from stepping into his inheritance, she thought it would be most politic to give the army and generals something to occupy themselves, lest they should grow restive through inaction and decide to meddle in the succession. So, at the start of 1121, the Qhanum decreed that the army should go forth, under the leadership of Mahir, Gurqhan of the Seljuqs, and make war upon Khwarizim, securing it for the Great Sultan!

By chance, the Seljuk army was already in Turkmen, just south of the Khwarizimi frontier and geared up for renewed war. Mahir's force was formidable indeed – four thousand splendidly-armoured household cavalry formed the spearhead of the army; they were, in turn, supported by another four thousand lance-armed askari horsemen and five thousand Turkish horse archers and somewhat more than four thousand skirmishing psiloi. It was a strong army indeed and in February of 1121, they struck northwards, keeping to the western bank of the Oxus, and making directly towards Khiva.

The speed of the Seljuk advance caught the Khwarizimi defenders by surprise. Most of the land south of Khiva and west of the Oxus had been subjugated by Mahir before Shah Ala al-Din Aziz had even finished mobilising his army (which numbered eleven thousand horse archers – four thousand of whom were from the Shah's own clan and demonstrated an admirable devotion to his cause).

In the face of the Seljuk host, the Khwarizimis fell into disarray, finally rallying at the city of Qongirat in the middle of April. The Shah realised that his options were extremely limited: with his army now in some semblance of order, he could either fight the invader or flee his kingdom. This latter option was not at all attractive for Aziz had already spent almost two decades in exile on the steppe; too, his army, though smaller than that of his foe, was not contemptible. So, feeling that there was at least a *chance* that he could emerge victorious, the Shah of Khwarizim declared to his officers that they should await the enemy here, at Qongirat.

Mahir and the Seljuk army, in close pursuit of the Khwarizimis, appeared on the horizon less than a week after the Shah made his decision. Battle was soon to be joined. Aziz was probably a slightly sharper leader than Mahir, and he certainly enjoyed much more popularity with his men, but the nature of his army – entirely mounted and light – stripped him of many options; he could make no head-on attacks against the foe, could dig no defensive earthworks and, in fact, could do nothing but engage in the familiar hit-and-run tactics of the steppe - and these were not likely to be very effective given the enemy's preponderance of mounted and light troops.

On a hot day in late April of 1121, on a wide flat plain a few miles southwest on Qongirat, the battle took place. The Khwarizimis deployed in an inverted crescent formation at the northern end of the field; the Seljuks formed lines – their heaviest cavalry under the Gurqhan's personal command occupied the right-centre, with horse archers making up the right flank; the mounted askaris took the left centre, the left flank being left to the Persian foot skirmishers. Not being one for tactical subtleties, Mahir signalled for the whole army to begin its advance, horsemen moving at a trot and footmen jogging to keep up; the enemy, under their beloved Shah, did not immediately react but waited, instead, until the Seljuks were about half a mile from their own lines before riding out, at a gesture from their Shah, and engaging the enemy.

A very muddled combat followed – in the centre, the lightly-armed Khwarizimis came within a couple of hundred yards of the Seljuk line before firing their bows and falling back; they repeated the manoeuvre several times but only to minor effect. The heaviest elements of the Seljuk army, meantime, simply pressed onwards, forcing the Khwarizimis to recoil but failing to close with them. On the flanks, though, it was a different story. On the left, in particular, the Khwarizimis enjoyed singular success against the skirmishing Persian psiloi; these footmen, though reasonably fleet, could neither outrun nor outmanoeuvre the harassing body of horsemen, nor, with their bows and slings, were they able to keep up a rate of fire fierce enough to drive the Khwarizimis away.

Indeed, so successful were the Khwarizimis that they were able to envelop the enemy skirmishers completely and on them they inflicted the most horrendous losses. Even when one of the Persians took it into his head to break and run, he found that the foe had cut off all means of egress. But, while the Khwarizimis enjoyed such success on that flank, things had gone less well elsewhere. In the centre, the askaris and household cavalry, by means of a series of very determined charges, had driven away the harassing hordes of horse archers. Their success had not been without its losses – almost five hundred of the Seljuk Sultanate's finest horsemen lay dead or wounded by Khwarizimi arrows; with their steeds exhausted and immobilised by all the charging, these brilliant nobles, all blood kinsmen of the Great Sultan, had been left exposed to the vicious arrows of their foe. Yet, the Gurqhan considered this a price worth paying for quite apart from driving the enemy horse back, one of his bolder askari squadrons had, during the mêlée, managed to capture the Shah of Khwarizim! What a coup! With his horse badly injured by a Turkish lance, Ala al-Din Aziz had ended up on foot and directly in the path of his advancing enemy!

With the Shah's apprehension, the Khwarizimi army was disheartened and not even its success on the left flank of the Seljuk army, where it had left almost all the enemy psiloi dead, could give them cause to rally. Their morale dented and with no clear idea of how to defeat the invader, they withdrew from the field leaving their leader in the hands of the invader. The Gurqhan of the Seljuqs, seeing that the Shah was a prize beyond price, did not waste time pursuing the defeated army for he reckoned, correctly as it would turn out, that they posed no danger now that their leader was gone. The Seljuk army had taken higher losses than the enemy but it was the Khwarizimis who fled, leaving the field and their Shah to the mercies of the enemy. That afternoon, from the dusty and blood-covered field of Qongirat, the Gurqhan sent a letter to the Qhanum proclaiming that he had gained a great victory, had captured the pretender Ala al-Din Aziz and would now march against Khiva to complete his mission of conquest.

The Seljuks arrived at Khiva during the first week of May and, to their chagrin, found that the defences of Khiva, which had been demolished when Berk Yaruq had captured the city, were now more extensive than ever – the city walls had not only been rebuilt but were now reinforced by a series of wide ditches and moats; and, before one could even approach these obstacles, there were several stout approach forts to be dealt with... Well, Gurqhan Mahir had not the means to launch a serious siege – in his almost entirely mounted army, there were few men schooled in the arts of siege – so he established a cavalry cordon around the city to prevent any supplies from reaching it and patiently sat back and waited for starvation to have its effect.

At the start of July, a Seljuk emissary was sent forward to request the city's surrender but, for his trouble, he was fired upon by archers on the city walls and didn't get a chance to deliver his message. Another eight weeks passed, during which the situation in the sprawling city became dire as the very last food reserves were exhausted, before the Governor of Khiva finally realised that he could expect no relief force. Surrender, in fact, was Khiva's only option so a messenger was duly dispatched to the Gurqhan's camp to offer the city's capitulation.

Mahir and his host trooped into the city merrily. It was a heady experience for the Gurqhan – he had achieved a considerable feat in conquering Khwarizim, an exploit that equalled those of the Great Sultan Berk Yaruq himself. With control of so large an army and with the victor's laurels on his brow, Mahir was tempted, if only for a moment, to claim the Sultanate for himself instead of allowing it to devolve to a mere child in distant Baghdad but he remembered the fate of the last person to challenge for the throne – Jamuka, killed by his own men – and decided to be content with the rewards that serving the Sultanate would bring.

In Khiva itself, Mahir stationed a sizeable garrison of Seljuk cavalry and appointed one of his most reliable and ruthless officers as Atabeg of the city; this was a state of affairs that stood in stark contrast to Berk Yaruq's relatively lenient treatment of the place a couple of decades earlier when, in place of a garrison and governor, he had allowed the Khwarizimis to govern themselves. Out in the countryside around the city, events followed a similar course with direct rule by Seljuk military commanders being established once more, just as it had been following the first conquest of this region. By the end of 1121, as Mahir marched back to Merv with the Shah of Khwarizim dragged behind the army in chains, he left behind an expanse of land which was now firmly and for all time under the control of the Seljuk Great Sultanate. Huzzah! (Upon arriving in Merv, the unfortunate Shah of Khwarizim was installed in a tall and uncomfortable tower until either the Qhanum decided what his fate should be or he died of natural causes).

While all this excitement had been going on, the Qhanum had been busily rearranging the governance of this wide empire of which she was steward. To ensure that relations with the Abbasids of Baghdad remained strong, she concluded an agreement whereby the Sultanate would renounce its control of the provinces of Fars and Ahvaz in return for a large subvention of the Caliph's silver. This arrangement was a little confusing, to say the least. The rebellious Shi'ites of Fars had, at the time of Berk Yaruq's death, thrown off Sunni Turkish bondage and established their own independent state – how, then, could the Qhanum "sell" this province to the lords of Baghdad? As for Ahvaz, even though it was an integral part of the Seljuk state and firmly under the Sultanate's sway, the Qhanum ceded all her son's rights to the province in return for more money from Baghdad. Yet, there was much confusion here, seeing as the Qhanum obviously expected the Abbasids to undertake their new responsibilities in Ahvaz *straightaway* while the Caliph was under the impression that power would not devolve to him for several more years... Such was the perplexity that Ahvaz was pretty much left to run its own affairs,

paying taxes to neither the Sultanate nor the Caliphate, but, in Fars at least, things were soon settled and the region was brought decisively under Baghdad's control.

In other parts of the Empire, the Qhanum ordered that administrators should abandon any and all efforts to extract tribute and revenues from the provinces of Neyriz, Khvor and Dasht'E'Lute; these areas, she reasoned, were so poor and the terrain so inhospitable that the Sultanate's tax collectors were being forced to spend inordinate amounts of time there to gather a mere pittance from the local tribes.

As far as Persian culture is concerned, this period turned out to be an especially rich one and important one! Xiahou Dun, the one-eyed merchant husband of Qhanum Roxane of El'Burz, had decided to supplement the tolerable poetry of his adopted country by translating some traditional Chinese literature into Persian. The downside, however, was that Xiahou had never been formally schooled in Persian; he spoke the Persian tongue fairly fluently but he spoke the language of the bazaar and the market, not the exalted speech of verse and epic... Thus, his attempts to render the lyric works of the Tang Dynasty poets Li Po and Tu Fu into Persian ended in some embarrassment because... Well, they just weren't very *poetic* by the time Xiahou Dun had finished with them. His wife, fortunately, was well-connected at the Imperial Court and was able to obtain the services of several discerning versifiers and poets from Isfahan and, in no time at all, they modified Xiahou's grammatically-suspect and mundane Persian into much more ornate language set in appropriate poetic metres.

Sadly, these literary endeavours were overshadowed somewhat by the death, in 1123, of the much-respected lyricist and poet Ghiyath al-Din Abu'l-Fath Umar ibn Ibrahim Al-Nisaburi al-Khayyami (aka Omar Khayyam). In the aftermath of the great man's demise, there was a growth in the popularity of the poetic works of the Sufi mystics.

The Qhanum missed out on all the literary matters because she was so concerned with preparing for the return of her son, the Great Sultan, who, by the end of 1125, was fully sixteen years of age and ready to step into his inheritance.

The Qara Khanate

Ruler: Ahmed Jibril Tigin, the Qara Khan of Samarkhand

Capital: Samarkhand

Religion: Sunni Islam

All was quiet, as usual, in the Qara Khanate until 1125 when the Black Khan Jibril Arslan choked to death on a chicken bone. He was followed, with surprisingly little fuss, by his eldest son Ahmed Jibril Tigin. It was widely hoped that the new Qara Khan would do something about the explosive inflation, caused by the mountains of gold which the late Khan had amassed in his treasury, and the unemployment which had driven thousands of unwashed starvelings onto the streets of Samarkhand to seek a "living" by begging for handouts from the wealthy princes and merchants of the land.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Empire of Khwarizim

Ruler: Ala al-Din Aziz, Shah of Khwarizim

Capital: Khiva

Religion: Sunni Islam

Alas, the Empire of Khwarizim was no more – the Shah in chains, the army vanquished and the capital fallen, once more, to the Seljuk invader. The only remnant of the state – the Shah's household cavalry – fled the land, leaderless, and took to the steppe where they soon became outlaws and mercenaries, selling their military services to the highest bidder.

The Middle East

The Seljuk Sultanate of Rum

Ruler: Etugral-ud-Din *the Lion*, Seljuk Sultan of Rum

Capital: none

Religion: Sunni Islam

Kilij Arslan, the Red Lion of Allah, was gone. None, save only his closest confidants and family, knew where he was and whether it was foolishness, courage or cowardice that had taken him out of the Sultanate at the very time when the survival of a Turkish polity in Anatolia was in the balance. All practical authority over the Sultanate had devolved to Kilij's distant kinsman, Etugral-ud-Din, who was well-known for his courage and competence on the

battlefield, as well as his considerable popularity with the Seljuk fighting men (too, and this was important to some, his name and honour had never been besmirched by involvement in the massacres in Phrygia...).

What was Etugral to do? Well, he had always been a committed and loyal adherent of the Red Lion's cause – he had shown admirable commitment to the dynasty and the Sultanate by commanding the armies which had, in the last few years, retaken so much of the land that had been lost to the Byzantines – Psidia, Pamphyla and the great city of Konya itself had all been liberated only because of Etugral's exemplary courage and masterful ability to seize an opportunity when it presents itself. Yet, even Etugral had to face facts – the Sultan was not here; cities and provinces had been lost and gained and lost again for nearly twenty years, with no decisive victory in sight for *either* side.

What was Etugral to do? He was to do the only thing he could: in January of 1121, Etugral proclaimed that, in view of Kilij Arslan's continued absence, the Sultan was now deposed! The Sultanate and the Seljuk tribes must have a leader who was bold, beloved and – above all – *here!* Kilij, whatever his successes in the past, fulfilled none of these requirements while Etugral satisfied all of them. Therefore, with the full support of most of the Seljuk army, Etugral announced publicly that, henceforth, *he* was rightful Sultan of the Turks and of Rhúm,

He had little time to enjoy his new position, for scouts reported that the Christian armies of Byzantium were already preparing to march against him. (*For the rest of the Seljuks' adventures, see The Anatolian Campaign*)

The Christian Kingdom of Georgia

Ruler: David II *the Builder*, King of Georgia

Capital: Tbilisi

Religion: Armenian Orthodox

Slept.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Seljuk Emirate of Mosul

Ruler: Ozalan, Atabeg of Mosul

Capital: Mosul

Religion: Sunni Islam

Slept.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad

Ruler: Al'Mustahazir Sultan, Commander of Commanders, the Caliph of all Islam

Capital: Baghdad

Religion: Sunni Islam



Abbasid Palace, Baqhdad

From the window of his palace, the elderly Caliph beheld a most satisfying sight. All around Baghdad, as far as the eye could see, the land was green with vegetation, thick with lush trees and orchards, all fed by the waters of two great and ancient rivers. Nor was this fecundity restricted merely to the environs of that one city. Al' Mustahazir knew well that, all along the great Mesopotamian Valley, the lands were fruitful and the people well-fed and gainfully employed. And, along the highways and byways of the Caliphate, long caravans of camels could be seen, winding their way from the eastern to the western horizon, carrying the silks of the distant Orient to Damascus and the merchants of Infidel Europe.

Trade, agriculture, prosperity – such words were a pleasure to the Caliph's ears for he was old enough, as he approached his seventieth year, to remember a time, a generation and more ago, when this land had been ravaged by endless war between the Turks, those champions of Sunni Orthodoxy, and the Fatimid heretics.

Yes, the old man remembered a time when here, even in the heartland of the Fertile Crescent, people had gone without food and trade had been disrupted; as peasants

were slain or conscripted or just fled to some more peaceful land, fields had been abandoned and irrigation systems left to crumble; then the desert, always near, had crept back and claimed the fields once more. Those had been dark days, indeed, but now things were different. Things were *better!*

To be sure, the people, the bovine masses, bemoaned the loss of Damascus to the Franks and of Mecca to the Fatimids but Al' Mustahazir had a longer sight than they. The clergy wailed day and night about the dark times that Islam faced and of the need for action to put things right, but they, in their ignorance and in their short-sightedness, did not realise that the darkest days were behind them. Indeed, far from facing "dark days", the subjects of the Caliphate now enjoyed an unwonted affluence. Even the poorest peasant had work to do and enough to eat, while the richest aristocrats enjoyed an opulence that had not been seen in Baghdad for centuries.

An old man and getting no younger, Al' Mustahazir bore no illusions of immortality; he knew that one day, probably soon, Death would come to speed him away. Yet, he could leave this sphere, and pass on whithersoever Allah willed, knowing that he died in a land that was better and greater and happier than the one into which he had been born. He knew that the historians, ever keen to find fault, would damn him as the Caliph who allowed two of the great cities of Islam to fall but he also knew that he himself was blameless, that the rulers of those cities had brought their fate upon themselves with their politicking and feuding. Above all things, though, he knew that the power of the Caliphate, which had been shattered into a million pieces during his lifetime, had begun to grow and that, if his successors cultivated the flower of Abbasid strength with the same care that he had shown, there would come a time when Baghdad might yet reclaim her pre-eminence in the world, might yet reclaim Palestine – aye, and even Egypt itself! – and might consign even the Great Sultanate to a subordinate position. If this came to pass, if even a small part of it came to pass, the Caliph of All Islam knew that it was *he*, and no other, who had laid the foundations for the future greatness of his dynasty. This, undeniably, gave the Caliph a warm feeling of quiet contentment and satisfaction.

Too, the Caliph had taken steps to extend the temporal and political power of his realm. Ambassadors to Isfahan had concluded a most satisfactory agreement with the Qhanum whereby, in return for a large payment, the provinces of Ahvaz and Fars (the latter of which was in revolt against the Great Sultanate) would come under the sway of Baghdad. By this stroke of diplomacy, the Caliphate's borders had been widened eastwards, to the very foothills of the Zagros Mountains. The only problems with this arrangement were that, first, the Persians and Abbasids were confused about the actual date for the transfer of Ahvaz (the Caliph expected the transfer to happen some years later while the Seljuks imagined it would happen at once); and, second, that Fars was not under the Sultanate's control to begin with so it was not within the Qhanum's power simply to hand the place over to old Al' Mustahazir. Fortunately, a solution was at hand for this second issue...

General Ahzaf, with five thousand armoured Arab cavalry, left Baghdad early in 1121 and marched to Fars, arriving by way of Hahmar and Abadan. The local Persian rebels, who had so recently butchered their Turkish Sunni overlords and established a Shi'a régime, were swept aside by the invading Arabs in a matter of months. All resistance to the Abbasid was crushed mercilessly and it all might have ended there – for the people of Fars had a long history of being presided over by rulers who were not of their own religion and calmly accepted the restoration of Sunni control – but Ahzaf had plans of his own...

In Spring of 1122, the Abbasid army in Fars began a fierce campaign to suppress the practice of all heterodox Muslim sects. In particular, Ahfaz proscribed the traditional Shi'a celebration of Hussein's martyrdom on the 10th day of Muharram, decreeing that any man who performed *taaziyah* in memory of the martyred son of Ali would be impaled along with his family. Sure enough, there were many Shi'ites so fervent in their heresy that they ignored the conqueror's edict and, as anticipated, they paid a dear price for their religious devotion. The Faithful were slain by the soldiers of the Caliph, even as they prayed, even as they scourged themselves in memory of the massacre of Karbala. Nor were women or children shown any clemency – mere babes were torn from the arms of their mothers and impaled, just as Ahfaz had threatened, and women were violated most horribly before being butchered. In other times and other conflicts, a conqueror might take the womenfolk and children as slaves but here, in Fars, there was to be none of that – the Caliph wished that no-one should remain alive who practised the false religion and heresy of the *Shi'at Ali*.

The 10th day of Muharram, in the 500th year since the *Hijrah*, became a date of grave infamy and profound bitterness for the Shi'as of Persia and the wider world. Stories of the carnage of that day were conveyed around the Ummah and beyond, to be received with horror or gladness depending on the sect to which one belonged – the Qhanum, fearful that the enraged Shi'ite masses in Persia might revolt in anger, disavowed any involvement in the massacres and conversions; yet, her son in Baghdad, the twelve-year old Great Sultan, seemed delighted and amused as he heard terrible tales of the suffering of the Heretics. In Shi'ite Cairo and Aden, the great nobles did not, at first, believe the accounts of the massacre; then, at long last, when they could no longer deny the suffering of their co-religionists at the hands of the Abbasids, they donned robes of mourning and prayed day and night for retribution against the Great Malefactor and justice for the faithful dead of Fars, slain on the holiest day of the calendar. In the mosques of the Shi'ite world – aye, even in Holy Mecca itself! – the mullahs damned the name of Abbasi, a house of traitors and apostates who once, centuries earlier, had not only been followers of *Shi'at Ali* but actual blood relatives and successors to the great Ali. Now, depraved and decadent, those fiends sought to soak the Holiest of Days in the blood of the innocent.

Yet that black day was only one of many for the people of Fars. Shi'ite shrines throughout the region were torn down by Abbasid cavalymen who damned as idolaters all those who worshipped at such places. Imams and mullahs and all those who participated in the prayers at these shrines suffered most cruelly as, at every shrine,

the cavalrymen would demand that they recant their heresy, denounce Ali and all his successors and swear fealty to the authority of the Caliph of Baghdad and to the practice of Orthodox Sunni Islam; those who refused – and there were many – underwent not only outrages against their own person but had to witness their families being tortured.

Time passed and all organised efforts to mobilise the miserable Shi'ites of Fars failed. The zealots, whose Faith in the Rightly Guided Caliph could not be shaken, became martyrs, but the majority of people were suitably chastened by the persecution and embraced, however reluctantly, the tenets of Sunni Islam – this was especially true of the peasants and the poor, cared more about saving their own necks (and those of their families) than about holding true to obscure doctrinal arguments about the Great Occultation.

By the end of 1122, Ahfaz was able to write back to his master in Baghdad reporting that Fars was now Sunni, in name at least, and that the muezzins called out the name of the Caliph Al' Mustahazir al' Abbasi at prayer times. The Caliph was satisfied but, in view of the hostility of this newly-won region, decided that it was not wise for the Caliphate to try to rule directly from Baghdad; too, the absence of direct rule would (it was hoped) make the people less antagonistic towards their new Caliph so the whole region was granted to the Caliph's middle-aged cousin, Khamal, as his personal fief. Khamal was an unexciting and unpopular man who had spent most of his life in Baghdad and, other than having overhauled the taxation system twenty years ago, had done nothing of note. He neither sought nor welcomed his new position a Shah of Fars. Indeed, he argued fiercely that he ought not to be made to leave the familiar surroundings of beloved Baghdad for an untamed and hostile province. But the Caliph's mind was made up and Khamal, now a Shah, began apportioning "his" realm of Fars amongst various Sunni underlings recruited from the minor aristocrats of Baghdad and the environs. Finally, at the start of 1123, a distinctly nervous Khamal Shah, fearing rebellion or assassination at every turn, arrived in Fars to take up his responsibilities...

But there were also downbeat aspects to the Abbasid experience. In 1122, even as the persecution of the heretics was at its height in Fars, the Caliph's eldest son, the well-liked and silver-tongued Mustahazir ibn Mustahazir al' Sultan, died during a hunting accident at the tender age of 21. The youth, while caught up in the thrill of the chase, accidentally cut his finger on a poisoned arrow; tragically, there was no antidote for this venom and he sickened very quickly, dying within twenty-four hours of his accident. The Caliph immediately nominated one of his younger sons as his successor, viz., the very handsome fifteen year old Hazad. The appointment proved a popular one. In most respects, Hazad was not brilliant but his personality set him apart from his fellows. Still, for old Mustahazir, the loss of his heir was a sore blow; not only had Mustahazir been carefully groomed to become Caliph, but the old man actually *loved* his son and wallowed in his death. Things were only ameliorated somewhat when, in 1124, the seventy year old Caliph fathered yet another son with one of his concubines.

But what of the Great Sultan Malik Shah II who now dwelt in Baghdad? The child continued to spend his time following an educational curriculum set down by the Caliph. Though only a Turk, Malik Shah continued to learn the proper arts of civilisation – poetry, calligraphy, the Classical languages, theology – but his martial education was not neglected. In the child's wake, a coterie of Seljuk khans had decided to abandon Isfahan and make a home in the Baghdad Court, planning to return when the boy was grown up and ready to lead them. These tough and rugged fellows made sure that Malik Shah was taught the arts of the horse, the bow and the lance, though they ostentatiously disdained the sword, commenting loudly that the sword was fit only for those who fought on foot; the Turks, they declaimed, were horsemen and if one was a competent rider and archer, one need never come close enough to a foe to exchange blows. (That was their pretext for obstructing his education in the sword; the truth, however, was that they wanted to discourage their Great Sultan from embracing too many Arab customs and, so, sought to emphasise – or even overemphasise – his Turkish steppe heritage).

On the whole, this debate mattered not. Whether with sword, bow or lance, the boy was useless. He had no interest in military affairs and minimal interest in politics; nor was he particularly well-liked or seen as a potential future leader – besides being somewhat short and physically ill-favoured (characteristics that only worsened as he aged), he displayed a certain arrogance, much moody sullenness and a streak of almost completely arbitrary cruelty. His viciousness first manifested itself in the way in which he so relished the many horror stories to emerge from Fars; with rapt attention, he listened, though only twelve, as men boasted of the carnage they had created, the lives they had taken. And if he had only stopped at listening, perhaps all would have been well but...

One day in 1124, while out riding with his guards, the Great Sultan – fifteen years old by now – dismounted and settled down in the shade of some grove by the great river. There, he rested and began to read a book of poetry recently arrived from Isfahan. After a while, a certain sound was heard - the sound of girls' voices raised in song nearby. For a little while, the Great Sultan struggled on, trying to read in spite of the noise, but, at last, he could stand it no longer and sent the captain of his guards to investigate. The captain departed and, a few minutes later, returned and reported that local women were washing clothes nearby on the riverbank nearby. The noise that so disturbed the Great Sultan's peace was the songs that these peasant girls sang while they scrubbed the gowns of their husbands, children and fathers.

"It's just the way of peasant women," the captain explained. "They like to sing while they work. It's actually pleasant enough, if you like songs."

"Well, I don't like it," replied the younger man, testily. "I want to read. In peace. Go back to those women and drown them."

The captain looked quizzically at the Great Sultan. "But they're just *washerwomen*," he said. "If they disturb you, I'll send them on their way."

"I told you to drown them, you dolt. I didn't tell you to send them away," was the boy's reply. "Now, go and do it, before I have to have *you* drowned too."

So it was said and so it was done. This story, and others like it, circulated all through the Caliphate and made their way back to the Seljuk Sultanate and beyond. All across the Ummah, it was generally agreed that the Great Sultan, though only a boy, was proving to have that streak of unwarranted cruelty that had so marked out the other members of his dynasty. It would probably stand him in good stead when he finally ascended to his throne.

The Azeri Emirate

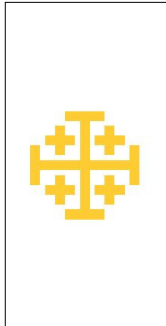
Ruler: Eldigiz, Yazdid of Shirvan

Capital: Tabriz

Religion: Sunni Islam

Slept.

The Crusader States of Outremer



Ruler: Baldwin I, Latin King of Jerusalem, Defender of the Holy Places of Christendom

Capital: Acre

Religion: Roman Catholic

All was busy in the harbour of Acre. The shipwrights of that lively city were toiling day and night to fulfil King Baldwin's command that twenty huge new cogs be built; so much work was on hand that even the lowest pilgrim, arriving penniless from Europe and with no means of paying for the rest of his journey to Jerusalem, could find some employment here and earn a few bezants. The other Crusader Lords questioned why their King should waste his time and the scant resources of Outremer in the building of vessels which, for the most part, were used for trade; no-one, neither the great Lords of Tripoli and Edessa nor the lesser Barons and Knights who owed complete fealty to the King of Jerusalem, could see the sense in spending with such

profligacy when the very frontiers of the Kingdom were, as yet, menaced by the Atabeg of Mosul and the Sultan of Iconium.

Baldwin's reply, typically, was quite unforeseeable to most of his followers. Though age wearied his body and long years beneath the harsh sun of the Orient gnawed at his flesh, his mind remained agile and he retained that streak of audacity and daring that had brought him alliance with the Greeks, peace with the Egyptians and control over Damascus, one of the the greatest Infidel cities on earth.

"You ask me why I build transport ships," he said to the courtiers of the Haute Cour, assembled in the Knights' Hall of their King's palace. "You ask why I waste money hiring sailors and paying shipwrights when I could be hiring soldiers and paying swordsmiths. Your questions are fair and deserve a proper reply..."

"You men - you are the bulwark, holding the frontier of our Christian Land against the foul depredations of the Turk and the Arab. You build your homes at the edge of our Christian civilisation, only a few miles from a most uncertain border across which, at any time, untold thousands of the Infidel might pour. You bring your womenfolk - chaste Christian wives and virginal daughters - and you set them in place where the Infidel might harm them; O, my brothers, how great is your faith in the Lord that you should take such risk! O, how I exult you for your courage! You men, you sleep in beds amidst a nest of Infidel vipers; you lie at repose while in unceasing fear for your life at the hands of those who deny the Divinity of Christ and who wallow in false religion. Why, your every day on this earth is a trial and tribulation and a test of your Faith - and praise God you have not been found wanting!" The King paused from his fulsome praise and drew breath, but he was not yet finished...

"But, I beseech thee, as goodly men of resolute Christian Faith, be not so blinded by the evils near at hand that you neglect the evils which await us over the horizon. Even now, the King of Germany has raised his hand against the See of St. Peter; even now the Duke of Bavaria marches his army against our Venetian comrades who, though they lack our noble Frankish blood and honour, have proven themselves the most

steadfast of allies in this great task of retaining the Holy Land, sanctified by the footsteps of the Immaculate Lamb.

“It is clear to me that the impious machinations of the Germans cannot be allowed to go unchecked. Verily, it is clear that we, the humble Knights of Christ, are disregarded in the counsels of the Princes of Europe and of the Empire. We who wrested this Holy Land from the grip of Satan through our strong arms and brave hearts, we who have sent Saracen hordes beyond count screaming down into the Pit – we are now disdained by Henry of Germany, by Frederick of Swabia and by a hundred other German Princes who count their petty squabbles over the wealth and lands of the Church as a matter more important than the salvation of men’s souls and the fulfilment of God’s Will that over Jerusalem should fly the banners of Christendom.

“Therefore, I will sail to Venice. With a small force of loyal knights, I will sail to the Great City on the Lagoon and offer them succour; in this wise, we shall repay a great debt to the thalassocrats of Venice who, by protecting the sea lanes, have made our position in the East tenable; and, not least, we shall show the Schismatics that the most virtuous of Christ’s servants – the Knights of Outremer – take a dim view of this schism and of the assaults upon Venice.”

The King’s declaration was not universally well-received but nor was it completely damned. There were many who saw that the appearance of Crusaders in Venice might show the Germans that this situation was grave – perhaps even grave enough to drive Emperor Henry to seek a settlement with the Holy Father. Too, no doubt existed that Venice was both a vital strategic ally of the Crusaders *and* a loyal friend who, in her hour of need, ought to be rendered relief and assistance. Yet, for all that, there remained many who saw no wisdom in the King departing Acre – and taking fighting men with him, no less!! – at a time when so many enemies might prey upon Outremer and from so many directions. The objections, though, were largely in vain. Baldwin’s speech had not been meant to initiate a debate about the efficacy of this course of action over that; it was, instead, a simple statement of what the King was going to do. Let the Crusading Lords agree or disagree, but Baldwin would act as he saw fit and would sail to Venice...

Spring of 1121 saw the newly-outfitted Crusader fleet depart Acre carrying the King of Jerusalem, one thousand Frankish knights and two thousand footmen. They sailed across the Mediterranean, up the Adriatic and into Venice where, in the Autumn, they received an exultant welcome from the people of that enormous city... The exultation turned to nervousness when the cultured Italian merchants realised just how unsophisticated and crude the Frankish warriors could be; the Venetians began secreting their gold and other valuables, with some even hiding away their daughters and wives, fearing that these Knights of Christ might lose control of their senses in so wealthy – and sensual – a city as this. Fortunately, for the whole of the three years during which Baldwin and his men were there, they behaved, by and large, in a proper fashion and engaged in no looting, rape, theft arson or other serious offences... However, it was noted that the Franks showed a rare passion for gambling and, as the thousands of courtesans who dwelt in this decadent city could testify, they proved a most lascivious and dissipated group in their relations with ladies. King Baldwin, thankfully, remained something of an exception and was not seen to embark on any inappropriate liaisons. (*For full details of the Crusaders’ activities in Venice, see the Venetian tax entry.*)

In the Winter of 1124, returning from Venice to their homes in the East, the Frankish fleet stopped off at the island of Rhodes and, noting it was still in rebellion against the rule of Emperor John Comnenus, Baldwin and his cohorts were struck by the same spirit of opportunism which had been the guiding principle of Crusader policy. They decided to conquer the defenceless island! After unloading onto the craggy beaches of Rhodes, Baldwin sent forth heralds to proclaim to the natives that, in view of their secession from the Byzantine state, they were now to be annexed to and by the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem! The islanders were not, as a rule, particularly hostile or belligerent (their recent revolt on behalf of Isaac Comnenus notwithstanding) but the arrival of the ironclad Latin heretics was enough to drive all the grandees of the island to take up arms – and all the more so as the people of Rhodes heard details of the Latin Apulian raids – and accompanying atrocities – on the mainland.

Nevertheless, the actual struggle for control of the island, which took place during the Summer of 1125, was predictably one-sided. Greek peasant militias, poorly-armed and indifferently-led, were no match for the veteran Frankish cavalry with their bright, fierce blades and gargantuan warhorses. In only a couple of months, resistance was shattered and the island of Rhodes was under Baldwin’s control. Since he had no wish to be responsible for the direct governance of this outpost, he selected a few of the resident magnates and granted them the authority to govern on his behalf. No military garrisons would be stationed on Rhodes and there would be no martial law, provided the islanders paid proper tribute and did not revolt. It was important to note that Baldwin took his treaty with the Byzantines seriously and at no time did he seek to impinge on the liberty of the port of Rhodes which remained subject to the Emperor of Constantinople, with Comneni banners fluttering from the city’s modest defences...

Back home, 1122 saw the unfortunate but not untimely death of King Thoros I of Lesser Armenia (Cilicia), a close ally of the Frankish Crusaders. At the age of fifty-three, His Majesty’s heart simply gave out during a brisk hunting expedition. His immediate successor was his son, Leo, who, for reasons best known to himself, opted to withdraw

from the military alliance which his father had concluded with the Franks. Instead, Lesser Armenia would send a small annual tribute to Jerusalem and Antioch while retaining their military forces for their own use... It was not immediately clear what effect the weakening of Crusader influence in Anatolia would have on the future direction of Outremer's policies.

At Acre itself, the flow of Christian pilgrims from Europe began to taper off noticeably. To be sure, pilgrims still came but fewer than in the days immediately following Jerusalem's liberation. With chaos reigning supreme in Europe, and Jerusalem apparently, secure under the banner of Christ, not so many knights and barons were prepared to leave their estates and homes for years at a time to undertake a perilous and, in many ways, unnecessary journey to the Holy Sites. Despite this, there was a marked growth in the number of merchants – mainly Italian, Armenian and Greek – who traded in the city, buying up fine silks and the exotic goods of the East brought to Acre across the dry plains of Syria; and the population of the city swelled as local peoples, whether Musselmen or Christian or even Jews, moved within the walls to take advantage of the commercial opportunities available. By 1125, the city had become one of the great commercial centres of the Eastern Mediterranean and, indeed, of the Latin world.

In other matters, the nobles of Outremer were scandalised by the marriage of Maud of England and William of Apulia. This was particularly vexing to Raymond of Edessa who was meant to have married young Maud, prior to her kidnapping by the Apulians and their subsequent lascivious handling of the girl. Even in Antioch, which traditionally had quite close links with the Normans of Italy, there were voices raised in anger at this egregious insult to Frankish honour. On the other hand, some people commented on the negative traits of Raymond of Edessa who, as Seneschal of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, was quite likely to ascend to the throne of the Holy City at some point. They said that he had uncommon carnal appetites, that he was quick to anger and lacked humility – all this was true but, nevertheless, Raymond was very popular in the Latin East and the humiliation he suffered, the affront to his chivalric dignity, was not something that most people were likely to forget quickly.

Tellingly, when young Matilda died barely a year into her marriage, the uncharitable and the pious alike claimed that this was God's judgment on the Apulians and on Matilda's family for their conduct.

The Fatimid Caliphate of Cairo

Ruler: al-Bahar ibn Mustali, Commander of the Faithful, Whirlwind of God, Caliph of All Islam, Guardian of the Holy Places of Islam

Capital: Cairo

Religion: Shi'a Islam

Al'Amir had his mind on war. The damnable Sicilian Hautevilles, having already been chased from Libya, now had to be chastened more completely. Not only did their troops have to be driven from all African soil – even from Sunni Tunisia – but control of the seas had to be seized by the Caliphate. Only in this way could the Caliph of All Islam hope that North Africa might remain free of the Norman taint, protected from Sicilian pirates and Neapolitan slavers; only in this way could he keep the ravaging hands of the Hautevilles off of African lands. It was not simply Christianity that al'Amir sought to contain, for he was on cordial terms with the Makourians and Abyssinians and had even reached an accommodation with the Crusaders. No, it was the *Normans* whom the Caliph saw as a threat to Africa.

Many new keels were laid down in Cairo, to be combined with the existing fleet and sent forth to battle, under the command of Yusef al-Matin, now appointed to the rank of Grand Admiral. Ten handsome new corsair ships were built and they, along with all the other ships, were packed to the gunwales with marines. A brilliantly constructed flagship – the *Fatima* – was built, along with a sister vessel named the *Mustali*. As with the other ships, these two received a full complement of marines but, whereas the other marines were mostly miserable Sunni conscripts, these men were all faithful Shi'ites, recruited for Cairo and other strongholds of the Caliphate and the Faith.

While the fleet was being readied, the Grand Vizier al- Hâfiz, together with the young Prince Bahar, made ready for their trip to the Zirid Emirate to the west. They took along a military force – three thousand men, more than enough for the journey – but there was some apprehension about what welcome they would receive; the Zirids and Fatimids had a long and fraught history and, even though the Caliph assured them that the Emir Yahya ibn Ziri would welcome them with open arms and that treaties would be signed, both the Prince and the Vizier remained cautious and a little doubtful that the reception would be quite as effusive as their master imagined. Yes, there had, in recent years, been some rapprochement with the Zirids but agreeing to "live and let live" was quite different from this kind of large and high status embassy – even more so because the Caliph had ordered that one of his distant female cousins, a direct descendant of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima, should be taken along to become the wife of Emir Yahya!

Well, in any case, in March of 1121, Yusef's fleet slipped out of Cairo to seek glory on the blue-green sea. Totalling sixty ships and with four thousand marines, these bold sailors of Egypt didn't actually do very much – mostly they just sailed around the Sea of Libya and Bay of Tunis and back again, seldom moving very far from the sight of land, looking for a fight but failing to find it. They knew that the Caliph had sent them here because he

expected yet another Hauteville fleet to head for Tunisia but many on the ships doubted the wisdom of their leader and voiced their suspicions that this would prove to be a fruitless mission. Yet, in the Spring of 1122, all that changed! Fatimid corsairs, acting as scouts far ahead of the main fleet, spotted a number of dromon warships flying the Hauteville ensign and heading towards Malta. The Christian fleet, under the command Count Roger de Hauteville and the Greek mercenary Christophoulos, pursued the light corsairs, hoping to catch them and teach those Mahometan dogs that the western Mediterranean was a Hauteville lake. However, the dromons were just too heavy and the Norman sailors had to watch, angrily, as the Musselmen escaped over the horizon...

Al-Matin, for his part, welcomed the intelligence his scouts brought. He knew, now, that there were Christian ships in the vicinity and that presaged an opportunity for battle! Cunning as a fox, the Fatimid Admiral directed his ships to set course for Malta, where he planned to ambush the heavy Norman fleet as it passed, forcing them to do battle... (*For details of the Sicilian-Fatimid sea battle, see the County of Sicily's entry; for details of events on land in Tunisia, see the Zirid Emirate's fax entry.*)

While such exciting things were happening abroad, things at home seemed a little more sedate. The Caliph, for example, seemed more concerned with the University of Cairo than with anything else. Heretofore, the University had been dominated by Sunnis and, although they had to tread carefully and never actually criticise the Shi'a Caliphate, they had always managed to remain annoyingly independent of central control. Well, that was all to change. The Caliph sent a little gold to the place, hoping to encourage the students and teachers alike to look favourably upon upon, and sent many hundreds of carefully approved Shi'ite scholars and theologians to take up places in the institution. In many instances, these incomers pushed out existing Sunnis; even when a Sunni was allowed to keep his post, he was seldom left completely unmolested, as the Caliphate's officers maliciously hinted at the insecurity that could (and would) attend the career of a non-Shi'a scholar in Cairo. Before very long, most Sunnis had either quit the city for Baghdad or, all too often, embraced the Shi'a Faith.

But it was not all bad. The Caliph, being much concerned with scholarly matters, decreed that an observatory should be built in Cairo, whence the movements of the heavens might be observed and the firmament charted for the glory of Allah and the elucidation of Man! It was a marvellous idea but, sadly, the Caliph al'Amir did not live to see it completed for, in January of 1122, he died of a fever at the ripe old age of forty-nine.

The most likely successor to the Caliphate was al'Amir's younger brother Bahar, who had already been formally nominated as heir, but he was off in Tunisia, on a mission to the Zirids, and it was not at all certain that he could make his way back to Cairo in time to forestall an attempted coup by other ambitious members of the dynasty. Bahar surprised everyone by riding home in record time, along the coastal roads from Tunis to Alexandria. When he arrived in Cairo, his elder brother had been dead for less than a fortnight and the capital's vying factions had not yet had time to choose their candidates for the Caliphate or to begin jockeying for power in earnest.

Well, Bahar would trump all his rivals, all the would-be Caliphs, all the great nobles and all their courtly partisans by going directly to the true source of royal power in Cairo. As soon as his barge docked in the city, he marched directly to the barracks of the Caliph's regiment of Mameluke bodyguards. "Barracks", though, is a word that doesn't convey the splendour of the set of buildings which the late Caliph al'Mustali had created for his most favoured, most privileged and most trusted soldiers; although they were nominally only slaves and they numbered only a few hundred, al'Mustali had set the Mamelukes up as a force of unparalleled power in Cairo. In addition to their obvious duties, such as guarding both the city and the person of the Caliph, their General (the renowned Mustafa) was also responsible for policing the capital and maintaining surveillance on all suspect individuals – tasks he accomplished handsomely. And in return for this devotion, the Mamelukes received princely material rewards, including a set of barracks that was more akin to a palace complex.

When the Mameluke General Mustafa received the Prince, he did so in an ornately-panelled meeting room with an intricately-carved oak ceiling. Bahar smiled inwardly as he contemplated that here was a military barracks that actually needed a *reception room*, where important visitors could meet and be welcomed by men who were meant to be slaves. These two men – one a prince descended from the prophet and the other a slave soldier who didn't even know who his parents were – sat at opposite ends of a massive inlaid wooden table. Around them stood bookcases filled with scrolls in dozens of languages – works on religion sat alongside books of poetry and they, in turn, sat next to Arabic translations of the Platonic dialogues. Bahar appraised the room. Though not blessed with great intellect, even he could see that it spoke of power and of confidence – attitudes that came from the Mamelukes' unique position as kingmakers.

In his usual blunt way, Bahar cut to the point: "Honoured Mustafa, you were a loyal servant of my brother and of my father before him." This comment was received with a nod and an inscrutable expression.

"Well, you are aware that my brother nominated me as his favoured heir. So your duty is clear, if you remain true to the dynasty which raised you up from the gutter and made you a great man, a leader of men. Forces are moving against me – why, if the fleet were not away, I suspect al-Matin would have tried to manoeuvre himself onto the Caliph's throne and there are a hundred cousins who would gladly flout the will of my departed brother and try to take power for themselves. You must crush them! Crush them and secure my path to the throne." The young man (for Bahar was only eighteen) looked intense as he spoke these words, but then he went on with a

somewhat more fawning visage and an oilier tone: “You may rest assured, it need hardly be said, that there will be rewards for your loyalty – honours, riches, offices and more besides. Your sons.... Why, they will not even be Mamelukes but shall be free and honoured nobles at our court...”

For half a minute, neither man spoke and the General maintained his sphinx-like, unfathomable expression. And then he broke into a broad smile, bright white teeth showing in his thick dark beard. “Master, why do you insult me by offering me inducements?” he asked in a jocular tone. “Do you really think my loyalty can be bought? Great Caliph, you had my loyalty from the moment our lamented lord al’Amir left this terrestrial plane for the Gardens of Paradise. I follow you, as a humble and unworthy slave, because you are my rightful master, the rightful successor of my last master. Now, let us discuss those who would oppose you...”

For the rest of the day, they remained closeted in the room, making lists of Cairo’s most prominent citizens and of all those who would or who might oppose Bahar’s ascent. That night, all those whom Bahar saw a threat were visited by Mustafa’s Mameluke guardsmen. Some were warned in advance and managed to flee and others bribed the slave-soldiers to let them slip away, but most were slain quietly and quickly. At dawn the next morning, as the sun began to smile on the teeming city by the Nile, Bahar was awoken from his slumber in the guest chambers of the Mameluke Barracks. A message had come from General Mustafa explaining that any potential opponents had been dealt with or forced to flee and that, whenever he was ready, al-Bahar ibn Mustali could march to the Caliph’s Palace, with an escort of Mameluke soldiery, and have himself proclaimed Commander of the Faithful. Bahar was delighted and did just that (after breakfast, of course).

With the succession settled so easily, the youthful al-Bahar decided to continue the policies espoused by his wise older brother. The friendship of Yemen was courted and the Fatimid claim to the coastal strip of Asir was transferred to the Sayyida in Aden. Too, considerable quantities of grain were shipped across the Red Sea to aid the impoverished Yemenis who, so recently, had suffered from terrible droughts and, being at the very cusp of the desert, were often prone to food shortages.

At home, the defence of the Caliphate was not overlooked. The modest walls of Damietta were extended and more men set to garrison the place; more towers were raised and ditches excavated; why, there was even talk of digging a moat. Given that, with the death of the Caliph al’Amir, relations with the Franks of Jerusalem might become a little more erratic, it seemed wise to strengthen the bulwark on the realm’s volatile eastern frontier.

The docks at Cairo, where the new Caliph had arrived at the start of 1122, had another august visitor at the end of the year as Yusef al-Matin returned home with the fleet. The marine contingents who gone out to war were visibly very heavily depleted but the ships were all there – some, it is true, bore the scars of war but none had actually been lost. Too, to the amazement of all the Cairene onlookers, when Yusef jumped off his flagship, the *Fatima*, to be met with the cheers and applause of the Caliphate’s loyal subjects, he was followed closely by a pale, yellow-haired and surpassingly filthy young man who wore the bizarre dress of the Norman barbarians – it was none other than Count Roger de Hauteville! When the Count’s identity was confirmed, news swept through Cairo that Allah had brought a great judgment down upon the enemies of the Caliph – a scion of that hated family, those brigand Princes of Apulia and Sicily, had been humbled in battle by the warriors of Cairo and was now dragged in chains to grovel before the throne of the Caliph! Allah-hu-Akhbar!¹¹

Why, the arrival of the captive Roger caused more of a stir even than the boxes of Maltese loot that the Egyptian sailors dragged from their vessels. The new Caliph was not so impressed by his “guest”. In fact, if young Bahar’s hands had not been tied by laws of etiquette and hospitality, he’d gladly have lopped the grubby infidel pirate’s head clean off his shoulders *but* such ungentlemanly behaviour would hardly be appropriate for a man who sought to be Islam’s supreme leader (and, also, Roger’s ransom could be handsome and his person could be a valuable lever in negotiations with Simon of Sicily); so he swallowed his disgust and ordered that Roger be quartered in comfortable – though not luxurious – lodgings; guards would be posted, lest the rascally Norman get ideas about escaping, but their presence would not be onerous. The Count was even granted permission to go hawking outside the city and to visit the great works and monuments of the ancients, to visit the new observatory, to gaze upon the famous mosques and palaces of glorious Cairo.

Roger, for his part, was far from pleased either at captivity or at the identity of his captors (for he had some very personal grievances against the Fatimids) but he resolved to make the best of things and found much solace in the small pleasures that the Mahometans allowed him.

The Zirid Emirate of Tunisia

Ruler: Yahya ibn Zirid, Emir of Tunisia

Capital: Tunis

¹¹ This was, of course, rather exaggerated. Count Roger was never put in chains and he wasn’t dragged anywhere. Having been taken prisoner in honourable combat, Yusef treated him as a respected guest and the two men got along famously – which was a most unexpected turn of events given that Yusef was such an obnoxious fellow and Roger was so violently prideful.

Religion: Sunni Islam (allegedly)

So many tribulations beset the Emirate that Yahya could scarcely envision a means of escape. From his increasingly dilapidated palace, he looked across a half-ruined capital, its docks devoid of commerce, its people despondent. Even in the mosques, where the word of the Prophet of Allah was conveyed to the Faithful, there was fear for the future and an expectation that, like their Muslim brethren in the Holy Land, the people of Tunis might end up under the rule of European barbarians. Yahya contemplated a future that, if he was lucky enough to escape with his life, might involve exile to Baghdad or Seville.

Yet, amidst this gloom, one bright spot remained. The Emir had been busy exchanging letters with his eastern neighbour, and sometime rival, the Caliph of Cairo. While the Fatimids were certainly Shi'a heretics, one could not disguise the fact that they were *powerful*; already, two Christian invasions had been successfully driven from Africa and even over Most Holy Mecca, home of the Prophet and site of the Ka'aba, the green banners of the descendants of Fatima fluttered. Yes, the Fatimids were a great power once more and they were especially eager to bring wayward Tunisia back under their wing. Nor was this something that met with much resistance from the Tunisian people. To be sure, some of the fiercer Orthodox Sunni mullahs and theologians made noise about the need to remain true to the proper doctrine of Islam and to reject the heresy of the Shi'ites but, in the streets and bazaars and many mosques, the people seemed simply apathetic about the doctrinal differences. The aristocracy, realising that they had no actual allies and only one *potential* ally, enthusiastically embraced Shi'a teachings and tradition. Better, they thought, to accept the legitimacy of the Fatimids and their brand of Islam than to fall beneath the crusading blade of the Norman invader...

In 1121, perhaps in response to the current pro-Fatimid, pro-Shi'a sentiment in Tunisia, a small Egyptian army turned up at Tunis under the command of the Fatimid Grand Vizier al-Hâfiz and the Caliph's younger brother, Prince Bahar. The two men remained were welcomed in the Zirid capital with some warmth – a fact that surprised the Shi'ites, somewhat, given the often violent history between the two states - and noted, in their dispatches home, that a distinct lack of religiosity could be detected across the whole of Tunisian society. In any case, the Vizier offered Yahya al-Emir a treaty whereby the Caliphate and the Emirate would undertake to defend each other from the aggression of any third parties (the Normans were not named but they were the obvious target of the treaty); Yahya enthusiastically signed the treaty, swearing before Allah and in the Name of the Prophet, that he would prove a loyal ally. To cement the new alliance, the hitherto unmarried Yahya took a Fatimid princess as his bride; though only the daughter of some distant cousin of the current Caliph of Cairo, the symbolism – in that the Emir was mixing his blood with that of the Prophet and taking a Heretic woman into his house – was fairly clear: Tunisia was obviously preparing to return to the Fatimid fold...

In other matters, January 1122 brought news that the Caliph al-Amir was dead. Bahar, his nominated heir, immediately quit Tunisia and rode, hell-for-leather, along the coastal that lead all the way through Tripolitania, up through Bnghazi, east to Alexandria and finally across the Nile to Great Cairo. There, he was proclaimed Caliph in accordance with the will of his elder brother and predecessor. On the whole, it was probable that Bahar would have had a much harder time establishing his claim but that most of the Caliphate's leading nobles and ministers were off doing other things. One of them, Yusef al-Matin, had gone to sea with a respectably-size Fatimid fleet and, in Spring of 1122, had faced a large Hauteville Sicilian fleet in battle off the coast of Malta. This victory removed, for the time being, any chance that the Christians might land in Tunisia and was seized on by the Zirid Emir! (*See Fatimid entry for details of the naval battles between the Sicilians and Egyptians and for the successionary issues in Cairo*).

With the heat of Summer not yet at its greatest, the Emir ordered his lieutenant Ali al-Gesi to march out to Hauteville-controlled Bone with about three thousand Zirid troops and an auxiliary force of Egyptians. Ali was only too glad to obey and, by June, had cut the dusty little city off on the landward side. Within the port's modest walls, less than a thousand Hauteville troops – Normans, Sicilians, Greeks and even Saracens – waited. They had expected to be reinforced or evacuated by a fleet from Sicily but the Fatimids, having driven Count Roger's fleet back into Palermo, had put an end to any such hope. A couple of months of brinksmanship and negotiation followed. The garrison troops, man-for-man, were significantly better than the ragtag Zirid-Fatimid conscripts *but* the Sicilians no longer controlled the sea so the men in Bone could expect to receive only very limited supplies from Palermo and, importantly, could not expect to receive any military reinforcements. The Zirid commander, for his part, realised that he had no chance of successfully storming the city and that his blockade might not be enough to bring a port to its knees.

Thus, as Autumn descended, bringing with it heavy rains that churned the ground to mud, the two sides felt time pressing down upon them. For the Zirids, it was vital to compel the city to capitulate before the Hautevilles could take to the seas once more. For the Sicilians, it was vital to hold out as long as possible *in case* the fleet could come to their aid... In the end, it was the Hauteville garrison who gave in first. At the urging of the Fatimids, Ali al-Gesi sent forward an offer that anyone who surrendered would be given the chance to post a ransom and would be exchanged without ransom if a permanent peace could be agreed. This was enough to push the demoralised garrison into yielding. As their last task before formally handing the city over to the Zirids, the red-and-white Hauteville banners were taken down and burnt by the defenders, to prevent their being taken by the Infidel as

prizes. Ali did not mind losing these banners; he thought that the eight hundred Hauteville troops who were now his prisoners were prize enough.

This was just about all that happened to Tunisia except that Ali, having completed his martial task, headed up into the mountains to the region of Al'Hauts. His fevered efforts to recruit the locals for the Emir's cause met with only limited success, as the tribal chieftains agreed to pledge some of their blades and young men to serve in the Emirate's army.

Eastern Europe

The Byzantine Empire



Ruler: John II Comnenus *the Beautiful*, August Emperor of the Romans, Basileus kai Autokrator, Head of the Eastern Rite

Capital: Constantinople

Religion: Eastern Orthodox

While His Majesty remained in the field with the army, the Grand Domestic John Axuch organised the settlement of the Bulgarian Revolt. Various stretches of Imperial territory would be granted to the nascent Bulgarian state in return for peace; the Bulgars, in return, gave up any and all claim to the city of Adrianople, where the local Paulicians were in open revolt against Constantinople. (See *the Bulgarian entry for details*).

The resolution Axuch reached did not meet with much support from any level of society. The courtiers and aristocrats were grievously angered by the loss of Thessalonica, the second greatest city in the Empire, and some openly condemned the Emperor for allowing this treaty instead of just crushing the Bulgarian upstarts – after all, were not the Comneni renowned for their military prowess? The ordinary citizens of The City showed their opposition to the Bulgar-Byzantine accord by engaging in three solid days of rioting; Bulgarians, suspected Bogomils and Italians were particular targets of the mob – for it was such people as these who had brought the Empire to its current pretty pass – but, if these targets were not available, the angry rabble, with little discernment, would fall on any convenient victim. Tellingly, the Grand Domestic quietly and sensibly absented himself from Constantinople until the people's rage had spent itself.

In the end, though, the affair blew over and the anger of the urban throng dissipated, leaving behind a vague feeling of resentment against all damned Bulgarians. War was raging in Asia and that, rather than the surrender of Thessalonica, occupied the minds of the citizenry. News from the war in Asia seeped back to the capital – stories of the sacking of Turkish cities and of victories won and territories claimed deep in Asia Minor; yet during 1123 and 1124, even as Thanksgiving Prayers were being offered in the cathedrals and churches of Constantinople, a man with good eyesight could stand beside the sea and discern Turkish warbands active on the Asian shore, burning and destroying. So, the populace was torn between extremes of joy and misery and there could be no certainty about what the future held for the Empire of the New Rome.

With such tribulations afflicting the God-Sustained Empire, the question of finance soon raised its ugly head. The maintenance of a powerful army, almost constantly in the field for year after year, was an undertaking both weighty and costly; too, with rebellions in the provinces, corruption amongst the bureaucracy and the destruction of so much valuable land in the interior of Asia Minor, the revenues of the Empire were collapsing and what little money could be raised was eaten up by the soldiery. So, understandably, it became a matter of prime importance for the Grand Domestic to secure more funds, more capital, for the war. Sadly, the traditional sources – the Italian bankers and the Church – had either exhausted their reserves of gold or were unwilling to risk any more of their wealth investing in loans to the Byzantines. What could be done?

Well, John Axuch hit upon a novel idea. Inspired by the Latin Church, he pressured the Patriarch of Constantinople into the pursuit of a not altogether popular policy – the Greek Orthodox Church (or, more specifically, the Patriarchate of Constantinople) would now offer absolution in return for money! Axuch's logic ran something like this: the Orthodox Church had already received from Christ the power to absolve sin via the Holy Mystery of Confession; in order to grant absolution, a priest need only be convinced that the one seeking absolution is genuinely penitent; therefore, a sinner could – and should – demonstrate his or her penitence by contributing money towards the defence of God's Holy Church. And, of course, any monies raised in this way from the penitent masses would be contributed to the State for the upkeep of the legions.

Needless to say, there was a considerable outcry against this quasi-heretical attempt to wring money from the congregation. Some heated discussion followed between the most pious Orthodox priests, monks and bishops (who, naturally, abhorred this new policy) and the pragmatists who supported it. The only thing that prevented the Church – and perhaps the whole Empire – from splitting over this issue was the appearance of menacing Turkish hordes on the Asian shore opposite The City. The vile depredations of these roving Turkish bands were all that

was needed to silence all but the most vehement opponents of the sale of indulgences. Even the pious and those who despised worldly goods acknowledged that, at this most gruelling of times, any and all means of sustaining the army must be employed.

Perhaps to distract the clerical community and the congregations of The City, the Patriarch John IX personally selected two extremely promising young acolytes of Swedish extraction (in fact, they were the grandsons of Varangian guardsmen) and commissioned them to compile a Norse translation of the liturgy and the Gospels. Having accepted the Patriarch's assignment, the two men were ordained as monks under the names Cyril and Methodius... The significance of this was not lost on most people – Cyril and Methodius had, three hundred years earlier, translated the liturgy and Gospels into the Slavonic tongue and, while doing so, had invented two new alphabets. The fruits of their missionary work had been the establishment of Orthodox religious hegemony over most of Eastern Europe – why, even Bohemia and Hungary had, at that time, accepted the appointment of Greek bishops.

So, with this new effort at translating the Christian works into Norse, it seemed clear that the Byzantines were interested in exporting their Faith to Scandinavia where the Church of the Latin Rite was obviously weakening in the face of renewed confidence from the pagans. Many Byzantines felt that they, given their long relationship with the Varangers of the Far North, could have much more success in establishing a lasting Christian presence in the frigid and wild Norse lands. Too, since the Orthodox Church did not labour under the ridiculous "Trilingual Heresy"¹² that so afflicted the Catholics, they could present the Word of the Lord in a way that was understandable and intelligible to the vast mass of Swedes (unlike the Latin Gospels which, being in so alien a language, were beyond the grasp of most Swedes, including even very educated people).

In any case, by the end of 1125, the translations had been completed – a complete liturgy in Norse using Runic letters and two Gospels in the same language, one using Slavonic letters and one using Roman. Perhaps, in the coming years, bold Orthodox missionaries would set out from Miklagard¹³ with these books in their hands, to bring Christianity and enlightenment to the north and to extend, ever further, the rich cultural commonwealth of Byzantium...

And while all that had been going on, the small Muslim population of The City was not ignored by the Emperor's officials. Seeking to demonstrate Imperial tolerance of non-Christian minorities, the Grand Domestic issued an edict, on behalf of the Emperor, giving members of the Sufi sect the right to live and worship freely in Constantinople and even to open a madrasa for the education of their own community. Sadly, the decree, however generous, did not cause an influx of Sufi mystics. Be that as it may, a similar decree was promulgated regarding the Naziris. Although the Byzantines maintained their official preference for the followers of the Fatimid Caliph, they embraced the Naziri Muslims as fellow travellers in the war against the Turks and invited them to establish homes in the Mahometan community of The City. Too, since, many Naziris were of Syrian and Persian extraction, there were some who hoped that the arrival of these people could bring competition to the Italian merchants who threatened to dominate, or even monopolise, the Empire's trade. Sadly, as with the Sufis, the decree had minimal effect. So much for the policies of the Grand Domestic.

While that was all going on, much more interesting things were taking place. Information had come to the Emperor that the hated "Red Lion of Konya", Sultan Kilij Arslan, had crossed into the Balkans and had actively been involved in fomenting the late Bulgarian revolt. The hearts of the Emperor and all Greeks still burned with rage when they thought on the crimes of Kilij Arslan in Phrygia; for the Byzantines, there could be no greater victory than the capture of this demon so, if there was even the smallest chance that this rumour might be true, they had to seize it and try to capture the fiend! If Kilij Arslan really *was* in the Balkans, there was only a limited number of routes which he could take to return to his home in Anatolia and any route – whether he tried to depart from the Mouths of the Danube or tried to sneak across the Sea of Marmara – would require that he take to a boat and sail across open water. That being so, the Empire's extensive network of spies and informers went to work in docks and ports, in towns and villages, hunting down any suspicious foreigners who might have sought the use of a boat. The information gleaned by these agents was put directly into the hands of Admiral Papanicholas, whose fleet was extremely active in the waters off Constantinople and Thrace, stopping and searching even the smallest boats and skiffs.

As chance would have it, in March of 1122, Byzantine agents in Thrace received reports of a strange foreign fellow in the southern coastal district, apparently seeking passage across the water to Bithynia. Apart from the fact that he was obviously not Greek (nor even a Slav!), the thing that really made him stand out was that he paid his way not with Imperial Bezants, the preferred coin of most of Eastern Europe, but with Seljuk silver dirhams – Mahometan coins minted in Iconium! The Byzantine authorities received the reports about this man with a degree of scepticism. They doubted that that anyone important would be found wandering through Thrace and, on the

¹² This is the idea (occasionally official Catholic doctrine) that liturgical literature could only be presented in one of the three "Holy" languages – Greek, Latin or Hebrew – and it was heretical to translate sacred works into any other language. In the C9th, Pope Hadrian II made a special exception for Slavonic but it was very much a "one-off".

¹³ Miklagard – the Great City, the Norse name for Constantinople.

whole, they reckoned that he was probably no more than a roving Turkish merchant. Nevertheless, their orders were to investigate any dubious individuals and, so, that was exactly what they did...

A couple of Byzantine naval patrols arrived off the Thracian Coast, in the vicinity where the foreigner and his travelling companions had been spotted, and liaised with local officers of the government who had been keeping a surreptitious eye on the stranger. These local agents reported what they had learnt by their close observations of the suspicious man; they gave details of how he had been sniffing around, for a couple of weeks, trying without success to find a fisherman who would transport him across the sea into Bithynia. Well, the Greek naval officers needed no further inducement – they arranged for one of their own men to go ashore where he would pose as a fisherman willing to convey the foreigner to the distant Asian shore but, instead of making for Anatolia, the “fisherman” would sail directly into a squadron of warships who could arrest these shady scoundrels and uncover exactly what kind of malefaction they were up to.

The Byzantine plan went off without a hitch. The boat carrying the foreigners – who numbered only five and who definitely seemed to be some kind of Mahometans – was intercepted before it got out of sight of land and the men were clapped in chains to be taken to The City for interrogation. It was only after they arrived in Constantinople, when the capture of these men was brought to the personal attention of Admiral Papanicholas, that the full truth was discovered. Far from being harmless merchants or even hostile spies, the documents they carried identified them as high officials of the Seljuk Sultanate. Further investigation revealed that the leader of this band was none other than Kilij Arslan himself!! In no time at all, the whole of Constantinopolis knew that the *Red Lion* had been captured while trying to cross from Thrace to Bithynia!

But what were the Byzantines to do with this dread Mahometan potentate? Well, far from harming the Sultan, as soon as his identity was uncovered, he was treated with the utmost honour. The Grand Domestic, John Axuch, personally attended the Sultan and paid him full deference and respect but “Regrettably,” he explained to Kilij Arslan, “we shall not be able to let you go. Even if His Majesty, the Avtokrator, wished to release or to ransom you, the new leader of the Seljuks, Sultan Etugral, has made clear that there is no place for you in the Turkish lands. Therefore, I am afraid you shall have no option but to retire here in Constantinople...”

It was an interesting and unexpected situation for Kilij Arslan. Axuch described the situation that would now unfold: the ex-Sultan (who had actually been deposed, in his absence, by his kinsman Etugral) would receive a villa in one of the nicer suburbs of the city and he could spend the remainder of his days there, presumably in some luxury. The men who had been captured alongside him would be granted the status of an honour guard, while Emperor John would personally provide a staff of servants and a suitable bride from a Senatorial family. The life, as Axuch described it, was notably lacking in political power but it was a generous captivity – and perhaps more than any Seljuk could have hoped, given the enormity of their crimes in Phrygia.

In due course, the marvellously attired ex-Sultan, who had received some glorious red silk robes as a personal gift from the Emperor, was escorted, along with his men, to the villa that was to be their new home. It was an extensive property of only one storey but it was set in very fine grounds with several acres of rich gardens surrounding it and had a most impressive set of oak-carved doors. Again, thought Kilij Arslan, this residence was not ideal but it was far from the worst fate he might have suffered at the hands of the Greeks. Perhaps, in a year or two, he could convince the Emperor to move him to a proper palace...

And while he thought such things, something quite unexpected happened. After entering the villa, the ex-Sultan and his five honour guards were most surprised to see that the palace was almost bare – hardly a stick of furniture was in the place and, worse, other than the main hall, only a couple of rooms were accessible, all the rest having been bricked up!

“What is the meaning of this?” the ex-Sultan spluttered, too staggered by events even to shout.

No-one answered his question. Behind him, Varangian Guardsmen slammed shut the great double-doors of the villa leaving Kilij Arslan and his men all alone in the hall – in the very *dark* hall for, although it was afternoon, the only light in the place came from two small oblong windows high up on either side of the main doors. The captive Turks rushed into one of the other accessible rooms and found that the windows here, though barred, were open and received the light of day. Kilij watched the scene outside with horror – workmen, secreted amongst the trees and shrubs in the garden, were now emerging and without delay set to work bricking up the main door. And then all the remaining windows, including the one Kilij Arslan and his retinue looked out from. Only a tiny aperture was left unbricked – enough for a man to stick his hand in but no more than that.

Searching around in the murk and shade, panicking more and more by the minute, the Seljuks eventually found, in the only other accessible room, thirteen coffins; twelve were neatly stacked – six on the ground and another on top of each – but the thirteenth was propped up against a wall. When their eyes became accustomed to the dimness of the room, they uncovered a Turkish inscription on the thirteenth coffin; it read “*The Bride of the Red Lion of Iconium*”. It took but little effort to prise the lid off of the coffin to reveal a bare skeleton clad in a saffron wedding dress; around her neck a silver locket hung, its brightness apparent even in the darkness of this bricked-up villa; an inscription on it, in the Greek tongue, revealed the bride’s name “Kyria Thanatos” – Mistress Death.

The other twelve coffins, too, had their inscriptions; each held a victim of the Phrygian massacre, now a “servant” of the captive Sultan.

Predictably enough, the Turks had a very hard time that first night. As if the baleful and menacing nature of their predicament were not enough to drive them quite mad with terror, at midnight a strange sound was heard – voices, odd and toneless, calling out to the Sultan, calling him “Great Lord of the Rhûm and Turks”, “Conqueror of Milkmaids and Shepherds”. The sound came from a chorus of eunuchs. They returned at dawn to repeat their song and, again, at midday and at dusk. At first, the spiteful song of the eunuchs troubled the Turks more than any words could describe but, as days went by, it gave them some encouragement that they had, at least, not been totally forgotten. Food, too, was provided – every day, through the aperture in the window, a small amount of bread was thrown, together with generous servings of pork. Flasks of watered wine were also given, and a very small amount of water. For ablutions, nothing was provided – not water, not even sand. No light was provided. No beds in which to sleep. No ropes, no knives, no eating implements either – the Greeks, that most cunning of all races, did not want their captives to cut short the torture by ending their own lives.

The sad thing was that, barring any unforeseen circumstance, Kilij and his guards could probably eke out a truly miserable existence for decades...

Away from all this fun and excitement, Admiral Papanicholas and the fleet took a trip from Constantinople to Genoa in 1123. It was hoped that the articulate and well-spoken Admiral could convince Count Hugh of Champagne (now, sadly, lacking a County!) to come out to the East, renew the vow of fealty that he had given to Alexius Comnenus more than two decades earlier and fight for the Empire against the Infidel! Sadly, the trip was in vain for Hugh, having found common cause with Robert of Normandy, had decided to stay in France and try to restore the House of Capet or, at least, restore some semblance of an independent French monarchy...

The only other thing of real import to happen in the Byzantine Empire took place down at Kastamon, during the Christmas festivities of 1124. The Emperor was keen to cement the alliance with Emir Ghomoshtegin and his faction of Turks; indeed, if certain rumours were to be believed, His Majesty had even offered to make Ghomoshtegin “Logothete of the Italians” and to give him full control over organising all the trade of the Empire (effectively, giving the Turk *carte blanche* to skim off any amount of “baksheesh” that he pleased) in return for his conversion to Christianity.

In the end, though, a different means of alliance was reached. One of Ghomoshtegin’s young daughters, only fourteen years old and quite plain, was given over to Prince Andronicus Comnenus, younger brother and heir presumptive of the Emperor. The girl, whose Mahometan name was not recorded, formally converted to Christianity and was baptised with the name of “Eudokia” on Christmas Day 1124. A bare month later, she and the thirty-two year old Andronicus were united in marriage by a priest of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Emir Ghomoshtegin, though he approved of the match and welcomed closer links to the powerful Comneni family, did not attend either the baptism or the wedding – it would have been an affront to his Ghazi pride to attend Infidel ceremonies!

The Anatolian Campaign

On a ridge overlooking a broad field a miles outside the fortress of Kastamonu, there stood a great warhorse and, on its back, sat the Byzantine Emperor, John II. He had come here to inspect a portion of his army – a most unusual portion of his army for they were *Turks!*

As he looked over the field where more than four thousand Turkish nomads camped, the young Emperor stroked his beard and wondered whether they could tip the scales of battle in his favour. Caught in his own pensiveness, he did not notice the approach of a nimble dark steppe pony.

“Salutations, Emperor of the Romans,” came the quiet voice of Ghomoshtegin Danishmen Ghazi, commander of these Turks.

“Ho, Emir! God strengthen your blade!” shouted John, with a deliberate effort at bravura. As the Turk came closer, John nodded his head towards the field and asked in a lower voice “Will your people truly follow you? Even against the Seljuks?”

The Emir snorted. "By the Prophet's beard, and by that of Jesus (may peace be upon him), of course they will follow me! You will find no lovers of Kilij Arslan here. They will follow me."

"But where shall they follow you?" the Emperor asked. No sooner had the words left his mouth than he wondered whether he had really meant to speak them out loud...

"To hell, if I ask them," came a calm reply.

John cocked an eyebrow and superstitiously spat three times in the dust, deliberately turning away from the Emir so he should not think it an insult. "Never mind about hell," he said, crossing himself. "Will they follow you to *Mosuh*?"

The winds, blowing down from the nearby mountains, howled in answer...

Spring 1121: The Byzantines began this season in Galatia and struck out, at once, for Seljuk-held Psidia to the south. The Emperor took personal command of the cavalry component of the army (almost fifteen thousand men) while his brother, Prince Andronicus, led five thousand strong force of infantry and sappers. The Turkish contingent were led by their Emir, Ghomoshtegin and a Kievan Russian force, under Alesha Popovitch, supplied five thousand sturdy spears.

Simultaneously, the Seljuk army, under Etugral (who had now proclaimed himself Seljuk Sultan of Rum), set out over the mountains into Isauria.

Summer-Autumn 1121: The Imperial army, finding no serious opposition, overran Psidia in only a couple of months. With the region secured, the Emperor decreed that his army would be given free rein to loot the place, stealing anything they wished with no fear of punishment or retribution (the Emperor, himself, took two-fifths of the spoils, as was his right).

In any case, the point of the looting was to deny the Turks any income from the province but, inevitably, the region's large Christian population suffered too – many Christian homes were violated by thieving soldiers and Christian merchants were robbed just as much as their Mahometan counterparts.

Amongst the Turks themselves, the most interesting result of the looting was that the Imperial army was brought into direct confrontation with the quasi-nomadic Suriye¹⁴ tribe of Turks (who, admittedly, were a bit further west than was their wont). The Suriye were cousins of the Rhûm Seljuks but not, at this time, allies. So, while they had no particular love for the Byzantines, they had no particular disagreement with them either. But that all changed when the looting began. Perhaps by accident, some of the Christian looters made off with flocks that belonged to the Suriye Turks and, in an act of caprice, these same raiders actually set alight some of the pastures that the Suriye used.

Within a couple of days of this provocation, the warlike tribesmen had gathered together for battle. They numbered somewhat less than six thousand men, all mounted and ready to fight in the manner of steppe (viz., as archers). Their zest for battle, however, vanished as soon as the scouts reported back on the *numbers* of the Christian host (who outnumbered the Turks by rather more than four-to-one). So, no battle was fought and the Suriye Seljuks withdrew into Vaspurakan with their families, flocks and yurts – and also with a new grievance against Qustantiniyah.

Down south, the Turks of Rum had burst into Isauria full of hopes about conquering the place and making it tributary to Isaac Comnenus (who was still hanging around with them). However, upon crossing over the mountains and coming down into the coastal plain, Etugral was forced to change his plans: firstly, the sheer preponderance of forts in the province was enough to dissuade him from engaging on a rash assault (lacking a decent siege train, he knew his losses would be high if he tried to take the place by force); secondly, to his amusement, the Seljuk Sultan discovered that Isauria was not actually under the direct control of Byzantine authorities... To be sure, the magnates of the province paid tribute to Constantinople but they kept their military forces under their own control and acknowledge the rule of no Byzantine governor.

So, instead of attacking the Infidels of Isauria, the Sultan decided to press on into the richer and much more important region of Lydia. Meanwhile, Isaac Comnenus was left behind to win over the Isaurians and persuade them to back him against his brother for control of the Empire (Isaac, after all, was widely held to be a quite brilliant negotiator).

¹⁴ "Wandering Tribes Rules" coming into effect here...

Isaac's efforts, though, were largely in vain. Although the Isaurians had no love for the centralising tendencies of Alexius Comnenus, they had no grievance with Emperor John and saw no reason to transfer their loyalties to Isaac – especially as Isaac was now in league with the most evil and universally-reviled race ever to pollute the face of God's Green Earth (namely, the Seljuks of Rum!). The Isaurians, still enraged (like all other Christians) by the massacres of Phrygia, actually imprisoned Isaac in an iron cage and hung him from the rafters in the stronghold of the province's leading *dux*. Etugral, when he heard of this, was encouraged – at least the Isaurians hadn't actually killed Isaac outright!

Spring 1122: Having subjugated Psidia, the Byzantines pressed on into the waterless and infertile region of Pamphyla and the Seljuk capital of Konya (or Iconium, as it was more widely known to the Christians).

In the west, Etugral's army finished its push along the coastal routes into Byzantine Lydia and began subjugating the region.

Summer-Winter 1122: The campaign in Lydia reached its successful conclusion as the local provincial militias were swept aside by the Turkish veterans. Once more, Etugral was surprised to find that Lydia, far from being under direct Byzantine rule, was self-governing and enjoyed complete exemption from all taxes and levies. In any case, after checking that the garrison of Smyrna was not going to sally out and cause trouble, the Sultan and his army departed for Bithynia.

Over in Pamphyla, the Byzantines took the region virtually unopposed and, in fact, with some support from rebellious elements amongst the Greek and Armenian Christian population. The Dogu Seljuks, another wandering tribe of pastoral troublemakers, came close to confronting the Byzantines but, seeing as the number of men they could field was smaller even than the Suriye tribe, they decided to bail out and head, instead, for the fertile valleys and coastal plains of Isauria where they would probably face less danger from hostile armies while having an easier time subsisting.

With the province secured, the Greek army laid siege lines around Konya in July 1122 and waited for the place to capitulate... Inside, the skeleton garrison, numbering only a few hundred Turkish warriors, decided to hold out in the hope that their Sultan might raise the siege.

Spring 1123: The Byzantines continued to sit outside Konya, waiting and waiting for a surrender that seemed as though it would never come. At last, at the very end of March, the garrison capitulated. They were, by this time, an emaciated shadow of their former selves, while the populace of the city – both Christian and Mahometan alike – was already dying in droves from hunger. In spite of their pitiable state, little mercy was shown by the Emperor who ordered the city burnt to the ground; still less mercy was forthcoming from the ordinary soldiers who, emboldened by their exploits in Phrygia and now deeply bored after some nine months encamped outside this miserable city, gave themselves over to several frenzied weeks of looting, pillaging, arson and rape.

Just as Christians and Muslims suffered equally from the privations that accompanied the siege, now they suffered equally at the hands of the rampaging legions of the Byzantine Emperor. Churches and mosques, private homes and palaces, government buildings and even the meanest dwellings of the poor – none escaped intact. Anything of value (and much that was without value!) was carried off and divided up by the soldiers, whether Greek, Turkish or Varangian. The old people, being near death, had no worth to the captors and were usually killed out of hand; children became slaves; and women were treated in the usual way, irrespective of their rank. When the Sultan's harem was captured, even the old mother of Kilij Arslan was grossly mistreated by the furious Greeks and, in fact, she was only rescued from death at the hands of her attackers by the personal intervention of the Emperor; as for Kilij's favourite wife, not even the Emperor could save her from a violent death at the hands of angry men who sought to take vengeance upon the lady for the crimes of her husband.

In any case, by the end of April, the army had exhausted itself and was finally ready to follow the Emperor's will again. Iconium had been left a burnt-out wreck of a place, its inhabitants dead, captive or scattered to the winds. The packs of the soldiers were stuffed with plunder taken from the unfortunate place but the Emperor himself gained not a single bezant from the affair; even though John had ordered that the city be sacked, the conduct of his men had been far worse than he could ever have expected; all discipline vanished, only to be replaced by avarice, greed and cruelty. As they marched away from the forlorn heap of smouldering and ruined buildings that had once been the proud and ancient city of Iconium, home to a Greek diocese and a place where St Paul had preached to Jews and pagans, Emperor John could only trust that life in the field would restore proper order to the army once more. With that, he commanded that the men should march up into the mountains to reach Vaspurakan so, without further ado, they began retracing their steps into Psidia, thence to their eventual goal...

Over on the Aegean coast, the Turks arrived in Bithynia (which they quickly conquered "*in the name of the true Avtokrator Rhômaios, Isaac II Komnenos*").

Summer-Winter 1123: Bithynia fell to Etugral before Summer was out. Recognising that the Byzantines suffered a unique handicap because their European territories were cut off from their Asian lands, he chose to exacerbate

things by burning all the local ferries, boats and other sea-going vessels that he could find. It took a bit of time and, inevitably, some vessels escaped to the Thracian shore but, on the whole, it was a job well done! The Turks wintered in Bithynia, intending to march on Paphlagonia the following year.

Back in Central Anatolia, the Byzantines were busy for the whole of the rest of 1123 just marching across those nightmarish mountain ranges, trying to reach Vaspurakan.

Spring-Summer 1124: As soon as the weather cleared, the Byzantines burst into Vaspurakan and brought the desolate place to heel within a few months. To everyone's pleasure, there were no Turks about – no warriors of the Seljuk Sultan (for they were all in the west, molesting Byzantine citizens) and no peripatetic tribesmen. With the province liberated, the Emperor turned his attention to Sivas – or Sebastia, as the Christian Greeks and Armenians knew it. Here, the Greeks simply reduplicated the tactics they had employed against the Seljuk capital – they sat back and waited for the people in the city to starve.

It did not take too long for hunger to take effect. Before Summer was out, the city had capitulated and, like Konya, it was sacked thoroughly, albeit in a somewhat more orderly fashion than Konya had. His Majesty was even able to take some plunder for himself, including some fine Turkish carpets, a string of horses and several pagan slave girls (since John was a chaste and pious man, he ordered that the girls be baptised, emancipated and given into the care of good Orthodox nuns in Edessa).

With Sivas/Sebastia in flames, the Byzantines swung around to the west. They would march to save Paphlagonia, which the Infidel Turks had overrun while the Imperial forces were in Vaspurakan. To the surprise of the Turks, the weakness of Byzantine authority in Asia was shown up when, during the occupation of Paphlagonia, they discovered that the local people were basically self-governing and only paid a small tribute to Byzantium...

Autumn 1124: The Turks in occupied Paphlagonia made a repeat their recent ship-burning activities. Any and all vessels on the Asian coast were put to the torch or otherwise smashed up and rendered useless. A good deal of the Seljuk activity could actually be discerned from Constantinople, something which brought a pall of fear to the great city (curiously enough, this fear worked in the favour of the Byzantine authorities, for it discouraged the citizens from rioting or rising in revolt, even though they were outraged beyond measure by the ecclesiastical policies of the Grand Domestic and by the shameful peace with the Bulgarian rebels).

In Galatia, the Imperial army arrived back and entered winter quarters at their now-familiar fortress of Kastamon.

Spring-Summer 1125: Up in Lazica, the Turkish chieftain, Ishak, finally decided to move out with his small force of two thousand horsemen. He had been ordered, at the very start of the campaign, to ride hell-for-leather through Pontus and Galatia, thence to Paphlagonia where he would link up with Etugral's main army. For good or ill, the wily chieftain had disregarded these orders, believing they would bring him into direct conflict with the main Byzantine army; only now, with the Emperor obviously intent on moving west into Paphlagonia, did Ishak reveal his hand and actually commit to the battle.

Down from the high mountains of Lazica, and into the coastal plains and valleys of Pontus, the small Turkish force swept. There was no real Imperial control over the province itself and even Trebizond, which proudly flew the Imperial banners of Byzantium, was practically undefended! Ishak experienced no trouble brushing aside what little local resistance he met and proclaiming that Pontus had returned to the beneficent rule of the Seljuk Sultanate! The natives, Turkish, Greek and Armenian alike, greeted this with a mighty "Who cares?" – considering how many times Pontus had changed hands recently, few people could motivate themselves to feel excited about the Turkish reconquest. Anyway, Turks weren't *that* bad, once you got to know 'em...

In any case, with the province secured, Ishak turned to Trebizond. The city garrison consisted only of a few hundred Armenian militiamen and (very importantly) the walls had been broken decades ago and had never been fully repaired, leaving the place extremely exposed and practically indefensible. Standing on the ruined ramparts of the city, the *dux* of Trebizond, the renowned Constantine Gabras, tore at his beard and screamed – oh, how he screamed – in impotent rage as he saw the first Turkish scouts appear on the horizon: "Christ's blood! Would that the Emperor give me just a thousand men, I would chase those damned infidels from here to Baghdad!" Constantine, being a man of action and strong temperament (as well as a very renowned and competent soldier), was offended, both at a personal level and from an unselfish strategic point-of-view, that he had been abandoned here to defend Trebizond with no men, no walls and no real remit of his own! Later that day, Constantine and his chief officers took ship for Constantinople, leaving the grandees of Trebizond to arrange their own surrender to the Seljuks.

Anyway, while that was going on, something quite interesting happened further to the west. Etugral, feeling isolated in Paphlagonia, decided to make a daring dash *out* of the province and across Byzantine Galatia to Pontus, counting only on his increased mobility to dodge the lumbering Roman war machine. The Byzantines, by contrast, were intent on driving *into* Paphlagonia from Galatia, hopefully forcing the Seljuks to fight a decisive battle along the way.

On this occasion, luck was with the Turks. With almost all their troops mounted on horseback and all of them armed only lightly, they experienced but little difficulty in outmanoeuvring the heavier Byzantines. Even though the Greek forces were also primarily composed of cavalry, they lacked the mobility that was needed to obstruct the passage of the Turks in a meaningful way; small Turkish warbands proved, time and again, that they could outpace the Greeks, with the latter afflicted by a combination of inferior mounts, heavier weapons and armour and a tactical doctrine which diminished the rôle of the individual cavalryman in favour of a unit acting in formation. In pursuits, the Turks outran the Byzantines; in skirmishes, they outmatched them.

Two things, only, could give the Byzantines encouragement: their liberation of Paphlagonia and the speed with which Etugral exited Galatia.

Autumn 1125: The Emperor was tiring of this interminable war. Still, he could not abandon it now. He turned his men around (yet again) and marched them right back into Galatia, back into Kastamon, whence they could launch the next attack on the shattered Seljuk Sultanate. Meanwhile, Caesar Igor the Fat, with two thousand light horsemen, headed off into Bithynia and Lydia to restore Imperial authority.

The Sultan, for his part, quickly departed the Christian stronghold of Galatia, with its impenetrable fortress of Kastamon, and made for Pontus. He arrived there without any further trouble from the enemy but no sooner did he arrive than his subsidiary ally, Ishak of Lazica, headed off back home. Well, alone in Pontus with all the provinces of his Sultanate either wrecked or occupied (or both), he had a lot to think about...

And while he thought about it, the Byzantine Caesar made his way, very quickly, through the occupied regions. Imperial authority was restored, to some limited extent, and all those who had collaborated with the heathens were garrotted to death with a bowstring. The curious exception to this was in Isauria where the provincial magnates declined to turn over the Emperor's traitorous brother, Isaac, for punishment. To be sure, they continued to acknowledge John's suzerainty and they had a severe dislike for Isaac *but* Isaac was their prisoner, not John's, and they could do whatever they wished with him... If it should please the *duces* of Isauria that Isaac should live, then that was really none of the Emperor's business (or so the Isaurians said, at any rate).

As all sides entered winter quarters at the end of 1125, it would have taken a brave man to attempt to predict what might happen next or what the outcome would be of any of the shocking things that happened in the past few years...

The Grand Principality of Kiev



Ruler: Mstislav Harold Vladimirovich I Monomakh, Grand Prince of the Kievan Rus
Capital: Kiev
Religion: Eastern Orthodox

When the Grand Prince began scowling and talking loudly about the dire menace that threatened Kiev's hold on northern Russia, most people guessed that blood would be spilt, for Vladimir was a man of action and bold spirit who could not tolerate any hazard to the great state he ruled. But what was this menace that so vexed the mind of the Grand Prince? It was nothing less than the incursions by the pagan Balts of Latvia who seemed, at every turn, to undermine his hard work in securing Livonia and the vital outlet to the Baltic afforded by the River Dvina. For so many years, under Vladimir and his predecessor Sviatopolk, much energy had been expended in obtaining political influence in Livonia and in preaching the Gospel to the heathens. This great endeavour had not been entirely unsuccessful – already a Rus city had been built in Livonia and every year more of the pagans embraced the teachings of the Church – but always those damnable treacherous Balts would niggle at the edges of the province, spreading trouble, stirring up paganism, trying to gain the allegiance of the Livonian chieftains. Enough was enough. *Something had to be done!!*

In January of 1121, Vladimir's eldest son, Mstislav Harold, was summoned to his father's august presence in the Great Hall of the Knyaz. The Grand Prince was now in his sixty-eighth year and, obviously, the time had come to nominate an heir. It was no surprise to anyone that he appointed Mstislav as his successor and next Grand Prince of Kiev. Apart from this, Mstislav was given the mission of securing Livonia permanently for the Rus state – if he could achieve this by diplomatic means, that was fine but if necessary, he was not to refrain from using force to make the recalcitrant region a part of the Kievan hegemony. Naturally, an army was made available to Mstislav for his task – a thousand armoured Varangian axemen, fifteen hundred Russian spearmen, five hundred skirmishers and two hundred mounted Varangers. In addition, the Grand Prince had sent out orders to his Litt allies and to the Knyaz of Muscovy –



Vladimir Monomakh,
Grand Prince of Kiev



Mstislav Harold
Monomakh

Bugoslaw the Litt was ordered to bring two thousand men; Isjaslavl of Muscovy was to bring fifteen hundred (of

whom, about a third were mounted). They would rendezvous with Mstislav at the Rus city of Verchnjadvinsk in Livonia and, if peaceful means failed, their axes and swords would serve alongside those of the Kievans. Too, the walls and defences of Verchnjadvinsk itself were expanded considerably – this city was, after all, the only firmly-held Rus outpost in all of Livonia and, should war break out, it might at any time come under pagan assault.

In a related matter, one of Vladimir's lieutenants, a fellow named Rostislav, was ordered to bring a contingent of warriors from Novgorod to assist in operations in Livonia. He was scheduled to depart the province in the Autumn of 1121 but, curiously, this high official of the Kievan state was found floating in the River Volkhov in July of that year. He had, apparently, been strangled to death. No clues were found as to the perpetrators of the outrage though, for some weeks before his death, Rostislav had been engaged in certain mysterious – and some might say *nefarious* – activities and this, surely, had been the cause of his sinister demise.

In any case, Mstislav arrived in Livonia in June of 1122 and found the allied Muscovite and Litt contingents awaiting him. While he carried out the diplomatic part of his mission, the allies were compelled to withdraw to Verchnjadvinsk and await the results. By the Summer of 1123, Mstislav's ambassadorial activities were at an end; he had informed the chieftains that they must offer fealty to Kiev, fully and uncompromisingly, or face conquest. The pagans chose the latter. In order to comply with Kievan demands, the Livonians would have had to break faith with their Latvian brethren – an idea none of the pagan chiefs could stomach – so, from the Autumn of 1123 until the Spring of 1124, Mstislav and his allied contingents busily saw to the violent subjugation of the Livonians. Janis, the foremost of the Livonian chieftains, fell in battle in March of 1124 and, from that point on, all effective resistance was ended. Rus, Muscovite and Litt warriors occupied the region, garrisoning all the towns and important strategic points, while a Kievan governor was appointed to rule over the conquered people. In the aftermath of the conquest, many Livonians muttered darkly that they had been abandoned and even betrayed by their cousins (and nominal overlords), the Kursi and Latgali. Most Livonians had expected, quite reasonably, that their suzerain Valdimir would sally down from the coast, with all his warriors, and aid the Livonians in driving the Kievan Cross-Men out of the ancient and ancestral lands of the Livonian Balts...

In any case, in the aftermath of conquest, the Byzantine minister Stavros Doukas and his party of Orthodox missionaries were, as usual, toiling amongst the unsaved of the population and – remarkably, in view of the war and conquest – they were enthusiastically received! During the period 1121 to 1125, Stavros and his cohorts more than doubled the number of converts in Livonia so that, as 1126 approached, almost one-tenth of the region's population received the Orthodox Rites in the Slavonic language.

With Livonia secure, her barbarian hordes tamed, and the Faith slowly gaining its foothold amongst the masses, the aged Vladimir could finally feel that the northern frontier – and especially the vital outlet of Verchnjadvinsk on the Dvina – was secure. Only one thing remained to guarantee the maintenance of Rus influence in that area – an alliance with Poland (something for which the Grand Prince had already laid the groundwork by marrying his son to a Polish Princess). So, in short order, a formal treaty of mutual defence was concluded between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Principality of Kiev – the two great Slavic states of eastern Europe, Catholic Poland and Orthodox Kiev, were now united in a common commitment to maintain each other's borders against all interlopers and invaders!

And while all this is going on, Vladimir remained at home in Kiev seeing to the continued good governance of the realm. In the great city itself, some new cisterns were built, allowing the population access to clean water, and the main thoroughfares and roads leading to the Grand Prince's fortress on Starokievskia Hill were *paved* – not merely with timber, as was common in Novgorod and the other lesser cities of the Rus, but with stone! Sadly, overseeing this set of improvements to the city was to be the last official duty performed by the Grand Prince. In April of 1125, at the ripe old age of seventy-two, Vladimir II Vsyevolodovich Monomakh, son of Prince Vsyevolod of Kiev and Princess Anna Monomakh of Byzantium, gave up the ghost and died of heart failure. His death was not a surprise for, as his years advanced, he had gradually weakened and had become prone to chest pains which, according to the learned Greek physicians who attended His Highness, were a sign of heart disease and presaged imminent death.

The death of the great leader was taken with surprising equanimity by the masses – they wept for the loss of a most revered and beloved leader, a man renowned for his courage and compassion as much as for his statesmanship, but they were not extravagant in their grief and gladly accepted that Mstislav Harold Vladimirovich was now their rightful sovereign. Out in the provinces, though, things were a little different – the subject Princes, many of whom were related to Vladimir, estimated their chances of successfully seizing the throne and canvassed their supporters to see how many people could be counted on to support a coup... In Novgorod, in Muscovy, in Chernigov the magnates and nobles talked amongst themselves about the possibility of murdering Mstislav and marching on Kiev; they contemplated even seizing Vladimir's widow, the Byzantine Princess Anna Comnena, and forcibly marrying her as a means of gaining legitimacy; others talked of seizing Vladimir's younger son (also confusingly named Mstislav) and proclaiming him the new Knyaz...

In the end, though, it all came to nothing. Mstislav Harold, the conqueror of Livonia and legally anointed heir of the Grand Prince, was able to make his way to the capital where he assumed direct command of the armies of the Rus and was swiftly, but solemnly, crowned Grand Prince of Kiev in the Cathedral of the Haghia Sophia.

Presented with a *fait accompli*, the would-be pretenders swiftly gave up any ideas about rebellion and, instead, embraced the rule of the new Grand Prince.

For his part, Mstislav was able to spend the Winter of 1125 digesting a written testament, left to him by his father, containing instructions on how to rule in the most appropriate and honourable manner, with piety, humility, justice and clemency, as befitted a great Christian ruler.¹⁵

The Second Bulgarian Empire

Ruler: Peter Voitech, Czar of Bulgaria, *Imperator Omnium Bulgarorum atque Blacorum atque Graecorum atque Sclavorum*

Capital: None

Religion: Eastern Orthodox (allegedly)

The whole of the so-called "Bulgarian Empire" was on tenterhooks. The Bulgars had bravely seized the chance to break away from the Byzantines, had successfully wrested away control of a swathe of Balkan territory and almost the whole of Danubian Frontier... But now it was time to face up to the consequences of their actions. They knew that their Greek overlords were busy with the war in Asia but there was no guarantee that the incomparable might of the New Rome could not find the resources to fight the Turk while simultaneously chastising the errant Bulgars.

Yet, things turned out less black than expected, largely due to the intervention of prominent Bulgarian churchmen. The Archbishop of Ochirida, in his rôle as head of the Bulgarian Orthodox See, was deeply fearful that any war between the Bulgarians and the Byzantines would provide fertile ground in which the Bogomils could sow the seeds of their heresy. It was not hard to see that an invasion by Greek Orthodox armies, fighting under Icons blessed by the Patriarch of Constantinople, could lead the ignorant and simplistic masses to equate Bogomilism with the cause of Bulgarian national liberation and that this could, in the worst case, draw the souls of the Bulgarians away from the Truth, as taught by the Church, and into error and eternal damnation.

These qualms and reservations were expressed by the Archbishop, and many other prominent Bulgarian clergy, in a series of letters which they sent to the Caesar and the Patriarch in Constantinople. They made their views clear, too, in interviews with the Czar, explaining to him that while, he could certainly command the Church's support in his efforts to free Bulgaria, he should take care not to place Orthodox souls in danger of being deceived by the honeyed lies of the Bogomils. "We know," said Archbishop Theophylact of Ochirida, "that many of the most enthusiastic of Your Majesty's supporters espouse the Bogomil heresy. We must be wary lest they gain undue influence, the influence to set Christian against Christian and to draw the souls of men into error."

Peter Voitech, self-styled Czar of Bulgaria, was no enthusiastic devotee of the Orthodox Church, though he and the rest of his family remained nominally Christian. Yet, despite his irreligiosity – and even some sympathies for the Bogomil doctrine – the Czar knew that failure to adhere to the teaching of Orthodoxy would bring constant hostility from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, from elements of his own population and, above all, from the battle-hardened legions of the Byzantine Emperor. Accordingly, he joined his country's churchmen in writing to Emperor John, during the Winter of 1120-21, to seek a peaceful settlement to the Bulgarian situation. Unlike the clergy, though, Peter doubted whether the Greeks could fight in both Asia and the Balkans, so he gambled that he was in a position to make demands that, in another time, would have been unheard-of – peace with Bulgaria could be bought but only in return for independence, control of Bosnia and, most audaciously, the great and ancient city of Thessalonica! Recognising the danger that lay in demanding too much, Voitech offered to surrender his claim to the Thracian city of Adrianople.

In Constantinople, the Emperor's secretaries and ministers received the Bulgarian overtures with mixed emotions. They were hopeful that war could be averted but took grave offence when they heard that the rebels (for so they called the Bulgars) demanded Thessalonica, the Second City of the Empire. If only the army were not off in Asia, the Byzantine bureaucrats muttered darkly. If only we were not at war with the Turk, we would teach these impudent Bulgars a lesson... But the army and the Emperor were all off in Anatolia, pursuing the Seljuks of Rum from pillar to post, and there were no resources available for a second war in the west. It was a mark of the gloominess of Byzantium's fortunes that the Emperor, after some dithering, finally felt compelled to accept the Bulgarian terms.

The Spring of 1121 saw the implementation of the peace settlement. The position, crown and title of the Bulgarian Czar were now recognised and guaranteed by Constantinople; the position of the Czar was inserted in the Book of Ceremonies, scrawled into the margins somewhere below the Caliph of Baghdad but above the Khan of the Pechenegs (much discussion went into this and it was finally decided that Czar of Bulgaria was *probably* roughly about as important and dignified as the King of the Magyars...). To seal Peter Voitech's new pact, a purple silk robe was sent by the Grand Domesticos of Constantinople, along with a slightly shabby pearl diadem; such rich

¹⁵ See this site for a text of *the Testament of Vladimir Monomakh* <http://www.dur.ac.uk/~dml0www/vladmono.html>

and glorious ornaments were the markers of royalty in the Byzantine Commonwealth and to receive them as gifts from the hand of the Emperor was to receive the authority to rule as a monarch.

In more concrete terms, Slavic Bosnia, despite being linked to the Comneni by bonds of marriage, was passed to the control of the Bulgarian Czar. Macedon, with its often mutually-hostile population of Vlachs and Slavs, likewise went to Bulgaria; so too did the great and wealthy city-port of Thessalonica, a place which could no longer really decide whether it was Greek or Slavic but was definitely not Vlach¹⁶. Finally, Epirus on the Adriatic coast was lost to the Byzantines. As he looked over the treaty that created his new Bulgarian Empire – a treaty on which the seal of the Byzantine Emperor was already fixed – Peter Voitech could scarcely believe the scale of his achievement; with almost no effort and with hardly any blood split, he had wrested control of the whole of the Empire north of Thermopylae from the hands of the Comneni. The clergy who had helped bring this agreement about were similarly shocked at the scale of the thing and upset as they realised just how much damage they had done to the God-Sustained Empire; still, they could console themselves with the knowledge that they had, at least, ensured that Bulgaria would remain Christian – and that was an something that mattered much more than the ephemeral question of who actually ruled the land.

In that connexion, one part of the peace treaty that brought Bulgaria into formal existence had allowed for Byzantine missionaries, sent forth from Constantinople, to help re-establish the sway of Orthodox Christianity and Doctrine in the Bulgar state (assuredly, Czar Peter had no love for the Church but he saw the many benefits he and his dynasty would gain by maintaining cordial relations with the ecclesiasts of The City – after all, one could hardly maintain a monarchy if one abided by the anarchistic tenets of Bogomilism!). The Christians of Bulgaria, feeling beset by the lies of the Unsaved, were most disappointed when the missionaries failed to arrive; they hoped that, if not now, their co-religionists would soon send succour. In the meantime, the Bogomils were busy, extending their influence at Court and trying to win new converts amongst high and low alike...

At any rate, now that the transfer of all this Byzantine territory had been agreed, there remained the practical question of *how* the Bulgarian Czar would take control of his new domains. Epirus and Bosnia had long been allowed practical independence by the Byzantines – if only because the cost of extracting revenues was often greater than the sums raised – so, in some ways, the transition was easiest in these places; they nominally accepted the sovereignty of the Bulgarians while declining to pay a bean in tax.

Down in Macedon, things were more complicated. Slavs and Vlachs alike agreed that the rule of the Bulgars was unacceptable and it took the presence of Prince Alexius Voitech and Dimitar Ducas, with more than twelve thousand warriors, to prevent the locals from outright revolting. As it was, a military government was established in the area, enforced by a large garrison. The Czar, hearing tell of the harsh policies that his ministers had undertaken, was perturbed and hoped that this initial resistance could be overcome, that it did not bode ill for the future of his polyglot empire.

In Thessalonica – or Saloniki or Thessalonike, depending on your perspective – the Bulgarian ascendancy was viewed with a curious mix of suspicion, amusement and wry contempt. There was no outright revolt, no attempt to resist the theoretical imposition of Bulgarian suzerainty, but this was probably because the Bulgar yoke was so light. Unlike Macedon, which had been fully incorporated into the Byzantine Empire, Thessalonica enjoyed near total autonomy, paying only a small annual tribute to Constantinople. Now that they were theoretically subject to the Czar, the citizens redirected their tribute to Bulgaria *but* they made it abundantly clear that they would not countenance direct Bulgarian rule. This was a real blow to Peter Voitech who had hoped to make the rich and sprawling city his capital, far away from the cold and muddy landscapes of Bulgaria. But, there was nothing to be done; the citizens of the grand and venerable port knew well that they were an ancient and honourable people – successors to the Caesars, successors to Alexander and Philip, successors, even, to the Apostles – and their haughtiness was reinforced all the more by their unshakeable confidence in the strength of their ancient walls.

So, in the final analysis, Thessalonica became a partially-autonomous subject of the Bulgarian Empire. Tribute would be paid, at exactly the same rate as had been paid to the Byzantines, and Bulgarian merchants would enjoy full legal rights and status in the city. The law and government of the municipality, though, would remain in the hands of the citizens. While this was a lot less than the Czar would have wished, it was nevertheless a greater accomplishment than any Bulgarian leader had been able to pull off in centuries. With his diplomatic successes perhaps going to his head, the Czar decreed that he intended to shift the Imperial Court and national capital to sprawling Thessalonica! His Majesty's enthusiasm was somewhat diminished when his advisors explained that

¹⁶ "Who are these people?" I hear you ask. Fear not! Your GM shall edify you! The Bulgars were the descendants of Turkic steppe tribes who invaded the Balkan region in the C7th; by the C12th, they had intermarried so heavily with the Balkan Slavs that the two races were virtually indistinguishable and even the Bulgar Turkic language was extinguished by the Slavonic language. The "Vlachs" first get mentioned in the C10th but they had been around a lot longer; they were *probably* the original inhabitants of the Balkans – known to the ancients as "Illyrians" – who had been driven into the impenetrable highlands by Slavic invasions during the Dark Ages and only re-emerged hundreds of years later. The most important distinguishing marker of Vlachs is that they speak a Latin-based language (although their name – Vlach – was actually Slavic). The modern Romanians are descended from the Vlachs.

the people of that city, not being fully subject to Bulgarian authority, would probably be somewhat offended if the Czar and the rest of the Bulgarian aristocracy showed up and tried to stamp their authority on the place. Suitably abashed, Czar Peter withdrew his decree.

In any case, it was now time for the Czar to contemplate his own position. From the Byzantine state, he had inherited a sprawling land of many nations, many languages and even different faiths – not all of whom were content to live in peace with their neighbours. Even within the Bulgarian Court, there were many competing factions – the old Bulgar aristocrats, the Hellenisers, the Bogomils and others besides (not to mention the various parties who felt that they had a more legitimate claim to the new Bulgarian Crown than Peter Voitech). Dire problems, these – how to keep the different peoples of the Bulgarian Empire from massacring each other and how to keep the Crown on his own head?

To secure his status and to discourage any “strongmen” from trying to remove him, it was vital for the Czar to establish, first, his *personal* legitimacy to rule and, second, that his dynasty – the Voitechs – had a right to rule the land in perpetuity. At the same time, he hoped that a strong and centralised monarchy, based around his own dynasty, could bring stability to the land and project so much power and so much authority that the subjects of the Empire would not dare to engage in petty conflicts and feuds – after all, was this not how the Byzantines had brought peace to the warring peoples of this land?

But, even if he now had a plan (viz., to establish a very strong monarchy ruled by his own dynasty), how could he hope to bring this to fruition? His own family were venerable and respected but they hardly enjoyed universal support; beside, the Voitechs were Bulgars and could not realistically expect to be supported by the Vlachs or even by some of the Slavs. To find a solution, the ingenious Czar turned to the most ancient sources in the realm, sending monks and clerics to comb the archives of the ancient monasteries at Preslav and Plovdiv; parties of scholars went even to Constantinople itself, to rummage through the libraries and annals of the New Rome, though it was never made clear what they sought...

At last, in the Winter of 1122, His Majesty was finally ready to explain himself to his subjects. In the Great Hall of his palace in the city of Plovdiv – known as Philippopolis to the ancients – the Czar made ready to address his Court – the hundreds of noblemen and ecclesiasts, of every stripe, who had united, just a few short years ago, to wrest control of the Balkans from the Byzantine Caesars. Clad in regal purple, with his sacred pearl diadem lending him a halo-like glow, Czar Peter rose from his elaborately wrought wooden throne and spoke...

“My brothers-in-arms, together have we wrested control of Bulgaria from the Emperor in Constantinople. Together have we brought the whole of this ancient and glorious land under our control. Together have we extracted from the Avtrokratos recognition of our independence and guarantees that the Men of The City will not make war upon us. Together have we remade Bulgaria and set her forth upon the face of the Earth, a nation under the protection of the Almighty and on the path of Orthodoxy, equal to any other nation. All this we have done – deeds greater than those even of our most ancient ancestors, yet deeds accomplished without the shedding of any blood.”

At this point, some of the Bogomils within the audience (who probably made up a majority of Voitech’s supporters) were beginning to look a little grim. They, after all, had no interest in setting Bulgaria upon the path of Orthodoxy. The Czar went on...

“Great though our achievements have been, we must now avoid the natural tendencies of men, which is to say we must not be prideful. For, if we revel in pride and conceit, we might come to imagine that this Empire we have created is invincible, for, of course, only the God-Sustained Empire is invincible and everlasting. And pride is wont to fill men with violent thoughts – pride and self-satisfaction will set a man at odds with his neighbour, will make a man think that he has the right to raise up the sword and suffer no consequences. Pride is the Father of Insolence, of Cruelty and of Laxity.

“My comrades, I fear lest we, the liberators of Bulgaria, should fall prey to the vice of pride. I fear lest the scale of our achievement should make us careless in the defence of our liberty; I fear lest the Bulgar should raise his sword against the Slav, the Slav against the Vlach; I fear lest the Christian be oppressed by the Bogomil and lest the Bogomil be oppressed by the Christian.

“I say that I fear that the unity which has brought us this far might now desert us. The Hand of God has brought me to this place, as your Czar, and the Will of God directs me to protect you from yourselves, from your strong passions which might drive you to imprudent acts. I shall be the Good Shepherd and shall guide you, my flock, through the dangers of this temporal sphere. I shall defend you – all peoples and nations – from those who would prey upon you; I shall, above all, protect you from yourselves. And be assured that I speak to you not merely as the Czar of the Bulgars but as the heir of Justinian himself and as one who sees it as his purpose in life, set out by Our Lord, to keep our peoples – Bulgars, Slavs, Vlachs and Greeks – joined as one, bound together by the silken ties of common cause. I speak not just as Czar but as the *Imperator Omnium Bulgarorum atque Sclavorum atque Blacorum atque Graecorum*.

“And, as Czar and Emperor, I hereby adopt my most beloved cousin, Alexius, as my successor and heir. In his veins, my blood flows – the blood of Caesars, the blood of Augusti, the blood of Justinian.”

This was a most surprising speech. In the main, it didn't actually say anything, except that the Czar would look after his subjects, but the final sentence caught everyone's attention – Voitech had claimed to be the heir of the Roman Emperor Justinian and, in the Latin tongue, had laid claim to the title “*Emperor of the Bulgars, Slavs, Vlachs and Greeks*”. As Peter seated himself, he was assailed by dozens of questions from all sides (the Bulgarians had, as yet, not quite grasped the fine details of how one goes about addressing one's absolute monarch). What did the Czar mean, they demanded, when he said he was “the heir of Justinian”? What did his new title mean?

Well, it was the Archbishop Theophylact of Ochirida who answered. With half-a-dozen monks in tow, he brought forth what seemed like scores of dusty old tomes in all the learned languages – Greek, Latin *and* Slavonic – through which one could (he claimed) trace the lineage of the Voitech clan. His Beatitude, the Archbishop, gave a “broad brush” explanation to the assembled courtiers, the effect that the Voitechs, although they were a respected Bulgar clan, had intermarried very heavily with Slavs but particularly with the Latin-speaking Vlachs of Macedon. It was well-known that the Emperor Justinian had come from that region and that he had been a Latin speaker... It was now *alleged* that the genealogies, if studied properly, demonstrated that the Voitech family had intermarried with descendants of the great Emperor. By extension, it could be argued that Peter (and the rest of his clan) had some kind of claim to the Roman Crown, which really meant a claim to the Byzantine throne (though Czar Peter was very clear that he had no intention of pressing any claim).

The reaction of the Court was largely one of perplexity. Few truly believed his claim to be the descendant of Justinian and, even if they *did* believe it, they did not really understand why their Czar thought that it mattered. After all, it didn't seem to do very to resolve the long-standing problems between the divergent groups at court. The Bulgar aristocracy remained jealous guardians of their own power and pre-eminence in the realm and looked askance at any suggestion they should share some of it with non-Bulgars; the Hellenised Bulgarians remained committed to the Byzantine worldview and to the cause of Orthodoxy – why, they even refused to speak the Slavonic language and insisted that only the Greek tongue could be appropriate for discussing important matters of state; the Bogomils were still committed to undermining both Orthodoxy and any form of hierarchical government (which rather put them at odds with everyone else...).

Yet, on closer examination, Archbishop Theophylact was awed by the brilliance and elegance of Czar Peter's solution. His declaration had, in effect, offered something almost every group in Bulgaria. The traditional Bulgar warrior aristocracy could look forward to a long rule by the Voitechs who, whatever their flaws or pretension, were true Bulgars; their rivals, the Hellenised Bulgar aristocrats (and also the Byzantines!), could take solace in Czar Peter's support for the Greek Rite and his reverence for the God-Sustained Empire of the New Rome. The Vlachs were fairly relieved that the Czar was not a bigot and, instead, seemed to celebrate his Vlach heritage and blood (indeed, he seemed to celebrate it a bit too much...). The Bogomils were left with relatively little to cheer about but, on the other hand, they *had* managed to liberate Bulgaria and the Czar, for all his profession of Orthodox Christianity, was not attempting to tyrannise or subjugate his heretical subjects - so perhaps they needed to be content with their current successes which had, on the whole, brought them far beyond the point they'd occupied only a few short years ago.

In any case, away from the complicated politics of the Bulgarian Court, the Czar's cousin, Alexius Voitech, went off on a diplomatic mission to Thessaly, with six thousand Bulgarian cavalry in tow. In an effort to garner more support from the local Hellenes, the heir to the new Bulgarian polity was wed to a local girl named Eudoxia, the daughter of a powerful local Bogomil leader. Alexius' exertions were, ultimately, successful and resulted in the full integration of the region into the Empire. On the other hand, the marriage was less productive, at least initially, with no issue during the first four years of matrimony; this led some to wonder whether Alexius and his bride had decided to adopt the Bogomil practice of marital celibacy... If so, it was difficult to see how Alexius could be expected to continued the Voitech dynasty.

But it was not all good news from Thessaly – during his time in the province, Alexius was witness to some extremely destructive raids by the Normans of Apulia and, indeed, had to lead his cavalry out to counter the depredations of the enemy. For two consecutive months in 1122, the Normans roved up and down the Eastern Greek seaboard, stealing whatever they could carry and burning much of the rest – including even Orthodox places of worship! (Not that this last sin particularly bothered the Bogomils who were now ascendant in the province). The women of Thessaly, as usual, were very badly treated by the pirates; many were raped and a few were even carried off on board the enemy's longships.

Quitting Thessaly, their holds filled with loot and captives, the Normans didn't return home but rushed northwards to Macedon where they repeated their piratical activities. Over and above simple theft, there were random acts of hooliganism too numerous to recount - olive groves were hacked down and burnt for sport; livestock was killed and dumped in wells; priests of the Greek rite were forced, at sword point, to dance and cavort for the amusement

of the often-drunk Catholic Normans; and here, as in Thessaly, maidens were ravished indiscriminately. What a disaster for Greece the coming of the Normans was!

In a curious aside, one of the Norman marines finally piped up and asked his commander – the famous Hildebrand de Bacqueville – why they were raiding the Greeks, with whom they had a treaty. The great cavalier replied that they were *not* raiding the Greeks; they were raiding the *Bulgarians*! This subtle differentiation probably made all the victims of Norman banditry feel so much better about their fate.

Finally, a very minor famine took hold of the Balkans during this period. Few people starved but many who had once been strong gradually took on the gaunt look of the underfed.

The Kingdom of the Couronians and Latgallians

Ruler: Valdismir, High Chieftain of the Kursi and Latgali

Capital: None

Religion: Euro-Pagan

Valdismir's brief experiment at forging the Balts into a coherent polity ended in the wake of the Rus invasion of Livonia. The failure to react to the invasion, to resist the incursions of the hated Cross-Men, let most tribesmen doubtful of the abilities of their erstwhile High Chieftain and cynical about the purpose of a centralised government. As a result, everyone, except the members of Valdismir's own household, ignored his decrees and, in no time at all, the whole Kingdom had broke up peacefully into its constituent parts...

The Kingdom of Poland



Ruler: Boleslaw III Piast, King of Poland, Defender of the Western Slavs

Capital: none.

Religion: Roman Catholic

The King of Poland was a man with many daughters and, like most fathers in that position, he was increasingly keen to marry some of them off. They were, after all, not getting any younger and were eating him out of house and home...

One daughter, Kunegunde, was packed off to Hungary to marry the Crown Prince (soon to be King) of that country. The union, as well as getting rid of one daughter, would secure a useful political alliance with Hungary. The hand of a second daughter, Nadya, was given to the influential Silesian magnate, Jakub Topor, in a bid to draw that province into a closer association with the Polish Crown and the House of Piast. It proved very successful and, by the start of 1123, the Duchy of Silesia had been fully integrated into the Kingdom of Poland. The marriage of Nadya and Jakub, for its part, was quite fruitful with daughters being born to the couple in 1123 and 1125; a son was born in 1124 but, sadly, he was weak and did not live more than five days. Despite the fact that they were obviously spending some time together (otherwise the babies would never have been born), Nadya was heard to complain that Jakub was always leaving her alone. She pouted at this neglect.

In other martial news, Crown Prince Wladislaw picked up a pretty blonde wife in 1121. A healthy son appeared in 1122, giving the Royal House much cause to celebrate. The next year, another pregnancy followed but the lady suffered an illness of the stomach while in her sixth month; a very bad fever followed, then a miscarriage from which she did not recover. A short time later, she shuffled off this mortal coil leaving Wladislaw, once more, an available young man.

Not much else happened in Poland, though Count Mieszko successfully oversaw a grand census covering the whole of Poland. All lands subject to the Crown were visited by the Count's men who tallied up the number of people living there, the value of their property and how much tax they ought to be paying. Amazingly enough, the Count reported to his master that the people had been underpaying their taxes for quite some time. Matters were now rectified.

The Kingdom of Hungary



Ruler: Buzilla de Hauteville, Queen Regent on behalf of Stephen II, King of the Magyars and the Croats

Capital: none.

Religion: Roman Catholic

"WAR!" shouted King Koloman. And it was a cry that was taken up by all quarters of the Magyar nobility. The Bavarian devils had gone far enough; after being excommunicated by the Pope and having made war against

both Bohemia and Venice, it was now time to tame the Welf beast. So, in 1121, the Magyar host mobilised for war and rode off into the west to subdue the Bavarian dogs... (*The war can be found in the Guelph War section*).

Back in Hungary, long negotiations with the Poles bore fruit when the Polish King agreed to give his daughter, Kunegunde, to be the wife of the Hungarian Heir, Crown Prince Stephen. Thus, the great Royal Houses of Piast and Arpad were united and, not long afterward, representatives of the two families agreed to sign a treaty of mutual defence. In these insecure times, it was natural that these neighbouring monarchs should seek to guarantee their liberty through foreign alliances. As to the young married couple, they were very shy at first, for both bride and groom were only sixteen years of age (and Stephen was a rather diffident lad), but in the four years following their marriage, they managed to produce a new daughter every year. Presumably, then, there was some chemistry between them...

In 1125, messengers brought the tragic news that Koloman had died while on campaign in Austria. Prince Stephen was immediately crowned King but his overbearing Norman mother, Buzilla, stepped in and effectively seized all the reins of power in the Kingdom, proclaiming herself Queen Regent on behalf of her son (who was twenty-one by now). King Stephen, meanwhile, was happy enough to stay in the background, spending his time with his pretty young wife or out hunting or, occasionally, drilling some of his household troops (an activity at which he proved rather gifted).

Down on the coast of Slovenia, the growing town of Pula was granted a charter by King Koloman which declared it a city and granted it various legal rights and considerable autonomy. Very soon, Magyar and Bohemian merchants were crowding the small dockside as they sought to import various exotic foreign commodities or export their own wares.

The Khanate of the Volga Bulgars

Ruler: Krum *of the Thousand Battles*, Khan of the Volga Bulgars, Protector of the Faithful

Capital: Great Bulgar

Religion: Sunni Islam

In Saksiny, down by the coast of the Caspian, the Khan was trying to improve relations with the rulers of the province. Jews, these rulers were, but speakers of a Turkish language and inheritors of the warrior tradition of the Khazars. Krum spent three full years amongst these proud clans, travelling here and there all over the province, speaking to the chieftains of wealth and glory of Great Bulgar, the most fantastic city west of Samarkhand... He spoke of the trade that his people enjoyed, of the excellence of the great university where medicine, law and all the arts and sciences of the Islamic world could be studied.

Yet, what did this matter to the tribesmen of the steppe? Trade mattered not to them, for they took what they wanted. Universities were an irrelevance, for all the tribes needs were fulfilled by the traditions of the Talmud and the teachings of the rabbis. Beyond that, the men of Saksiny needed nothing that the Bulgars could provide. Gifts and treasures might, perhaps, have softened the chieftains' attitude but Krum had nothing to give and, sadly, he quit the province as the Spring of 1124 opened; his diplomatic mission had been a failure and he counted himself lucky that the numerous and warlike tribes of Saksiny had not risen in arms against him.

Leaving Saksiny, the old Khan's longing for the thrill and glory of battle, together with his long-held desire for a port on the Black Sea, again draw him on campaign. He crossed the Volga on great pontoon bridge, built by his engineers over the course of a week, and proceeded through the friendly (or, at least, non-hostile) regions of Khazar and Patzinak. Thence, he descended into Taman, a fairly prosperous little region just east of the Straits of Kerch, at the edge of the great steppe. Local leaders, mainly Slavs but, curiously, with a few Greeks amongst them, quickly mobilised their forces and levies to face the invader. The campaign, though, was horribly one-sided. Krum commanded more than ten thousand men, three-fifths of whom were horsemen, while the provincial forces in Taman could barely raise fifteen hundred fighting men, most of whom were peasant footsoldiers. Before Summer of 1124 had expired, the Khan of the Volga Bulgars had swept his opponents from the field, captured their leaders and planted his saffron-coloured banner atop the foremost towns and castles of the region.

His lust for conquest sated, the Khan visited his captives and picked a few men whose courage and fortitude had impressed him and appointed them to govern in his name; since Taman was so far from the capital and homeland of the Bulgars, Krum was happy to let the local folk govern themselves without direct intervention from the Khanate provided, of course, that an appropriate tribute was paid annually.

Back home, the Khan's son and heir, Omurtag, had scarcely been less busy than his father. He had first departed the capital and travelled to the allied province of Urkel where he spent half a year hunting and talking with Khan Dukum, attempting to convince him that closer ties with his Bulgar kin were in the interests of his people. Dukum, while generally friendly towards the Bulgar, spoke with the full support of his people when he said that Urkel could not countenance compromising its autonomy. A better diplomat, one with a sharper grasp of the situation and a more thoughtful way with words, could perhaps have rescued the situation and confuted Dukum's protests but Omurtag was not so gifted and, sadly, left Urkel to return to Great Bulgar.

Once back within the gates of this, the greatest of cities, Omurtag was able to use his talents in the arena where he was most talented – administration. All the tedious but vital minutiae of running the growing domain of the Khanate came under the watchful eye of the Crown Prince; the tribute from the new subject cities, the levies which the vassal tribes and states supplied, the sums of money raised by tax collectors – all this, Omurtag oversaw efficiently. Too, at his bidding, hundreds of new clerks and overseers were hired to extend the administrative range of the government and to keep full and efficient records of all the realm's financial dealings – and, more than anything, to make sure that every single soul in the Khanate should pay his taxes promptly and in full. Much success for Omurtag, then, but there was some grief waiting for him in particular and for the whole Volga Bulgar state...

In 1121 and 1122, there was too little rain in the region around the Volga and the harvests, as a consequence, were horribly bad. Stores of food were quickly used up and many went without. By 1123, the children were beginning to suffer – weak from lack of food, they fell prey to ailments that, in other times, they might have fended off – and it became clear that all hope for the Khanate would be vested in that year's harvest. If there the crops were not uncommonly plentiful this year, no-one could predict just how disastrous the effect on the Khanate would be. In the mosques, churches and synagogues of the Khanate, all people prayed for mercy from whichever God they worshipped; out in the steppe, meanwhile, not even the wandering tribesmen escaped unscathed, for their animals, on whom they depended totally for subsistence, first grew thin and, soon, waned and died.

Autumn of 1123 came and the masses realised that, this year too, the harvest was poor. By the time Winter came, the first deaths to starvation had occurred. The next couple of years were, likewise, bad, with little food to be found anywhere. In the countryside, farmers and peasants were barely able to scrape together enough to keep their families fed but, in the cities, there was *never* enough. In Great Bulgar, in Golden Bulgar and even in the subject Jewish cities down by the Caspian and out on the steppe, people starved – the old and the young were most vulnerable; pregnant women miscarried more often than not; all were vulnerable to disease; and the perpetual drought left everyone short of water – what little could be found was almost always brackish or dirty.

Such agonies inflicted on the masses were matched by the miseries which Omurtag himself suffered. In 1122, his beloved wife, Marlas, became pregnant and there was joy throughout the capital at the prospect of an heir to continue the dynasty for another generation. Yet, despite her beauty and youth, Marlas carried the child for only three months before she haemorrhaged and died. Omurtag was distraught beyond mere words at the loss of his wife but, in the end, the miseries of his people, languishing under famine and drought, forced him to ignore his personal anguish and concentrate on alleviating the people's suffering.

Elsewhere, though, there was less anguish. The Vizier Olatai, following his recent diplomatic successes at Sarigh-Shin, had been tasked with the somewhat more difficult mission of acquiring an alliance with the old Khazar city of Samandar. It was an interesting city and an interesting assignment – Samandar, although now little more than a fortified market town and port, had once been capital of the Khazar Empire (in the 4481st year since the Creation – which is 720 AD to most people). Arriving in the city in 1121, the Vizier spent several years there, making himself well-known to the city grandees and extolling the strength and wealth of the Khan, together with the unfortunate fate of those who, in the past, had opposed him. Sure enough, before leaving the city, Olatai managed to extract agreements whereby the City Fathers allowed the Khan to levy full taxes upon Samandar, although they retained control of their own limited militia forces and the right to make their own laws.

As has been noted, Khan Dukum of Urkel spent much of 1121 welcoming Crown Prince Omurtag to his demesne, where the riding, hunting and hawking is particularly fine. But, with Omurtag's departure for Great Bulgar and the business of state, Dukum looked towards the business of war! Forging the mighty Volga, he crossed in Patzinak where the quarrelsome, loud-mouthed and extremely argumentative tribes immediately set upon him and demanded to know why he crossed their lands? When, they shouted, did we give permission for any Khan of Urkel to cross *our* territory?

It took a bit of smooth-talking from Dukum to convince the angry tribals that Urkel, as a vassal of the Volga Bulgars, had freedom of passage across Patzinak and that he was acting on behalf of Khan Krum. Eventually, though, they departed and let him get on with the business which had brought him here – the capture of Sarkel! With a little over two thousand cavalry and no engineers whatsoever, Dukum was in no position to lay siege to the city so, instead, he formed a sort of vague cavalry cordon and cut off supplies of food going into the city; needless to say, in a time of such severe drought, with food hard to come by and fetching many times its usual price in the market place, this tactic was extremely effective and Sarkel was compelled to capitulate to Dukum within a month of his arrival outside the walls.

Inside Sarkel wall's, which had originally been built by Byzantine engineers as a great Khazar fortress, Dukum found a surprisingly modest little city that suffered much from the absence of trade and the perilous state of its links to the outside world. Little difficulty was had in finding a band of collaborators who would govern the city on behalf of Krum and, in no time at all, Dukum quit Patzinak altogether and headed back to his own lands in Urkel.

The Duchy of Bohemia



Ruler: Borivoi II Przemyslid *The Righteous*, Duke of Bohemia, Cupbearer to the Emperor, Prince of the Empire, Grand Master of the Calixtine Order of Libuse, **and** Zuzana Przemyslid *La Militissa*, Duchess of Bohemia

Capital: Prague

Religion: Roman Catholic (Imperial)

Duke Borivoi was the man in the middle, trapped between the polar forces of the Pope in Rome and the Emperor in Franconia. On the one hand, ties of friendship and alliance had existed between Bohemia and Franconia for more than a century – and Borivoi was himself quite sympathetic to the idea that the Emperor should invest Bishops of the Church. But on the other, he could not honestly say that he felt able to *trust* the Emperor or any of the other scheming Princes of the Empire, nor even the Antipope. Troubling times, these...

At length, the Duke summoned all of his senior nobles and the official representatives of the Apostolic Church (including his own son, Jozef, who was now an ordained priest in the service of the Antipope). The grandees assembled, on a cold January evening, in the great hall of Prague Castle. The Duke came forth and spoke:

“Today I stand before you as many things: Duke, Elector, Father. All of these titles come with both privilege and responsibility, and one cannot forget to walk a balance between the two. Order must be maintained for us as a people to live free from chaos and barbarism.

“Ten years ago to this day, my wife and Duchess, Zuzana, was blessed with a vision. Glorious Libuse and the Saints warned that Bohemia would tread a difficult road in the upcoming years. However, it is a road the we must tread, for it is a road which will make us strong. If we choose to ignore the task, if we choose to avoid the challenge, then our own weakness will be our undoing.

“Each of us as must tread this path. The merchant next to the soldier, the serf next to the Duke, the father next to the son, the Bohemian next to the Moravian. Each of us must take the hard road not only to redeem ourselves but to help those people around us.

“It is time for each of us to bear the brunt of our responsibilities.

“As Duke, I am responsible for the welfare of each of you. I am responsible for the Justice of the realm, the prosperity of the people, the defence of our families.

“As Elector, I am responsible for choosing the Emperor, for maintaining cohesion within the Empire and its laws. For hosting and protecting any Elector travelling through my domain.

“As Father, I am responsible for my children, for their upbringing and honour.

“My difficult path starts here. For now, my responsibilities have come squarely into conflict. And I must choose which to uphold and which to betray. And I am afraid.

“I am afraid for my People.

“I am afraid for my Empire.

“I am afraid for my Son.

“I do not know which I will lose in the upcoming years, but I do know that with conflict comes loss. I do know that with betrayal comes sacrifice. I am afraid that in Paschal's dream, I am one of the hidden faces of the Beast, that I have allowed myself to be tempted by evil, and away from the light that is Our Lord.

“Tonight, I begin my sacrifices.

“Tonight, I sacrifice my Son.

“The Apostolic Church no longer has succour within the House of Przemysl. Two earthly sins shaped my decision. First, deceit. The Apostolic Church has used the name of Bohemia to further its goals. It has claimed to be a guiding force in the negotiations in the peace process between Bavaria and Bohemia. This is a lie. The Apostolic Church did not even exist at the time our treaties were signed.

“Second, and more importantly, they have succumbed to covetousness. I believe that the Unam Sanctum is forged; I do not have any evidence on who is behind it, but I do not believe it to be Rome. The Apostolic

Church is using this forgery as a pretense to usurp the throne of Saint Peter. Rather than investigate the true enemy, if it is not themselves, the adherents of the Antipope seeks to gain the holiest of positions through rebellion and lies.

“The sad truth to this matter is that Heinrich was fully within his rights to create the church. It is within his power to decide which ecclesiastical persons receive the lands and holdings within Germany that are granted to the Church. He may decide which monasteries collect which taxes, which bishops collect which tithes.

“Unfortunately, Heinrich and the Church were not satisfied with the legal limitations of his powers. Instead, both now seek to overturn Rome and take that which is not theirs. It is not for Heinrich and his Apostolic appointees to take the Holy See – the same Roman See which was the actual champion of the Bohemian cause during the Bavarian conflict.

“As my first action to discourage the Apostolic church from its sinful ways, I am arresting the bishops and bureaucrats currently residing at the court here in Prague. As part of this, I must include my own son, Jozef. All the clergymen will be held here in Prague until I receive word from the true Pontiff, Paschal in Rome, on what their fates shall be.

“Tonight. I sacrifice my Empire.

“It is clear to me that the Holy Roman Empire will never know peace and Justice while Heinrich corrupts its processes and its people. He abuses his authority, schemes against those who know his true nature, murders and lies when it suits him. I cannot sanction this man as the epitome of the Empire.

“I have stood silent too long on this matter. No more! I, as Elector, call for an official Diet on the election of King of the Germans. Bohemia does not recognize Heinrich's claim to the Imperial Crown until such a time as this Diet is concluded. And we will further not recognise him as Emperor until he is crowned in Rome, as our laws demand.

“Should Heinrich fulfill both these requirements, I will acknowledge him as Emperor. But I doubt he, as a man of sin, can do so. I hope the other Electors will do what is right and support this Diet, even if it is to confirm Heinrich's claim to be King of Germany. Each must vote as their conscience demands. But a vote must be taken. This precedence of Imperial and Kingly seizure must end here and now, otherwise this will be a battle our children fight for many generations.

“Tonight, I sacrifice my people.

“I believe that God personally tests each of us. Each of us as people, and each of us as nations. Time and again, we have been beset by treachery and sin. Time and again, Zuzana and her pilgrims and her crusaders have been hindered in their quest. Time and again, the culprit of these difficulties has been Bavaria.

“With the excommunication of Henry the Black, we are freed from our ties of treaty with Bavaria. We no longer hold the pact of non-aggression as valid until such a time as Henry reconciles with Rome. Once again, Bavarian greed has hindered efforts to reach the Jerusalem and return home. This hindrance must no longer be tolerated. All that is needed for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing.

“Bohemia is finished with doing nothing. As of this day, a state of war exists between Bohemia and Bavaria, again to be enforced until such a time as Bavaria is reconciled with Rome. Until that day, trade is forbidden and our borders are closed.

“And so the first steps on our difficult path have been taken. Now we each must bear the responsibility of this journey. To see to its end, to see to our future. To see to a final justice.

I hope that we as Bohemians have the strength to see it through.”

Silence followed as each person in the hall tried to assess how he would be affected by the policy espoused in this speech. A few of Borivoi's most enthusiastic supporters burst into applause; most of the rest of the lords and barons, seeing which way the wind was blowing, erupted into a clamorous tempest of cheers. A handful of Imperial sympathisers remained resentfully silent (as did the Apostolic churchmen, needless to say). In short order, a band of men-at-arms entered the hall to remove the Antipope's representatives. The Duke's own son, Jozef of Bohemia, was hustled away to the castle of Český Krumlov, where he was imprisoned in very comfortable quarters.

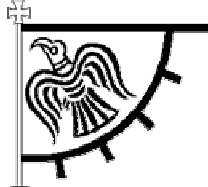
Apart from this, the major news came from the renewed war against Bavaria and the hated Guelphs. Zuzana herself, returning from the Holy Land in 1122, fought her way through Verona and Austria and into Bavaria itself

by the end of 1124. Austria, meanwhile, was made subsidiary to the Duchy of Bohemia following the defection of Margrave Leopold. (See *The Guelph War* for details of this).

In domestic matters, Borivoi continued his usual policy of lowering taxes for the peasantry and burghers and this continued to endear him to his subjects while, simultaneously, encouraging the growth of the economy.

Northern Europe

The Kingdom of Norway



Ruler: Eystein I Magnusson, King of Norway, Earl of the Orkneys, King of Man
Capital: Christiana
Religion: Roman Catholic

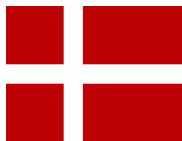


The Kingdom of Sweden



Ruler: Inge II *the Younger*, Sole King of Sweden
Capital: Sigtuna
Religion: Roman Catholic - Imperial (except sometimes when they're Euro-Pagan).

The Kingdom of Denmark



Ruler: Niels I, King of Denmark, Duke of Holstein
Capital: Copenhagen
Religion: Roman Catholic

The Icelandic Commonwealth

Ruler: Bergthor Hrafnsson, Logsgumadr (Speaker of the Law)

Capital: none.

Religion: Roman Catholic

Western Europe

The Norman Kingdom of England



Ruler: Henry I *Beauclerc*, King of England
Capital: London
Religion: Roman Catholic



Henry I "Beauclerc"

The Duchy of Aquitaine



Ruler: Guyaume IX *the Troubadour*, Duke of Aquitaine, Count of Poitiers
Capital: Toulouse
Religion: Roman Catholic

The Kingdom of France



Ruler: Louis VI *the Fat* Capet, King of France
Capital: Paris (occupied)
Religion: Roman Catholic

The War of the Dispossessed 1123-??

England and Aquitaine

vs.

Robert "Curthose" of Normandy, Louis VI "le Gros" of France, the Schwarze Garde and sundry rebels,
(with the Holy Roman Emperor, Lorraine and Flanders looking on and giggling)

Frankfurt, 1121: The Holy Roman Emperor reflected that Robert "Curthose" was a crusty old man. Sixty-nine years old and, after nearly two decades of defeat, exile and wandering across France and Europe like a vagabond, the only thing still keeping him together was *bitterness*. The only thing that animated the sour-faced bag of skin and bones was the hope – nay, the unshakeable belief! – that *one day* he would take revenge on his despised younger brother, the usurper Beauclerc. This made old Robert a useful tool for so subtle and devious a mind as Emperor Heinrich's...

"Retribution, my Lord Duke, may soon be yours. Retribution and the return of your father's domains, stolen from you while you laboured against the Infidel in the East," said the Emperor, slowly and deliberately. His elbow rested on the arm of his chair, his fingers curled pensively around his mouth.

The old man nodded. "I know the history of my misfortunes, Emperor. I need no man to recount to me how my patrimony was lost. All I care to speak of now is how it might be regained. I have but little support in the Duchy... My brother's lies have torn the people away from me. Now, after so many years in exile, few would care to raise a weapon in support of my cause."

"Perhaps," Henry nodded. He knew well how badly the Duke had ruled in Normandy and how popular Beauclerc's rule was amongst the poor Norman peasants. "I know that the Normans do not love you now – and, if I may speak boldly, they never loved you nor your rule. Yet, time dims the memory, does it not? And people can be swayed, if they hear the right words. Your subjects could, perchance, be induced to embrace you once again and to reject the usurper.

"After all," Henry went on, "your cause is a most romantic one. A knight of God travels to the east to liberate Jerusalem. He fights Turks, Arabs, Moors and Saracens. He defends Christian pilgrims with his own blood and his honest blade... And he returns home to find what?"

"I'll tell you what!" the old man barked. "That treacherous stay-at-home Henry, who was left *nothing* by our father, has murdered my brother William and is already massing his mercenary scum to invade Normandy, my own fief, given to me by the explicit will of our father, the blessed William!"

"In short, a most romantic tale," Heinrich declared. "All that is necessary is to create a happy ending – the return of the rightful Duke and the overthrow of the wicked King. Who could resist such a cause? I daresay that when word of your return reaches Normandy, there is scarcely a person in the land who wouldn't cheer!"

"Fah! Tales and causes... What good are they to me? Peasants may welcome me and clerics may tut-tut at my brother's behaviour, but what good is that against one of Henry's knights? How will a peasant's sympathy avail me when I face an army of twenty-thousand iron-clad warriors?"

"Oh, I concede your point," the Emperor replied, "but I do not suggest that you await a peasant's revolt to place you back on the throne that is rightfully yours. But you must see that the support of the masses would be a valuable prop, if you could find the resources to raise a professional army."

"Aye, perhaps," muttered Robert, "but since I can't raise an army, the whole point is moot. Good God, sir! Did you call me here, all the way to Germany, just to talk nonsense about what *might* be or what *could* be?"

Heinrich smiled good-naturedly, ignoring the bad manners of a man who was his inferior in every way. "Have you ever heard of a band of men called *Die Schwarze Garde*?" he asked. The look of repulsion on the exile's face was all the answer he needed.

"Murderers!" the Duke spat. "Brigands, bandits and the enemies of God! I know all about their crimes. Those two-legged vermin. Ha! I shouldn't be surprised to learn that they're all in league with my evil brother!"

"They are not," the Emperor explained calmly, "in league with the King of England. They *could* be in league with you... For a price."

"Explain yourself clearly," said the old man. "What do you mean? *Exactly* what do you mean?"

Henry shrugged. "It's clear enough. Isn't it? They are mercenaries and they will fight for you, if enough gold is put into their hands. So, tell me now, do you wish their services? Will you march with them into France, into Normandy, to drive your brother and his dogs back into the sea?"

He steepled his hands and leant forward. "This is the moment, my Lord Duke. Take your decision. An agent of the Garde is here, under this roof. If you but say 'aye', we will begin negotiations for their service. If you say 'nay', I shall respect your wishes and allow you to find your own way to regain your lost domain. Decide."

The Duke looked torn, looked incapable of decision. Beneath the surface, ill-concealed beliefs and desires fought each other for mastery. At length, he spoke: "The Garde are a force for evil in Christendom. I believe this with no doubts whatsoever. You, Emperor, I judge to be a most sinful man. You are ambitious and lacking in morality or scruples of any kind. Your argument with the Holy Father is a fabrication calculated to increase your own power. You would not even be speaking to me now if my brother, who is of your ilk, had been willing to take your hand in friendship..."

The Emperor was not moved by this flattery. He waited and Robert spoke just one more word: "*But...*" Inside Heinrich's head, he allowed himself a smile. He had judged Robert Curthose well. "I must think of my family. Though I despise you and all you stand for, though I remain the most faithful adherent of the Roman Papacy, I have two sons and no patrimony to leave them. When my father conquered England sixty years ago, he fought under the Holy Banner of the Pope; yet, I cannot forget that Paschal turned a blind eye to my brother's treachery.

"I will never support your Antipope nor your cause. I accept your assistance but only so I may gain back that which is rightfully mine – and I would not even do that if all other avenues were not closed off to me."

"Well, that's settled, then," said the Emperor with a huge smile. He clapped his hands loudly and a door opened. A servant ushered into the room a very well-dressed figure in black. "Hartmann!" said the Emperor "Sit! We have much to talk about!".

"Majesty," the man answered, bowing deeply before taking his seat. He smiled effusively. "You honour me."

"We must speak," said Heinrich, "of a great and honourable cause. Your men, your Garde, must take part in this wonderful adventure! You will overthrow a wicked King and restore the rightful ruler, a crusader in the service of Christ!"

Hartmann made a deprecatory noise in his throat. "Majesty, you speak to me of 'causes'. You speak to me of 'honour'. I tell you, the Schwarze Garde has no truck with such things. We do not fight for passion or hatred or pointless gain. We do not fight because we delight in battle or to feed some dark inner need or for petty advantage. We do not fight for causes or beliefs. I tell you, Majesty, that all these reasons are suspect in the extreme!

"Look into the face of a man who will kill you for a 'cause' and your nostrils will snuff up the scent of abomination. Hear a speech declaring a crusade and, I assure you, your ears should catch the clink of Evil's scales and the dragging of its tail across the purity of language.

"No, we do not fight and kill for any cause. We do it for the money.

"And, because we know the value of human life, we do it for a *great deal* of money.

"There can be few cleaner motives, so shorn of all pretence."¹⁷

Without a word, the Emperor snapped his fingers and a lackey appeared from the back of the room carrying a small casket. He placed it on the table, before the mercenary captain, and retreated back to his place. Henry flipped the box open. It was full of silver coin.

Hartmann smiled. "That'll do nicely, sir. Forty more of those little chests and you'll have retained our services..."

1123 (aka The Year It All Went "Bang!"):

The Kingdom of the Scots



Ruler: David I Canmore, King of Scots

Capital: none

Religion: Roman Catholic

Things were quiet up here. In 1124, King Alexander died and was succeeded by his popular and pious younger brother. The succession went undisputed.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Serene Republic of St Mark



Ruler: Giuseppe Bembo, Doge of the Serene Republic

Capital: Venice

Religion: Roman Catholic

War, for the liberation of Verona and the destruction of the traitorous Bavarian Guelphs, was the major thing on Venice's agenda. The Doge sent his recruiting agents out to every corner of Western Europe, seeking to gather ever more mercenaries to the banner of the Serene Republic. More than five thousand soldiers-of-fortune were brought to the city by the lagoon. Efforts were even made to secure the services of Hartmann van Aue and his Schwarze Garde, although they had already accepted an offer of employment from another quarter.

Apart from war and the military, a very unpleasant diplomatic spat erupted with Pisa. The Doge presented some quite compelling evidence to the effect that the Consul of Pisa had attempted to "influence" certain Senators and to elicit sensitive information. Naturally, such underhand and nefarious activities ran contrary to both the spirit and the letter of Venice's treaty with Pisa, so the Doge was left with no choice but to consider the treaty null and void.

¹⁷ Hartmann's words are adapted, in part, from the speech of Dr. Cruces, the chief assassin, in *Pyramids* by Terry Pratchett.

Norman Apulia followed Venice's lead and cancelled their treaty of friendship with Pisa; the closeness of relations between Venice and Apulia was further reinforced when, in the Summer of 1121, the two states concluded a defensive alliance.

Treaties of friendship were established with Hungary, Bohemia and Tuscany. This last agreement was taken by some as a sign that the Margravate, which was very unfriendly to the Serene Republic, saw the aggression of the Emperor and the German Duchies as a much more pressing threat than Venice.

The Guelph War¹⁸

Bavaria

vs.

Venice, Bohemia and Hungary

1121: Mercenaries were recruited by the thousand in Bavaria and Venice, while, in Verona itself, the Bavarian occupiers built more than a dozen new garrisoned forts to strengthen their grip on the land. Yet, there was no actual conflict for the Venetians wisely chose to remain on their impregnable islands and refused to come out and do battle.

Amongst the Bavarian soldiery, the absence of impending danger gave the men a great deal of free time – and this was not necessarily a good thing (for oft is it said that the Devil finds work for idle hands). With nothing to do during 1121, the men became somewhat sullen and lazy; many knights and soldiers were heard to carp at the current state of events and, in particular, at the wretched situation whereby Bavarians marched against Tuscans in support of the hated Emperor. Things were aggravated further when, in May of 1121, the German Bishop Athaulf of Werla assumed command over Bavarian troops in Verona. Athaulf, as an agent and representative of the Antipope, was deeply unpopular with the Bavarians, most of whom supported the supremacy of Rome in the current schism. The great nobles, led by Margrave Leopold of Austria, were affronted that their Duke should give command of the army to a Franconian puppet-bishop, rather than to one of the magnates of Bavaria; the common soldiers, meanwhile, felt slighted because Athaulf had brought a couple of thousand of Pope Sylvester's personal troops to bolster the Bavarian force; to the eyes of the ordinary soldiery, it seemed as if the Imperialist bishop was insulting their courage and loyalty by suggesting that they needed reinforcements who were committed to the Antipapal cause.

Things, then, were tense in occupied Verona during 1121. Foreign agents, too, crept abroad in the Bavarian camps and amongst their garrisons, whispering calumnies, pouring poison into the ears of men and generally stirring up discontent. The situation reached boiling point in July of that year when *another* Imperialist "bishop" arrived in Verona. This fellow, what's worse, was a mere teenager and was not even German but a lousy Roman – and a half-Jewish Roman at that! – by the name of Guiberto Pierleone. On the positive side of the ledger, Pierleone led a force of about five thousand Bavarian and mercenary troops and seemed to enjoy the personal favour of Duke Henry the Black. Still, that didn't count for much when one took into account his age, nationality, Semitic origin and the intense and unabating disapproval with which the Imperialists were regarded by the Bavarians.

In the Autumn of the year, as news came that the Crusaders of Outremer had arrived in Venice to fight against the Welfs (or Guelphs, as those dashed uneducated Italians called them), things boiled over. Isolated mutinies broke out all across Verona, often led by knights or barons who felt that their Duke had pushed things too far. Leopold of Austria, the Duke's most trusted lieutenant, led the insurrection. However, Athaulf and the young Pierleone were hardly faint-hearted or timorous in their response. Both men were possessed of dazzling oratorical skills and had winning personalities combined with great personal courage; they rode, tirelessly and hardly any protection, to the seats of the mutiny and they addressed the rebels manfully. The bishops showed that they were willing to listen to the complaints, both from the common men and from the nobles; and they were able to respond very effectively to the various grievances and criticisms. For example, when men complained that they were here, in Verona, fighting on behalf of the Emperor or the Antipope, the bishops would eloquently demonstrate that the *real* reason for the war was to protect the Duke of Bavaria's rightful claim to the lands of the late Margravine Mathilda. When others carped at the influence of Imperialists in Bavaria, the bishops derided the idea that anyone could "influence" someone so strong and clever as Duke Henry (or his late brother, Duke Welf the Leper).

No, it was not right for the Bavarian army to mutiny for, in doing so, they betrayed the rightful cause of their ruler and their country. In no time at all, the two bishops spread this message throughout the Guelph army and, simultaneously, earned themselves (and the Antipapacy) a lot of respect in the eyes of the Bavarians. Leopold of Austria, meanwhile, sloped off out of Verona, having forsaken any loyalty to Bavaria and the Welfs.

¹⁸ For no reason at all, I've decided to call this war "The Guelph War" (deriving from the Italian pronunciation of the German name "Welf"). In L42 Hist Cal, the Guelphs, as champions of the Imperial cause and enemies of Papal Supremacy, are the exact opposite of their historical counterparts.

Over in Bohemia, King Koloman of Hungary (who was in the country with his large army) marched slowly through Moravia and Slovakia, making for Carinthia...

Start 1122: The campaigning season opened with the inauspicious news that Pope Paschal had excommunicated Duke Henry IX of Bavaria. The effect of this on the army, and on the Duchy as a whole, was disagreeable but much less melodramatic than might have been envisioned. Although there were no major revolts or defections, the troops in Verona grew extremely uneasy and a handful of desertions occurred; low morale became an issue of epidemic proportions. Throughout, the mercenary contingents remained the least affected (so long as their wages were paid, they would fight for anyone) but the average Bavarian soldier was in need of much reassurance from the authorities; they were, after all, devout and pious men who, on the whole, believed that Pashcal, not Sylvester, was the rightful Pope.

Once more, it was the Bishops Athaulf and young Pierleone who salvaged what would otherwise have been a grim situation. With their gifted eloquence and their tirelessness, they went a long way in undoing the poor morale and convincing the ordinary troops that Paschal's excommunication was invalid and flawed, even persuading some that Paschal was not the rightful Pope. So, for all its dangerous potential, the excommunication crisis passed off fairly uneventfully and the dent in the army's spirits proved to be shortlived. This was all very providential for, in the early Summer of 1122, the Venetians began crossing over to the mainland; with them were some four thousand Bohemian warrior-pilgrims just returned from the Holy Land and led by the dread Zuzana of Bohemia. Her presence caused even the boldest Bavarian to quail for they remembered the drubbing she had given old Magnus Welf at the Battle of Sazawa, fifteen years earlier.

Of course, the Bavarians and Bohemians were actually bound by a peace treaty, so there should have been no reason for conflict to occur. Indeed, the Duke and Duchess of Bohemia had even sworn fidelity to the German Pope and had gone so far as to send their own son, Jozef, to be ordained as a priest under the guidance and jurisdiction of the Antipope. But the theory and the reality proved to be two very different things. The Antipapal bishops sent out messengers with guarantees that Zuzana and the returning pilgrims would receive safe passage through Bavarian territory; but Zuzana refused to speak to the messengers and, instead, sent a written message to the two bishops telling them that, in the first place, Bohemia had annulled the peace treaty that had ended the late war between the two countries and, in the second, Bohemia no longer recognised the deceitful offices of the Antipope as a legitimate ecclesiastical authority. The churchmen were somewhat taken aback by this turn of events but the Bavarians were less than surprised by this perfidious behaviour.

In any case, battle was soon to be joined. On the shore opposite the lagoon, the Venetians and Bohemians landed a considerable force: from Venice, there were four thousand engineers and sappers, plus two and a half thousand Venetian and Veronese cavalry; supporting them, the Republic had engaged the services of a mercenary army that contained three thousand infantry from all over Europe, three thousand mounted troops and five hundred heavily-armoured knights. The Bohemians disposed of a little over four thousand armed pilgrims; about half of these were free yeomen who had strapped on swords and taken up the spear to follow their Duchess on a peregrination to the Holy Land; most of the rest were well-trained engineers, although there were a few hundred poorly-armed but bold peasant skirmishers who had taken the cross.

During the first few weeks of combat, the Venetians and Bohemians managed to avoid the main Guelph force and concentrated on reducing the plethora of forts that dotted the region. Superior intelligence services ensured that the liberating force was able to keep a close eye on the movement of the Germans and could even feed them false information. Hard fighting was needed to smash the Bavarian strongholds; the Venetian cavalry suffered particularly badly during the conflict and Vengali, the commander, lost his life.

On the Bavarian side, Bishop Athaulf was wounded during an ambush by a band of Bohemians and, for the duration of the campaign, was forced to relinquish overall command in favour of the young Guiberto Pierleone who promptly ordered a withdrawal from Verona into Carinthia.

His reason for abandoning Italy had less to do with poltroonery and more to do with practical strategic necessity, for the Hungarians – with the support of a second Bohemian army! – were advancing quickly into Carinthia, threatening to cut the army's lines of communication and supply.

End 1122-Early 1123: Pierleone's Bavarians arrived in Carinthia in good order after a very quick and methodical withdrawal. They found that the invading Hungarian horde had not begun to subdue the region in earnest; so, the Bavarians were able to recover from their exertions in Winter quarters and, when the snows melted at the start of 1123, marched out and made ready to defend Carinthia.

Koloman's army was made up of five thousand footmen, divided roughly equally between spear-armed troops in close order and bow-armed peasant skirmishers; on horseback, there were some five thousand mounted archers, riding the swift ponies of the Hungarian plains; finally, the shock element of the Hungarian army was provided by more than three thousand Magyar horse-warriors carrying the lance and the sword. These troops were bolstered by a Bohemian host that consisted of two thousand skirmishing cavalry, one thousand Czech infantry clad in heavy mail coats and bearing great axes, and a huge contingent of Slavic mercenaries numbering more than

three thousand infantry and almost four thousand cavalry (about two-thirds of whom were skirmishers). To the disgust of the Bavarian troops, the Bohemians were accompanied by the renegade Leopold of Austria, who had fled Verona the previous year after his failed attempt to stir up dissent in the Welf army.

A series of small and confused battles took place during the Spring of this year. Horses were of limited utility in Carinthia, their mobility being impeded by the wooded and hilly terrain, so most combat was undertaken by scattered units of foot soldiers. The light Hungarian skirmishers really came into their own in these conditions. The Bavarians, who were rather short of light infantry, had to use close order troops instead, particularly their battle-hardened mercenaries. Losses in the campaign were not particularly high on either side, though the Welfs did manage to ambush some Magyar mounted detachments in the forests of Carinthia, inflicting some embarrassing losses on the foe in the process.

In any case, the young Pierleone was fearful of getting mired down in this poor and relatively unimportant province. He worried that the loss of men here, in Carinthia, might impede his ability to defend Bavaria itself against the invading Huns and Czechs. So, after a couple of months of indecisive scuffles, he ordered that the Welf army should withdraw into Austria, thence to Bavaria. King Koloman, for his part, was happy to let the Bavarians go and concentrated on reorganising and regrouping his army for the coming campaign in southern Germany.

Towards the Autumn of the year, Zuzana of Bohemia and her pilgrims arrived in Carinthia to link up with Koloman.

1123: This year was relatively quiet. The Guelph army moved at high speed through Austria and into Bavaria. The combined Bohemian and Hungarian army, now under the joint command of Koloman and Zuzana, followed behind just a couple of months later. They paused to subdue half-a-dozen local forts but, by the end of Autumn, they had been overwhelmed.

In the aftermath, a Bohemian garrison was installed to ensure the compliance of the conquered Austrians. That treacherous defector, Margrave Leopold of Austria, was reconfirmed as feudal ruler of the region by Duchess Zuzana of Bohemia, with the clear understanding that the Margravate of Austria was now subject to the Duchy of Bohemia. News of this arrangement caused consternation not only in Austria but also at the Imperial Court in Frankfurt, where some of the more combative officials publically cursed the Bohemians for "subverting the Emperor's feudal prerogative".

Summer 1124: War now erupted in Bavaria itself! For the first time since the battle of Lech, the hated Hungarians were pressing deep into the Empire. The invasion caused complete and pervasive panic throughout the whole of Southern Germany (not only in Welf lands but even in neighbouring Swabia and Franconia).

The Bohemian and Hungarian armies were the same as those they had fielded in Carinthia the previous year (though now reinforced by Zuzana's pilgrims). Bavaria was defended by more than a dozen motte-and-bailey castles together with the main field army which numbered four thousand spear-armed footmen, about two thousand dismounted knights (in mail armour and with very good weapons), about a thousand archers, two thousand mounted knights with little or no armour, somewhat less than a thousand cavaliers with heavy mail armour and an elite body of five hundred armoured horsemen drawn from powerful noble families that were tied very closely to the ruling Welfs. Over and above this, sundry bodies of engineers and sappers were also attached. Command of the army remained with Guiberto Pierleone, even though Henry of Bavaria himself was present in the region. The army and the Duke had great confidence in the young Italian churchman while doubts about Henry's martial abilities were widespread.

In any case, during the beautiful Summer of 1124, the campaign for control Bavaria opened. The Bohemians, having rather more infantry and sappers, concentrated on reducing the region's forts while the Hungarians rode straight into the heart of the province, with their King at their head, seeking battle with the Guelphs. The local terrain, unlike that of Carinthia, was eminently suitable for mounted troops and Koloman looked forward to crushing these impious Teutonic dogs into the ground once and for all.

Pierleone realised that the odds were against him, given the difference in size between his army and that of his enemies, so he would need to be uncommonly bold and cunning. Having gathered as much intelligence as possible about the invader's dispositions and route of march, the young bishop tried to regain control of the situation by selecting the ground on which the inevitable battle would be fought (thus ensuring that the terrain would be favourable). The Magyars seemed to be making, without much subtlety, directly for the market-town of Freising in Lower Bavaria. After some brief investigation (and the dispatch of a few scouts), Pierleone found the perfect site for combat – not far from Freising, just outside a sleepy town called Langenbach, there was a long, steep ridge which would weaken the momentum of the charging Hungarians and augment the defensive capabilities of his infantry. So, in short order, the Bavarians marched to this place and occupied it.

Of course, King Koloman was no fool. As soon as his spies informed him of the Bavarian movements, he understood what the young cleric had in mind. But, even so, the King was very confident that his men could destroy the Germans on *any* battlefield and decided to fight at Langenbach after all. So, off he rode at the head of

his own army and a contingent of Bohemians and mercenaries (Zuzana and most of the rest of the Bohemians were busy reducing the Bavarians castles).

Koloman's army arrived in the vicinity of Langenbach during the second week of June, 1123. The swift Hungarian scouts soon found the fortified Welf camp barely half a mile from the defensible ridge line that had so attracted Pierleone. The Bavarians, as soon as they realised that the Hungarian devils were in the vicinity, immediately rallied to their standards and assembled into a defensive formation; on this occasion, the Hungarians withdrew quite quickly, being content merely to garner information about Guelph dispositions, but they returned the next day and the day after, each time in larger numbers; each time, the Bavarians repeated their drill and deployed in battle order. At last, on the 18th of June 1123, the King of Hungary himself turned up with all his men; they began pouring onto the plain opposite the Langenbach ridge and arranging themselves for battle a couple of hours after daybreak. The Bavarians were ranged along the ridge with their infantry formed up into a sort of phalanx. Dismounted knights formed the centre of the line; archers were deployed some way behind the main battle line, in the hope of using their missiles to break up attacking troops; cavalry were held back in tightly disciplined units, apparently meant to prevent the attackers from outflanking the Welf army or to bolster the infantry, should it be necessary. All along the length of the ridge, Bavarian engineers had stuck caltrops and wooden traps to retard the foe's advance.

While Koloman was arraying and disposing his troops, Guiberto Pierleone rode out in front of his own men and spoke to them, in the hope of steeling their backbone for the coming struggle. Speaking accented German in a loud voice, he rode up and down the line of Welf soldiers, all the while holding a large and ornate Bible over his head. "Good men," he cried, "you stand here not as soldiers of the Empire or of Bavaria but as the defenders of your own homes. You do not fight to defend this Pope or that Duke or some Bishop; you fight to protect your farms, your homes, your women and your children from the foreign horde that stands opposite. On this day, you shall stand firm and fight courageously; let the Bible be your shield and Faith in God be your sword. Know that if you fail, your children shall be impaled by those Hunnish fiends, those barbarian descendants of Attila, and your women shall serve their libidinous will. Know that if you die here, you die as men who had loved righteousness in the execution of that most sacred duty, the defence of your hearth and home, and those of your neighbours, against the vile depravity of the barbaric race of Huns who love only wickedness and sin."

The speech was short but fairly effective. The barbaric Huns, meanwhile, were braiding their hair for battle and receiving absolution from the numerous Catholic priests who accompanied the army. Koloman had no particularly inspiring words to give his men; instead, he simply reminded his army that the Duke of Bavaria had been excommunicated by the Pope and, therefore, anyone who served the outlaw Duke was beyond the protection of God's Law, "...and, were that not proof enough of the iniquity of the enemy, they are led by a Christ-Killing Jew who parades himself in the garb of a Bishop of the Church! Take holy vengeance upon these sinners and apostates!" So, at around eleven in the morning, the battle began.

Koloman opened by sending forth his horse archers – about eight thousand in all, half of whom were Magyar, a quarter Czech, and the rest Slavic mercenaries from Eastern Europe. The horsemen would ride out to the foot of the ridge, unleash their missiles and then wheel about; one regiment after another repeated this manoeuvre but with little discernable effect; some Bavarian soldiers died under the heavy rain of arrows but most just held their shields firm and crouched stoically, waiting for the storm to break and real combat to begin. For his part, the Hungarian King had hoped that the enemy cavalry might be tempted to countercharge his light horse; for, if only he could lure the enemy away from that ridge, he knew that he could exterminate them with ease. But, if the Bavarians were not going to be lured into reckless action, Koloman was left with no option but to attack in force.

¹⁹At all points, the Hungarians advanced. The fearsome Magyar cavalry cantered forward on the flanks, preparing to attack the extreme left and right of the Bavarian line; in the centre, a van of one thousand Hungarian spearmen advanced steadily, supported by more than three thousand axe-bearing Slavic mercenaries. The combat that ensued was uncommonly bloody for both sides. The advancing force, which fought under the Holy Banner of the Church of Rome, was stippled by hundreds of Bavarian arrows but, despite many losses, they continued to press on relentlessly up the ridge and through the nests of traps and caltrops until, at last, they were close enough to charge into the Bavarians! For their part, the



Bavarians also continued to suffer the unpleasant attentions of enemy archers and their losses steadily mounted; still, they held firm and when, at last, the Hungarians and Slavs charged, the Bavarians threw them back with ease. The combat in the centre settled into a shoving match between the two opposing lines, with the Hungarians and Bohemians unable to break through.

¹⁹ The illustration is particularly appropriate, though slightly anachronistic – it's taken from a 1488 Bavarian manuscript of the *Chronica Hungarorum*.

Out on the flanks, though, the undisciplined Bavarian cavaliers were much more dynamic than their horseless colleagues. Instead of just holding their ground, they actually countercharged their Hungarian attackers. The sheer weight of the Bavarians pushed the Magyars clean away from the ridge on both flanks, something that had the side effect of leaving the Hungarian centre completely exposed and preventing them from withdrawing. In any case, the Bavarians soon ran out of momentum and stalled; at that point, the opposing horsemen found themselves engaged in a series of whirling, bloody, merciless cavalry *mêlées*. The Magyars were surprised by the indomitable courage and martial skill of their enemy and could not easily overcome it but, still, the Bavarians could not match the equestrian proficiency and *élan* of the individual Hungarian horsemen. Many good riders and knights on both sides, then, met their end in this struggle.

At last, after a good hour of unbroken slaughter, the opposing cavalry forces seemed to recognise that neither one would win and each began to withdraw (with the Magyar light horse picking off exhausted and isolated Bavarians wherever the opportunity arose). The end of the cavalry battle gave an opportunity for the worn out Hungarian and mercenary infantry to retire from the centre. Both sides, then, had broken off to regroup and to prepare for the next round of the battle. Grave disappointment attended King Koloman as he surveyed his men and contemplated how he could crush these obdurate Guelphs. On the other side of the field, young Guiberto Pierleone was active all along the line, shoring up his exhausted troops with encouraging words and trying to estimate the huge losses that his army had taken (most of all, though, Pierleone was trying to guess whether his warriors could stand any more punishment).

Perhaps thirty minutes passed before Koloman was ready for a final assault. He could see that the Bavarians, though brave, had taken exceptionally high casualties – many thousands of them lay wounded or dead, while many others (particularly amongst the cavalry) had been forced to retire from the field in confusion. The numerical advantage that Koloman had enjoyed at the start of the battle was now even greater... One last push, then, ought to drive the Guelph scum from the field.

A force made up mainly of mercenaries and a few regiments of Bohemians (including some who had fought these same Bavarians at Sazawa and Gistelnitz years ago) was disposed. Magyar horse archers would follow along at a respectful distance and, on the flanks, some heavier lance-armed cavalry would come to pursue the enemy when they finally broke and ran. They began their advance just as the sky darkened and a pleasant summer rain began to fall. The Bavarians, beholding that their final moment had come and that could not expect to survive the foe's assault, hefted their spears and axes, prepared to sell themselves dear and began to sing the hymn "*Media in Vita*", in praise of the Lord and in expectation of their own deaths.

Arrows were unleashed, flying in both directions and crashing into the lines of defenders and attackers. Many of the missiles were turned aside by shields or armour but, here and there, they ripped open the flesh or shattered the bone of some poor victim. By and by, Koloman's mercenary and Czech infantry arrived at the foot of the hateful ridge where so many of their fellows had met their ends that day; up they charged, over the bodies of men and the carcasses of slain horses, to crash into the Bavarian shield wall. Yet, the Bavarians held; every man in the line, including even the young Bishop Guiberto, held his shield high and hacked or stabbed at the foe before him with his blade. The surging wave of attackers pressed down hard on the lines of defenders who fell by the score, dead, dying or wounded; but the Welf warriors would not flee, would not quit the field, and yielded only a few feet of ground in response to the relentless pressure of the foe. On both sides, officers cried out reassurance to their men that God was with them, that the enemy was damned.

With the defending regiments whittled down to the bone, it seemed a mere matter of time before their resolve would break and they would be swamped and the battle won. But it was not to be. At last, the Czechs and mercenaries lost the will to fight, for their own casualties had been abominably high, and withdrew. The whole Hungarian host was now exhausted and dispirited by the hardest day's fighting they had ever seen. King Koloman signalled a withdrawal and, as the final few hundred Bavarians looked on, the whole invading army quit the field. A weak and ragged cheer went up from the devastated remnants of the Welf army. At a terrible cost, they had won the day and perhaps saved their country. Pierleone, tears of relief and joy streaming down his face, led an impromptu Thanksgiving Mass on the battlefield, even before the wounded were cared for.

The victory of *Langenbach*, though, was not so completely decisive as it first appeared. The Bavarians had beaten off the Hungarian invasion and had knocked Koloman's forces into headlong retreat but Zuzana and her Bohemian army had managed to shatter virtually all of the castles and forts that dotted the Bavarian countryside. Too, Welf losses had been huge, their forces cut down to almost nothing. Many feared that the victory would be fleeting. Be that as it may, before Midwinter of 1124, the Hungarian-Bohemian army had withdrawn from Bavaria.

1125: Having escape back to Austria, Koloman and Zuzana worked on regrouping and reorganising their battered forces. Stragglers and deserters were sought out and dragged back to the colours; some noblemen filled out holes in their ranks by grabbing local Austrians and inducting them into the army.

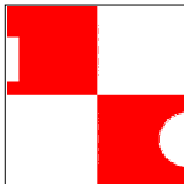
Pierleone was up to something very similar in Bavaria. He made sure that every sick or wounded man in his army received the best treatment available in local nunneries and monasteries; the young cleric's motivation, of course, was not sympathy or compassion but the pressing need for more fighting men. Apart from the sick, Guiberto and

his deputies rode tirelessly around the Bavarian countryside hunting for soldiers who had absconded, got lost or otherwise been separated from the main body of the army; he even enrolled the ragged escapees who had fled the forts which Zuzana had taken the previous year. So, by the Autumn of 1125, Pierleone had scraped up a reasonable fighting force.

In any case, Guiberto became quite a celebrated personage in Bavaria. The Welf family, in the unwarlike form of Henry the Black and Lothar Billung, was not portraying itself as a particularly competent defender of the Duchy of Bavaria; their followers, therefore, needed *someone* in whom they could have faith, some martial hero who would serve as a bulwark between the rich estates of the Bavarian nobility and the ravaging hordes of predatory Huns and Czechs. They found the teenaged, half-Jewish Italian cleric to be just the person they needed. In the absence of Sylvester IV and with Archbishop Burdinus inspiring something less than total confidence, some even went so far as to suggest that the young Guiberto could be the next Imperial-sponsored Pope...

Over in the Hungarian camp in Austria, it seemed that this final campaign had been too much for the ageing King Koloman to bear; in August of that year, at the age of fifty-five, he died after a sickness settled on his lungs.

The Duchy of Franconia



Ruler: Henry V, Duke of Franconia, Holy Roman Emperor, King of Germany, Italy and Rome, Supreme Head of the Catholic Church within the Empire

Capital: Frankfurt

Religion: Roman Catholic (Imperial)

Frankfurt: The Cathedral²⁰

In the gloomy but impressive surroundings of Frankfurt's monumental cathedral, the ancient Salvatorkirche, the air was filled with motes of dust, illuminated by the brilliantly-hued sunlight filtered by panes of stained glass. All was silence but for the everpresent drone of the plainchant sung by a conveniently out-of-sight body of Benedictine monks. Before the altar, with all his attention bent to a great book that lay upon it, knelt the figure of the Emperor, Heinrich V.

At the back of the Cathedral, far enough away that he would not disturb the pensive Emperor, the stout figure of Mauritius Burdinus, Archbishop of Braga, could be discerned, half-concealed in the shadows of the church's many unadorned stone columns. He was waiting, waiting for the King of the Romans to finish his pious deliberations and issue his orders. And while he waited, he passed the time with pleasant daydreams about his diocese in distant Portugal and less agreeable reflections about the civil strife now gripping that land. He was torn from his reverie by the approach of a fresh-faced young priest.

The younger man leant close to the Archbishop's ear and whispered. "Your Grace, pardon me but I wonder about the welfare of the Emperor. He has been at the altar for many hours. Is he quite well? Should we perhaps be concerned about him?"

With a knowing smile, the Archbishop murmured his reply. "Worry not, my son. The weight of the world has come crashing down upon his shoulders. Rainerius of Cluny intends to destroy him, the power of the Imperial crown, and even the Empire itself. Our Emperor seeks to soothe his troubled mind and soul by reading from the Good Book, and speaking with the Lord. Let him be..."

At the altar, the Emperor, legs cramped by hours kneeling in this comfortless position, turned to a new leaf in his book and began reading. Scratched neatly in German, in his own hand, at the top of the page was the phrase "Heinrich's Huge Compendium of Rainerius' Supporters". With his finger, he traced his way down the names listed on the page until, coming to one in particular, he paused and read aloud. "Roger de Hauteville, Duke of Apulia and Calabria - I HATE YOU!"

²⁰ This section is by way of a humorous interlude, mainly by Lee Keefer but tarted up by the GM. Don't take it too seriously.



Continuing down the page, he mumbled quietly to himself, "Hate, hate, hate... Henry, King of England -
IOA THE ENTIRETY"

All of a sudden, a woman's voice was heard from some unseen quarter of the church. "Heinrich, is that you?"

The Emperor, shocked at the intrusion, looked around but saw no-one near him, for even his close advisors and counsellors were apt to leave him be when he was at prayer. By and by, he looked up at the statue of the Blessed Virgin.

"M-m-Mary? O Blessed Virgin and Mother of God, have you come now to bless me and show me the way?"

"No, no, no! Over *here!* Yoohoo!"

Looking to his right, the Emperor was startled to see a disembodied arm waving at him through a hole in the wall. He carefully closed his book and walked cautiously over to the arm. Next to the aperture hung a neatly-carved piece of slate on which, sketched in chalk, were the words: "The anchoress is *IN*".

A suspicious look spread across Henry's face. "I never expected to find a glory hole in church before."

"Silly Heinrich!" said the voice from beyond the hole. "It is I, Andrea, your own personal anchoress²¹ - someone to hear your prayers, someone who cares about you."

"... and several hundred other young lads I suspect," said the Emperor quietly.

"No, just you, Heinrich. And you have been a naughty boy. Come closer so I can smack you." The anchoress' arm flailed around wildly, back and forth, trying to catch the Emperor.

He, in turn, took a few steps back, careful to keep out of range of the arm, and surveyed the hole, the arm and the slate sign for a few moments. "You're a loony," he pronounced finally, flatly. The arm withdrew back into the hole.

"My father thought so," said the voice, "but my mother said I was blessed with the gift of prophecy and visions from Our Lord. And, being the tenth child in a family of... well ... ten... my father thought it best to tithe me to the church. After a few informal interviews, the Archbishop had me entombed in the walls of the cathedral, saying that I was indeed blessed with a gift, and this was the best and only place for people of my state of mind. The Archbishop also said that so great was my gift that I would one day be the Emperor's own personal anchoress."

"Well, I must just be a really lucky bastard," he answered.

"Manners, Heinrich!" shouted Andrea the anchoress. The Emperor ducked to avoid the flapping arm and the corrective blow which the anchoress tried to deliver.

"Now, Heinrich, listen," she went on, "After talking with God yesterday I was given some divine visions. I know you desire above all to punish Rainerius and remove him from the Throne of Peter, but there is something you must do first... Come closer, for none other than you must hear my revelation."

²¹ Check out this site for a brief commentary on what an anchoress is:

http://www.strangehorizons.com/2001/20010528/medieval_women.shtml

(For this to work, you have to imagine the anchoress sounding exactly like Brian's mother in The Life of Brian)

The Emperor, interest now piqued, leant closer to the aperture, an evil smile growing upon his face. The smirk was knocked clean off his face when the anchoress' right hand flew through the hole, caught Henry full in the face and knocked him flat on his bottom.

"Gotcha!" came an exultant cry from behind the partition wall.

Frankfurt: The Cathedral ~ the Hole in the Wall Parte ye Seconde

In the *Salvatorkirche*, all was holy serenity. Near the altar, before a certain small opening in the Cathedral wall, the familiar figure of the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry V of Franconia, could be discerned sitting on a stool. Before him, he held a pavise shield; and on his head, he wore a well-made *spangen* helmet²², richly gilded and embossed with gold rivets. On the slate next to the hole, one could discern the legend "The anchoress is TN."

Over at the altar, Archbishop Burdinus was kneeling in prayer; beside him, and a foot or so behind him, knelt the same young priest to whom he had spoken earlier. Once more, the younger man interrupted the elder's holy contemplations with a question.

"My Lord Archbishop, why does the Emperor wear his helmet in Church?"

Burdinus opened his eyes a little, snaked a glance over to the Emperor and then whispered to the priest: "Because the anchoress has a mean left hook."

Back at the hole, the Emperor was speaking...

"Now Rainerius is saying that the usury business was forged by nefarious elements within the Church... What if... Just, what if... the *Unam Sanctam* was forged in a similar way by some truly evil people within the Holy Offices? I mean, if that's what happened, perhaps I should not be so harsh with Rainerius."

"Total Horlicks," barked Andrea the anchoress dismissively, "Being Emperor means you never have to be less condescending just because you're wrong."

"Did Jesus say that?" queried the pious Emperor.

"Can you prove he didn't?" Andrea retored with a knowing look.

The Emperor smiled. "I like the way you think."

Frankfurt: The Cathedral - The Hole in the Wall. Parte ye Seconde

Still at the anchoress' hole in the wall, the Emperor was sitting on his stool, head bowed. The plaque beside the hole read: "The anchoress is TN".

"So, now Rainerius has gone *completely mad* - I mean, even madder than before! First, he issues the Papal Bull of *Unam Sanctam* and then immediately denies that he even wrote it! Then he issues these 'reforms' on Usury and immediately denies that he even thought it! Now he bloody excommunicates me and all the other Dukes and he calls me a *heretic*... Me! A Heretic! Why, I'm 40% more Catholic than he is! At least, 40%. Maybe more."

In serene tones, the anchoress replied: "I am reminded of a poem I heard in my younger days:
He drew a circle that shut me out -

²² You can buy your own Spangen helm here: <http://www.a2armory.com/medspan.html>
Get one and wear it to work. Success, promotions and wealth will soon follow.

*Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout
But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in."*

"Took his neck in, is more like it," Henry snorted.

"Now, now, Heinrich. 'Love thine enemy'. That's what the Lord tells us."

"Oh, come on! That maniacal priest is trying to usurp absolute power over all Christian Kings, and I'm the bad guy?"

"Perception is everything, and his followers are blind to the truth," Andrea answered simply.

"Bah! It's amazing they can see anything with their heads stuck so far up their own ..."

"Heinrich!" she exclaimed.

Chastened, Henry muttered his rejoinder, "Well, it's true."

Frankfurt: The Cathedral - The Hole in the Wall, Parte ye Thirde

Still at the hole, still seated on his stool, beside a plaque that still read "The anchoress is: *AN*", was the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry *O*.

"All these years," he complained, "the Cluniacs never bothered to verify the validity of the *Unam Sanctam*. They always found it easier to assume their revered leader, Rainerius, had never written the thing, though he practised and exercised its powers. NOW, this infernal chief Venetian merchant scoundrel, the Doge, cries out that the Cluniacs have long asked for such verification! The unmitigated gall! The audacious lies never seem to cease from these Cluniacs. The further insult is that they ask for proof only *AFTER* they have sent their legions out to destroy the Empire. Idiots, one and all!"

"The agents of the Devil never cared about the Truth, my dear Heinrich," Andrea replied in patience.
"Whatever madness suits their dark purpose, they will use."

"But what should I do, anchoress? If I send them the *Unam Sanctam* Bull as proof, they will just create a forgery and burn the original. THEN they will wave around their own forgery and say I created it, and say 'Behold, see how poor a forgery it is!' Bah!" And he made a flamboyant gesticulation with his arms, "Their intentions have been made known to me. The Empire still has its informants deep within their ranks."

"Then perhaps you should place the Bull into our Lord's hands and His Will," she answered.

"How so?" the Emperor asked, his puzzlement revealing itself in his tone.

"Well, dearie, you must take this bottle," she explained, showing a now-empty bottle of stout Franconian ale, "and place Rainerius' Papal Bull within; then seal it with this stopper. And you can take this note and place it inside the bottle as well."

The Emperor took the items and opened the little vellum note. On it, written in a neat Gothic hand were the words: "To whom it may concern. Enclosed is the information you requested."

The Emperor looked up, somewhat bewildered and asked: "Then what?"

Said the anchoress, "After you have sealed the bottle, you must go to the banks of the River Rhine, and toss that bottle into the river. Our Lord shall deliver this Bull into the appropriate hands."

“But what if...” he began...

...only to be interrupted. “It’s God’s Will, Heinrich.”

Meanwhile, away from the Cathedral, all was not well in the Empire...

An invasion by the Pope’s adherents was expected at any time and the Saxons lay restive beneath the hated Emperor’s boot, waiting for any opportunity to regain their liberty. Even in Bohemia, an erstwhile ally of Franconia, Duke Borivoi railed against Heinrich’s iniquities and called upon the Princes of the Empire to hold an election at once, to depose this false Franconian Emperor and replace him with a godly and sane candidate. This could have hurt Henry’s authority but, thankfully, none of the other German Princes were paying much attention to Borivoi’s demands.

In any case, in 1121, a bizarre set of rumours swept the Empire and Europe; the reports said that Henry had declared himself to be the Son of God, the Second Coming of the Messiah, and Caesar of the World. Not many people in Germany were willing to give much credence to these stories – especially as clergy loyal to the Antipope acted quickly and quashed these rumours from the pulpit – but, in Italy, Saxony, Bavaria and Bohemia, there were some malcontents ready to believe anything negative about the Emperor. His Majesty’s prestige, never very high in those places, dived even lower. Outside the Empire, Henry’s enemies – such as the King of England and the Duke of Aquitaine – took some perverse amusement in the stories even though they didn’t believe them to be literally true. Unfortunately for the aforementioned Duke and King, Heinrich had decided to stick his nose well and truly, and potentially decisively, into affairs in France...

At Easter of 1121, the Emperor and his Chancellor, Reinmar der Junge, summoned a few of Franconia’s high nobles, representatives of Germany’s Stem Duchies and emissaries of King Louis of France and the refugee Robert of Normandy to the Cathedral of St. Salvator in Frankfurt. The dignitaries assembled in the Great Hall of the Bishop’s residence, which backed neatly onto the body of the cathedral, where a rather plain throne was set up for the Emperor. Eventually, with no fanfare, Henry strode confidently into the hall, with Reinmar trailing behind him, seated himself on his throne and spoke firmly in Latin to the throng of grandees.

“It need hardly be said that troubled times are upon us,” he began. “Germany, in all her piety and devotion to God, stands assailed by the wicked and ungodly. Yet, in our time of struggle, we have committed a grievous error – we have ignored the sufferings of our brethren in France and have done nothing to soothe their pains or to allay their grievous sufferings.

“True, the Norman pirates and those devious Roman priests *plotted* to visit murder upon us, to steal our wealth and to lay waste our land but, by God’s favour and the strength of our arms, we have protected our frontiers and our homes from their vile intrigues; yet, others have been less fortunate. My brother²³, the King of France, has been deprived of his throne, his treasure, his lands and, as if anything could be more iniquitous, his family – and who has done this? None other than that blustering English ruffian, Henry *Beauclerc*, whose every sordid act sullies his glorious father’s name and honour. Yes, the very same *Beauclerc* who daily threatens war against the Empire and whose lies poison the very air of Christendom also betrayed his own liege and master, King Louis of France, and drove him into exile. And the very same Pope who decries me for my every deed stood by and approved this crime.

“And were that the full tally of *Beauclerc*’s crimes, perhaps we could forgive him. But it is not the full measure, nor even a tenth-part. Not content with betraying his liege, *Beauclerc* murdered his one brother to gain the throne of England and made war upon his other brother to gain the throne of Normandy! While Robert of Normandy, Robert the Jerusalem-Farer, went to the East to fight against Saracens and Moors and every manner of ungodly Mussulman, the traitor *Beauclerc* stole his lands, his titles, his wealth, made war upon him and even conspired his murder!

“But enough! No more shall we tolerate the sins and depravity of the English usurper. I call you here, nobles and ambassadors, to hear me bind the Empire to the cause of King Louis of France and Duke Robert of Normandy. We shall defend ourselves against *Beauclerc*’s violence by aiding those who have already suffered at his hands. If need be, I shall empty the treasuries and armouries of Franconia to finance and equip the most righteous cause of our age – the restoration of Robert and Louis to their God-given thrones.”

This was a surprise for all but a pleasant one. The Franconian nobles had no love for the King of England and were quite glad to see anything that would discomfit the lecherous old heathen. The only thing that worried them was the danger of getting involved in a long drawn-out war across the Rhine; after all, King Louis did not have any armies and nor, so far as anyone knew, did the very elderly Robert of Normandy. These fears were somewhat

²³ It was a commonplace for rulers to refer to other monarchs as “my brother”. It is not meant literally.

assuaged when the Emperor indicated that Lorraine was wholly committed to this course of action and, therefore, Franconia had at least one powerful ally. Indeed, in recognition of the Duke of Lorraine's position, Chancellor Reinmar presented the Lotharingian ambassador with a highly ornate charter which named Duke Simon of Lorraine as the hereditary Grand Marshal of the Alsatian Marches; a separate charter was also forthcoming which proclaimed Simon to be the new Constable of France and charged him with driving the Anglo-Norman occupiers out of France and restoring the King to his rightful place (of course, the Emperor didn't have the least authority to appoint anyone as Constable of France but he hoped – really, *really* hoped – that no-one would notice and that Louis of France would just go along with it).

Robert "Curthose", *Beauclerc's* brother and sworn enemy, showed up, accompanied by both his adult sons, at Frankfurt just before Midsummer of this year, hoping to take advantage of the Emperor's apparent zeal for nurturing the King of England's enemies. He was not disappointed. The Holy Roman Emperor personally oversaw the hiring of thousands of mercenaries to serve under Curthose's command; negotiations were even opened to secure the services of the notorious Schwarze Garde, whose reputation for savagery was, after their recent excursion to Italy, fast becoming legendary. To fund this, though, the Emperor was compelled to take some large loans from the Rhineland Jews, who proffered all the necessary capital with alacrity (for they liked Heinrich rather more than the other Catholic monarchs).

With the money in their hands, the Garde declared their commitment to Curthose, the rightful Duke of Normandy, and marched off to war, alongside the rest of his mercenaries, swearing that they would restore him to his rightful throne or die in the attempt! They departed for the west bank of the Rhine and adventures galore. (*See The War of the Dispossessed*). The Duke's two sons, William Clito and Henry of Normandy, both remained behind in Frankfurt as guests of the Emperor.

Heinrich, having arranged all these fun and games for his hated enemy, could now turn to other areas that called for his attention. First of all, His Majesty wanted to formulate some means to bind the ruling families of the Empire more closely together. To that end, he commissioned a small memorial monument within the cathedral of Frankfurt – an oversized granite memorial slab on which would be incised the names, arms and dates of birth and death for all the major Princes of the Empire (which, really, just meant the rulers of the four surviving Stem Duchies – Franconia, Bavaria, Lotharingia and Swabia; although, in a special act of magnanimity, Heinrich decreed that the Counts of Flanders could also be represented on the memorial stone). Some Imperialist clergymen noted that the Eastern Church was especially fond of memorials, much more so than the Catholic Church, and wondered whether this was yet another effort by Heinrich to forge alliances with the Emperor in Constantinople. Anyway, although the work was commissioned in 1121, it was obviously going to some time (and a lot of money and manpower) to bring this particular project to a satisfactory finish.

Apart from the memorial, some cash was found to finance a body of (pro-Imperial) learned monks to found a school at Frankfurt. Though their institution was still considerably smaller than Pope Sylvester's college at Gelnhausen, the Frankfurt friars did some rather good work at producing Christian poetry and teaching Latin literature to youngsters.

In foreign matters, the Emperor was convinced of the need to cement his warming relations with Flanders and, to that end, a marriage was quickly negotiated to tie Baldwin of Flanders to Heinrich's Salian dynasty – and the efficacy of this plan was quickly demonstrated when the Flemish fleet repelled an English force that tried to sail up the Rhine, doubtless to molest Franconia. So, in the Autumn of 1121, Chancellor Reinmar der Junge wandered off to deliver the Emperor's eldest daughter, the eleven year old Gertrude, to become the bride of Count Baldwin of Flanders. The Count, being a man of the utmost rectitude, agreed to become engaged to the girl but held off on marrying her until 1125.

Down in disgruntled Saxony, the year 1123 saw another large revolt break out. The exact genesis of the rebellion remained a mystery but it was telling, to many observers, that the rebels had abandoned any hope of restoring the old Welf Duchy of Saxony (largely due to the pact that their ancient rulers, the Welfs, had made with the hated Franconians). So, rather than revolting on *behalf* of the Duke (or anyone else), they merely revolted *against* the Emperor, their oppressor for two long decades. The Saxons took some satisfaction from knowing that the Pope (the *real* Pope, mind, not that other ponce) was on their side and that Heinrich the Unjust had finally been excommunicated. They retained, too, some hope that the pious Duke of Bohemia, and maybe even the Margrave of Meissen, might assist them in opposing the godless autocracy of that most Unholy Emperor.

Oddly enough, it was not only the nobles who were keen for revolt but also the long-suffering peasants. These unfortunates had endured great miseries during the last war against Franconia, some two decades ago, when nearly all their menfolk had been conscripted to fight in old Magnus Welf's war with the Emperor and few had come home again. Indeed, the last conflict, with all its terrible economic consequences, had been a blow from which the region was only now recovering – and the lower classes had suffered particularly disproportionately. The real catalyst in mobilising the peasantry proved to be the Pope's excommunication of the Emperor. While the much of the aristocracy's enthusiasm for revolt was based upon the loss of their land, wealth and privileges to the Franconian invader, the devout peasants saw things in stark and simple terms – Heinrich was a sinful man whose overthrow had been ordained by God's agent on Earth.

Over the Winter of 1122-23, the seeds of rebellion took root in Saxony. During February of that year, almost four thousand rebels (of whom a quarter were mounted knights) rose in arms, overwhelmed the Imperial garrison of a thousand men-at-arms and proclaimed their liberty. Requests were quickly sent to Margrave Godebold of Meissen requesting that he should become Regent of Saxony until an appropriate claimant to the throne could be found; the Margrave, being wise and subtle, refused to accept any message from the rebels, for he was sure that the revolt would fail and did not want to incur the Emperor's wrath.

It turned out that Godebold was farsighted. In June of 1123, the Imperial army, with the Emperor himself at its head, rolled into Saxony. It numbered about twenty thousand men of all types, including some eight thousand cavaliers. The campaign that followed was predictable. The Emperor, a brilliant commander who knew the Saxon topography well, smashed the tiny rebel army mercilessly and pursued the ragged remnants for the rest of the year, not resting until he had seen all those who had taken up arms against him dance at the end of a gallows rope. None of the rebel leaders were courageous enough to ask for Imperial clemency and, instead, those who survived the war chose exile. The peasants were unable to flee their land and could only hope that either the Emperor would be lenient with them (Ha! Fat chance!) or that, somehow, the Lord would find some way of preserving his faithful adherents. It's no fun being a peasant...

In any case, after reinstalling a garrison, Heinrich departed for home again. There, in the following year, he heard of the Hungarian incursion into Bavaria. His response: "Hmmm. I don't much care for the Welfs – buggers deserve everything they get – but I can't have bar-bars invading the Empire. I shall have to do something about this..." As it happens, the only thing His Majesty did at that point was to stick the Unam Sanctam decree in a bottle, wander down to the banks of the Rhine and toss it in. He was heard to remark, "I'm sure it can make its own way to Venice."

The Apostolic Catholic Papacy

Ruler: Sylvester IV, the Captive Pope, Vicar of Christ, Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church, Servant of the Servants of God (*aka Maginulf, the German Antipope*)

Capital: Frankfurt

Religion: Roman Catholic (Imperial)

Burdinus held his head in his hands. He could not believe the pass to which things had come, nor the weight that was being placed on his shoulders – he, with the absence of Pope Sylvester, was now the voice of the Antipapacy, defender of the Imperial cause and effective leader of the schism. This was *not* why he had become a priest. Well, there was nothing to do but dream of distant Braga and trust in the Emperor's plans and abilities. In the meantime, the Archbishop of Braga threw off most of his official duties and went hunting for witches and goblins in the Black Forest. He had become convinced that many of Christendom's problems were being caused by supernatural forces and made the hunt for these malefactors his sole duty in life, even though he was compelled to neglect the day-to-day business of preserving and maintaining the Antipapacy.

Burdinus and his clerics stomped from village to village, hunting out crones, witches and other weird women and practitioners of strange and occult rites. The local people, both noble and peasant, were severely annoyed at this kind of harassment and raised many objections with Imperial officials; still, Burdinus was not put off – his men kicked down the doors of many peasant huts and even the manor houses of Franconian knights and squires and seized daughters, wives, sister and mothers on the pretext that they practised the Darkest Arts. Brothels were also particularly targeted and many dozens of "Brides of Satan" (i.e., prostitutes) were arrested and their bordellos burnt down; the male customers were, for the most part, able to escape censure by pleading that they had been led astray by sinful women. Even when the Anglo-Normans took over his diocese in Portugal and installed Werinbert of Caen as his replacement, Burdinus barely looked up from his witch-hunting. In the end, when he began convening trials for the suspected "witches", the Imperial Chancellor was compelled to intervene and order the Archbishop to cease his ridiculous activities and release all those he had arrested. Burdinus, for his part, was incensed that the Empire could find wisdom in setting Catholics to spill the blood of other Catholics but would not allow him to hunt out the "enemy within". During the Summer of 1125, he made a written request to the Emperor that all German women should be required to veil themselves and cover their hair, as women in Spain did, for, he argued, it was grossly offensive to the Lord and all good Christian men to see women with their faces and flowing locks on display. The Emperor's reply was not recorded but it was not believed to be positive.

A few other things happened to the Antipapal Church but none were as interesting. Jozef of Bohemia, a son of Duke Borivoi and a priest of the Antipapacy, was arrested in Bohemia, along with many dozens of German clerks who had gone to Prague to help the Przemyslids govern their little realm. In 1122, old Rainerius died and was replaced with John of Gaeta, a decrepit fool even older than his predecessor; why, it was doubtful if he could even chew his own food, let alone lead the Church. Nevertheless, he wasn't much worse than Sylvester IV who, since his capture in Verona, was nowhere to be found. Some officers of the Church argued that Sylvester should be declared dead and a new Pope appointed; the natural successor was Burdinus but, in view of his increasingly tenuous grip on reality (and preoccupation with punishing naughty and sinful ladies), he was far from an ideal choice.

The emergence of Guiberto Pierleone, though, presented an interesting opportunity. His courage and skill in thwarting the Bohemian invasion of Bavaria had made him famous throughout the Empire and many reckoned that, with his youth, strength and bravery, he could be an ideal candidate not only to lead the Antipapacy but to extend its influence throughout all of Christendom and to present a genuine alternative to those decadent Roman princes who were destroying Catholicism with their sordid and corrupt way of life.

The Duchy of Swabia



Ruler: Frederick II Hohenstaufen, Duke of Swabia

Capital: Wurzburg

Religion: Roman Catholic (Imperial)

Great angst descended upon poor Duke Frederick in his castle by the banks of the Rhine. Grief welled up in his breast. He grieved for his dead wife and daughter; he grieved for his friend, Pope Sylvester, now a captive of the deluded followers of the mad Rainerius; and, as a father to his people, he grieved for the suffering of his subjects, who were now faced with attack from rapacious foreign hordes. Yet grief, he realised, was a luxury reserved for lesser men. Frederick was the Duke of Swabia, nephew of the Emperor, a cornerstone of the Empire itself. He was needed, even when anguish and heartache were overwhelming, and he had no intention of letting his people or his Emperor down.

At His Grace's command, more than a dozen new redoubts were raised; some were mere hillforts, defended by a palisade and ditch, while others were more substantial and included stone-built towers and moats. They appeared all over Swabia: at key Alpine passes from Tyrol and Switzerland; in the rich farmland near the frontiers of Bavaria and Nordgau; along the Imperial Highway leading to Frankfurt; but, most of all, they dotted the eastern banks of the Rhine. If an attack was to come, it was here that the Swabian faithful would meet it.

Rumours of foreign invasion had swept every part of the Empire for years now and Swabia was no exception. According to the most popular story, the Burgundians were going to sweep into Swabia, on behalf of Pope Paschal, and depose the Hohenstaufen line. This was most vexing for the Duke, as he had long felt that his antecedents had been generous to a fault in their dealings with Burgundy. It wounded Frederick's honour and, above all, his sense of justice to hear that, in violation of all the accepted rules of conduct, the Burgundians were willing to throw aside the goodwill and friendship of the Hohenstaufens and cross the Rhine in arms... In preparation for the coming storm, the Swabian army massed along the Rhine and waited. They waited quite a long time but, in the end, nothing happened. It transpired that the rumours of Burgundian hostility were all false. In fact, all the Burgundians wanted to do was to stay home and tend their own patch. They had minimal interest in the silly disputes between Popes and Emperors.

But, be that as it may, the Swabian people were still frightened by the prospect of war, especially after hearing of Hungarian intervention in Bavaria and the renewed war between the Welfs and Przemyslids. Duke Frederick was not slow to realise that, in an air of such insecurity, his enemies might capitalise on the fears of the people and stir up domestic dissent. To counter this, and reassure everyone that Swabia stood side-by-side with the Emperor, the Duke personally oversaw a grand celebration and religious festival at Bamberg in 1124 to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of St Henry II, now the Duchy's official patron saint and protector.

While participating in these celebrations, Frederick made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that he was tiring of the hollow rhetoric of Baldwin of Jerusalem. On the one hand, said Frederick, the old windbag was perpetually begging for more Crusaders to shore up Outremer's borders (all the while consorting with the Fatimid Infidels!); on the other, he banned those loyal to the Emperor from even setting foot in the Holy Land. It was all too much, the Duke explained to his lords and clerics; Swabians and, in fact, all Germans should take care of matters at home, instead of listening to some lunatic on the other side of the Middle Sea. The *real* crusade was the one to defend their homes and families against the False Pope Rainerius and his predatory supporters, though, with so little news of the fate of Pope Sylvester, Frederick was heard to remark that a crusade should be called to secure the Pope's freedom – or to avenge his death! Curiously, in the aftermath of the festival of 1124, the Duke appeared

more confident than was his wont and was even heard to remark, on more than one occasion, that anyone who invaded Swabia would surely be punished by God and Saints Henry and Maurice... No-one knew exactly what he meant by this.



Rahere, the jester

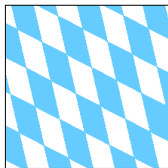
In a rather strange set of events, a completely unexpected visitor showed up in Wurzburg. The visitor was none other than the King of England's personal jester, Rahere. The clown had grown disconsolate when two of King Henry's sons had been stillborn and had left England in 1120 to go on a pilgrimage to Rome and other sacred sites in the troubled land of Italy. While in Rome, where the air was seldom wholesome, he had succumbed to malaria, an illness from which it took Rahere almost a year to recover. During this long period of illness and convalescence, the jester had much time to contemplate both his present situation and his sinful past life (for Rahere was a man who had indulged in many

vices). Such a serious sickness, coming so close to the two stillbirths, brought him an increasing awareness of mortality and a keener desire to seek God's forgiveness for his aberrant life. But the new religiosity made it hard for Rahere to countenance a return to England and service in the court of an impious and adulterous King whose disdain for the Laws of God were legendary and whose myriad bastard children were an eternal embarrassment.²⁴ By and by, as his health returned, Rahere became quite taken by tales he heard about Swabia – the apparent piety of the Hohenstaufen family, and of Duke Frederick in particular, was attractive to him after so long amidst the sensual pleasures of Beauclerc's fleshy court; the pious commitment of the people and their wholesome adherence to the teachings of the Saints moved him deeply.

Upon finally recovering and leaving the care of his doctor, Rahere took it into his head to go and see Swabia for himself. In the Summer of 1122, he arrived at Bamberg where he observed the cult of St Henry II with considerable approval. In particular, the Norman jester was deeply impressed by the many selfless good works to which St Henry's devotees were committed. So, he departed Bamberg for the Ducal court at Wurzburg feeling refreshed by the faith and conviction of the Swabians – yet, this was a feeling that took some battering when, just outside the Swabian capital, he came across a small forest lake where crowds of men and women were *bathing!* Together!! With no clothes on!!! To his utter dismay, the local clergy did not find anything remotely offensive about this and took no steps to upbraid the bathers. Eventually, it was explained to the affronted Rahere that mixed bathing was a very common – and very old – practice in this part of Germany. The jester was not very mollified by this but, eventually, came to understand that the Germans did not consider mixed bathing to be incompatible with Christian morality or modesty. He was troubled by this but decided that the bathing and nudity was probably less sinful than what old Henry was getting up to.

In any case, arriving in Wurzburg, Rahere was – bathing aside – rather impressed with the austerity and piety of the Ducal court; but, more than anything, the charity of the Swabian aristocracy astonished him, especially when contrasted with the selfish disposition of most other European aristocrats. He soon threw himself into altruistic works, using his limited fortune to pay doctors to care for the sick poor and founding a bakery that prepared free bread for distribution to the very poor and to lepers.

The Duchy of Bavaria



Ruler: Henry IX *the Black*, Duke of Bavaria

Capital: none

Religion: Roman Catholic (Imperial – more and more each day)

The year 1121 was a time of much disquiet in Bavaria. Towards the Autumn of that year, a Bull of Excommunication arrived at the Welf Court. As punishment for the Duke's support of the Emperor, his slander in claiming that the *Unam Sanctam* was written by the Pope and his treacherous foray into Verona, Henry the Black and his successors, and all their supporters, were put outside the protection of the Catholic Community, placed beyond all the Laws of God and Man. Almost immediately thereafter, the Duchy of Bohemia announced that it was severing its peace treaty with Bavaria.

In Bavaria itself, some localised disturbances followed the excommunication. Most Bavarians were, by nature and inclination, distrustful of the Emperor and supportive of the Roman Pontiff; they were scared by the idea that their ruler was now an outlaw in the eyes of God and the Church – and angry at Henry for provoking the Papacy so egregiously and for supporting the false priest Maginulf. Local clergy, who were mostly loyal to Rome, did their best to fan the flames of popular discontent by preaching fire and brimstone sermons about the iniquities and sinfulness of the wretched Duke...

But, in spite of this, most of the nobles were turned away from rebellion by fear of what would happen if they failed; after all, the Duke was being backed by the Emperor in his current course of action and no-one, not even those who supported the Pope, wanted to give the Franconians an excuse to invade the country. Besides, there were many who felt that the invasion of Verona was wholly justified, no matter what the Holy Father said, and they were reluctant to do anything (such as rebelling) which might aid the treacherous Venetians. And, with the nobles refusing to take action, the peasants remained fairly quiet too, for they had no-one to lead them, even if they wanted to rebel. So, although things seemed to stand on a knife's edge for a while, the excommunication had limited effect. Other than Leopold of Austria's defection to the Bohemians, Bavaria suffered no serious consequences from the excommunication.

In family news, the future of the Welf dynasty seemed to get onto a firmer footing with the birth of sons, in 1122 and 1123, to Lothar Billung. Henry the Black managed to father a daughter in 1124.

²⁴ Henry I of England had at least six illegitimate children by 1100.

The Duchy of Upper Lorraine (Lotharingia)



Ruler: Simon I *the Bold*, Count of Chatenois, Duke of Upper Lorraine, Constable of France, Grand Marshal of the Alsatian Marches

Capital: Cologne

Religion: Roman Catholic (Imperial)

In such tricky times as these, bold men may spot opportunities – and few men were as bold as Simon of Lorraine. He had successfully grabbed Nivernais and Champagne from the French; he had wrongfooted Pope Paschal; he had even coaxed the notoriously stubborn Emperor to return Hesse to Lotharingian rule. What next? An exchange of letters with Emperor Heinrich showed the way...

Early in 1121, an Imperial Herald delivered an elaborately decorated manuscript into the Duke's hands. This document was nothing less than a patent of arms pronouncing that, henceforth, Simon of Lorraine was to be Grand Marshal of the Alsatian Marches and Constable of France. His Imperial Majesty also charged the Duke with restoring King Louis VI to his rightful throne, chastising the evil-doers who had usurped his throne and generally restoring stability and peace to the anguished and tormented realm of France. No time was wasted in making this happen!

The Duke generously, and uncharacteristically, proclaimed that he was returning Champagne and Nivernais to their rightful rulers (respectively, Count Hugh and King Louis). He further proclaimed that Louis and his followers would have been allowed to use the lands of Lorraine as a base from which to launch their operations against the thieves, rascals and villains who had stolen their patrimony. The news was received gratefully – so gratefully that King Louis did not even make an issue of Simon's use of the title "Constable of France", which had been illegitimately given by the Emperor – and, shortly thereafter, Louis arrived in Nivernais, having snuck across the frontier from Orléanais, and was soon followed by the combative Count Hugh of Champagne who was itching for a chance to get even. Louis was accompanied by his father-in-law, the Count of Ponthieu (also called Hugh, annoyingly), who had lost his own fief to an English invasion and was quite eager to get it back.

The French grandees, and all their adherents and advisors, spent the next year talking, arguing and debating amongst themselves about the best way to kick the Normans out of Ile de France. Louis was not keen to face the foe in open combat, for they were a fierce enemy and a holy terror on the battlefield, and he doubted his chances of victory. However, a letter soon came to King Louis explaining to him that the exiled Robert "Curthose" – Robert the Jerusalem-Farer – was going to stage his own invasion of the Norman-held lands in Northern France to overthrow his usurper brother. This news was enough to sway Louis and persuade him to put his faith in the martial solution. Seeing all this afoot, Simon, who had stayed carefully on the sidelines during the planning stage, rubbed his hands with glee.

In 1122, yet another messenger arrived in Lorraine, this time from the Pope in Rome. He bore a Bull of Excommunication which he delivered to Simon in his throne room, before Archbishop of Cologne and all the assembled nobles of Lorraine. Simon, without rising from the Ducal Throne, graciously received the document and read it, with great care.

"Rainerius of Cluny, who falsely claims to be Bishop of Rome, would have me removed from the Communion of the Church," he announced to the notables. "He proclaims me an enemy of God and of the Church and Catholic orthodoxy. Words. The False Pope would fight me with words."

He handed the Bull back to the Papal messenger, who took it somewhat uncertainly, and declared: "Children are terrified by words; valiant men fear not even the sword's point."

The nobles were most impressed with this – and even the messenger, who was a good Catholic and loathed the sinfulness of the Imperialist schismatics, thought that it was a very striking and impressive thing to say and that Simon was eminently worthy of his soubriquet "the Bold". In the immediate aftermath of the excommunication, support for the Antipope actually increased significantly in Upper Lorraine; the Roman Pope had never really had much sway here but, now, even the few people who had adhered to old Paschal began to abandon the cause.

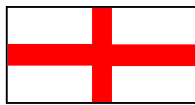
In political matters, Simon oversaw the negotiation of a complex and wide-ranging treaties on cross-border cooperation with the neighbouring Dukes of Swabia and Franconia and with the Count of Flanders, too. Merchants were especially pleased, as the treaty granted Lotharingian merchants the same rights in these states as native-born merchants (and vice versa, of course), but the slew of treaties had important implications for the whole of the Empire. Up 'til now, few of the German Dukes truly trusted Simon – they suspected him of harbouring treacherous plans and of plotting with the Romans against the Emperor and Antipope – but, under these treaties, Simon had finally pinned his country's colours to the Imperial mast.

Perhaps reflecting the perilous path that Lorraine trod, feared by many and distrusted by all, a great burst of castle-building was engaged upon. In Alsace, Lorraine and Hesse, scores of new hill forts and castles were built and garrisoned. Further, in Hesse, the limitless wealth of which drew much envy, a great new fortress was

constructed on the banks of the Rhine opposite Cologne. Its walls were higher and stronger than any comparable castle, bigger, even, than the Flemish-built castles at either end of Nijmegen bridge. If it were strongly held by a determined garrison, there was no doubt that an invader would be very hard-pressed to breach its defences and, without control of the river, no attacker could even dream of starving the place into submission.

So, with his lands more secure and his political currency higher in value than at any time in the recent past, the Duke also managed to strengthen the hand of his own dynasty when, in 1123, he fathered a third son upon his young wife Adelaide. His other male offsprings, Godfrey and Matthias, were both now old enough to participate in the daily life of the Duchy and assisted their father regularly in governing and organising the state, and otherwise executing the Duke's policies.

The Margravate of Tuscany



Ruler: Robert I *the Fat*, Count of Savoy and Canossa, Margrave of Tuscany, Guardian and Viceroy of the Kingdom of Italy, Defender of the Patrimony of St Peter
Capital: Milan
Religion: Roman Catholic

Chaos and war were engulfing Europe. Here, in Italy, German mercenaries could swoop down out of the hills to rape and loot whole regions and no-one would take up arms to oppose them. The soldiers of the Margravate used their weapons to fight each other, rather than to repulse invaders. Noble families and great cities chose this time to resurrect old feuds with neighbouring clans and communities. On everyone's lips, the battlecries of Pope or Antipope could be found... Truly, trying times had descended upon the Italian people.

Robert the Fat saw that only firm and decisive actions on his part could protect the state from further erosion and ensure the continued existence of his realm – and of the cause of Papal supremacy! At his command, the recruiting sergeants went forth to gather almost ten thousand new men to serve under Robert's Colours. Every available able-bodied man in his domain was enrolled to bear arms against the enemies of the Margrave and the Holy See but they were not enough to meet Robert's requirements so, before long, there was recourse to forcible conscription. Young boys, teenaged and beardless, were dragged away from their homes and the embraces of their mothers to fight. Misery was the lot for those conscripted in this way and for their families. Women watched tearfully as the Margrave's junkers dragged away husbands and son alike, perhaps never to return to their homes and families again.

Yet, amidst all this unhappiness, the ravaged region of Lombardy was slowly recovering from the ravages of the Shwarze Garde. Trade between Lombardy's many towns and cities began again; fields which had been burnt, trodden down or otherwise devastated were sown and cultivated once more; the Margrave's tax collectors and bailiffs could go about their duties, collecting revenues for their master. Gradually, Lombardy was returning to its former strength...

But the land remained split between the partisans of the two Popes. The supporters of Paschal agitated against the adherents of Sylvester and vice versa. All of Lombardy was rent with discord and disunity; Milan itself remained firmly and absolutely committed to Papal supremacy but, beyond the walls, the Emperor was not without his supporters. The rural knights and country barons were largely faithful to Imperialism and the recent attack by van Aue's German mercenary army had done little to shift them from this stance; indeed, the Lombard *contadini* seemed to believe that the inability of the Margravate to defend itself (and their estates!) against external dangers was hard proof that supporters of the Church were incompetent and needed to be swept out of Italian politics so that the strong hand of the Emperor might, once more, be placed upon the tiller of the ship of state.

As Spring of 1121 opened, though, a strange rumour surfaced and began to spread throughout Northern Italy. No-one knew whence the story originated but the gist of it was that the Emperor had proclaimed himself Caesar of the West, Son of God and the Earthly Incarnation of Our Lord and Saviour... It was a surprising turn of events, to say the least, and was swiftly seized upon by priests who, from the pulpits of their churches in Lombardy and Tuscany, called upon the Christian masses to reject the Satanic heresy of this evil Emperor who not only challenged the supremacy of the Holy Father but now actually went so far as to proclaim himself *God!!* The rumour found its way across the whole of Italy and Germany but, while the Germans laughed at the lunacy of the charge, many Italians found it entirely believable. The year 1121 saw a veritable collapse in Imperial support in the Margravate. A very small number of nobles and communes, with their own narrow and selfish agenda, continued to support the Imperial cause but almost all the rest – including even those who despised the idea of Papal supremacy – were forced to reject Henry. Those who believed very earnestly in the cause of Imperial supremacy put away their swords and opted to wait for a new, better, champion to emerge; most Northern Italians started calling Henry by the nickname "*Caligula*" – how better to pass comment on his delusions and crazed megalomania? The French scholar Abelard, still resident in Milan, wrote a series of letters to friends and fellow scholars in which he argued, jokingly, that Henry ought rather to be called "*Nero*", for, besides being as demented as that historical figure, Henry's heart was truly black.²⁵

²⁵ **PUN ALERT! PUN ALERT!** "Nero" is Italian for black.

While all this excitement was taking place, Robert's sons, Amadeus and Renaud of Savoy, were extremely busy in Lombardy. They visited all the major cities in the region and the great families. The silver-tongued and brilliantly intelligent Renaud presented to the Lombard nobles a thousand reasons why they should embrace Robert and Paschal. The memory of the glorious Mathilda of Canossa was evoked and Robert, her chosen heir, was presented as the inheritor of her mantle as champion of ecclesiastical right and Christian piety. In an unashamed attempt to cement the link between the Houses of Savoy and Canossa, Renaud even went so far as to dig up a very, very distant female cousin of the late Margravine (a girl by the name of Beatrice) and arrange a marriage between her and Amadeus. These activities bore fruit quickly and, by the end of 1121, the Lombard nobles had, once more, agreed to allow their private armies to fight beneath the banner of the Margravate on behalf of Mother Church.

And while such political manoeuvring was going on in Lombardy, Bishop Gilbert of Lucca had been active in Latium. Although not terribly competent as a diplomat, Gilbert was able to broker a marriage between Agnes of Savoy (Robert's daughter) and Vittorio Frangipani, a senior member of a powerful local clan of staunch Papal supporters. The marriage brought the region around Rome completely under the sway of the House of Savoy but, tragically, the union between Agnes and Vittorio was not destined to be happy for, in the Summer of 1122, she died giving birth to the couple's first child (a boy who died a mere hour or two after his mother).

Not long after Agnes' demise, another death took place in Latium and, this time, it was even more momentous and significant. In September of 1122, His Holiness Pope Paschal II, being the 161st man to have held the Holy Office, died. Strife followed. In the days leading up to the Pontiff's death, the powerful Frangipani family had been extending its already wide network of supporters in the College of Cardinals and was obviously situating itself to control the election of the next Pope. At the same time, their hated rivals, the Pierleone clan (who had been forced out of Rome a few years earlier and were now in exile in Pisa), were trying to feel out elements of the Roman Senate and citizenry, trying to convince them to invite a scion of the House of Pierleone to occupy St Peter's Throne.

With Paschal's final demise, it became obvious that the Frangipani and their supporters constituted an overwhelming majority of the College and that they would, in fact, choose the next Pope; hence, there was every likelihood that the next Pontiff would be as hostile to the Emperor as Paschal had been and that no Pierleone would become Pope at any time in the near future. Those elements within Rome who remained sympathetic to the Pierleone family or to the cause of Imperial supremacy took to the streets and squares and incited the people to riot. Of course, Frangipani partisans responded in kind and, before Paschal's body had even been interred, the streets were filled with rioters, looters and hoodlums. Blood was spilt, heads were cracked and, in no time at all, this political dispute between the two great families of Pierleone and Frangipani turned into something even greater – the poor and impoverished *populo* turned against the nobles of the city, the Senators and Princes of the Church (and, all the while, diehard partisans of the families were still fighting it out with each other!).

The Cardinals fled the city for a monastery and, there, elected the decrepit Cardinal John of Gaeta as the new Pope, with the Pontifical title Gelasius II. (*For more details of the election, see The Holy See entry*) But political control over the city was lost. Most of the Frangipani fled but the Pierleones, who were in Pisa, could not exploit this and, in this vacuum, a bunch of populists were able to proclaim a Roman Commune. Fortunately, their harebrained scheme was not destined to last. Renaud of Savoy came bounding down from Milan with an army that was well in excess of twenty thousand men! The would-be Communards rolled over at the mere sight of this force and Papal authority was quickly restored. A few dozen of the worst rebel ringleaders were sent to the gallows, along with several Pierleone sympathisers. More were sent off in chains to the distant fortress of L'Aquila, perched on the summit of a craggy peak, to face the tender mercies of Robert the Fat's torturers.

Not much else happened in the Margravate...

The County of Flanders



Ruler: Baldwin VIII, Count of Flanders

Capital: Ghent

Religion: Roman Catholic (Imperial)

Other than the occasional raid by pesky Norse pirates, things had been pretty quiet in the Low Countries for the past couple of decades. The Flemish had been able to stay aloof from the wars in France and Germany; even in the spreading conflict between Pope and Emperor, the Count of Flanders had offered sympathy to both sides and had stayed broadly neutral (albeit with a certain popular inclination towards the Emperor). But all that was about to change...

His Grace, the Count, had heard many of the bellicose pronouncements sweeping across Europe and had slowly come to realise that the spectre of an unavoidable war was upon him. To defend the country against incursions by foreign armies, he commanded that two thousand new knights be raised to serve him, mounted on excellent

warhorses and armed in the heaviest fashion; these horsemen were, in turn, augmented by a slightly larger number of doughty peasant spearmen. Of course, Baldwin was too wise to put all his faith in land-based forces to protect his domain; if the recent Norse raids had taught the Flemish anything, it was that their sea frontier was extremely vulnerable to the depredations of foreign navies. Therefore, ten new cogs were commissioned to augment the existing, and quite formidable, Flemish fleet. Command of all His Grace's naval forces were given to Soren of Friesland, who was also appointed to the newly-created office of Lord Admiral of the Netherlands with responsibility for protecting all of the Low Countries from seaborne attack. Despite the militaristic nature of this new office, Soren was a man known less for his martial ability than for his personal loyalty to the Count.

His Grace's attention was also drawn to the as-yet-unfinished Bridge of Nijmegen which had been conceived by his predecessor, the late Robert II. The completion of a bridge to link Holland and Brabant would, Baldwin thought, be a great boon in protecting the country, for it would allow very quick passage of the armies from one bank of the Rhine to the other, so the Count decreed that fresh labour would soon be poured into the project. To ensure that the utility of the bridge should not be exploited by interlopers, two new castles were planned, facing each other on either bank of the Rhine. In a particularly ingenious act, a number of very, very large iron chains were made which would run between the castles; in normal times, these chains would simply lie in the river getting rusty, far beneath the surface; but, when a hostile fleet approached, the chains could be *raised* to serve as a boom, a barrier to enemy shipping! Thus, the whole of the Rhineland south of Nijmegen could be cordoned off from the Norse pirates and Norman corsairs who roamed the North Sea.

At first, some of the Flemish nobles muttered against such extravagant expenditure and overblown plans. They denied that such things were needed and ridiculed the idea that anyone should want to attack Flanders. Yet, the Count's plans were vindicated – and his critics forced to eat their words – a lot sooner than anyone could have predicted...

From the start of May 1121, merchant ships and fishing boats had reported seeing a squadron of swift-moving Norman longboats snooping around at the mouth of the Rhine. The Flemish admiral, Soren, took his fleet out, on more than one occasion, to teach these foreign devils a lesson they wouldn't soon forget; but the Normans, who numbered about fifteen ships, simply fled at his approach and their ships proved to be much quicker and more nimble than the Flemish vessels.

The following month, June of 1121, yet more Norman ships appeared and, unlike the others, these ones showed no interest in merely loitering around the mouth of the Rhine. Some forty Norman cogs, supported by about twenty-five of the smaller longships, attempted to sail into the Rhine; Admiral Soren, needless to say, rushed to intercept them, knowing that they could only have hostile intent against Flanders. The Flemish fleet, numbering about thirty-five cogs, fifteen longships and with ten empty cargo ships, was able to block the passage of the Norman pirates. The two armadas hovered into view of each other just off the little fishing town of Baarland on the coast of Zeeland early in the afternoon of 15th June and immediately joined battle²⁶.

The Normans turned out to be led by their formidable war-captain Evas de Belesme, known to be a favourite of Henry of England due uncommon personal courage, with the somewhat less dashing William Fitz Robert de Mortain as his second-in-command. The sailors under their command, for their part, were not lacking the customary Norman zeal for battle, bloodshed and plunder. The two fleets crashed into each other, one attempting to push into the Rhine while the other was determined to keep the trespassers out. The Anglo-Norman ships, with their advantage in numbers and weight, were able to crush a number of the smaller Flemish boats, yet the Normans didn't have it all their own way – the direction of the wind and narrowness of the river mouth hampered them, and the Flemings, whose ships were generally more manoeuvrable than those of the English, were poised to exploit this.

Swarms of arrows, some flaming, sailed across the sky; Dutch and Anglo-Norman sailors leapt onto the decks of one another's ships; bodies, blood and burning flotsam speckled the surface of the sea. One ship after another, Norman or Flemish, went up in flames and, in such a confined area, the conflagration spread easily to other vessels. One the deck of his own ship, William de Mortain fell, dead before he hit the ground, when a rascally Fleming crushed his skull with an axe, cleaving the Norman grandee's brain in two and staining the deck with his noble blood. Elsewhere, the story was much the same. The scale of slaughter in this battle surpassed anything seen before, nor was there any easy way out, for even if a captain wished to flee from the blood-spattered inferno, it was hard, and often impossible, to direct a ship through all the burning debris and the continuing frenzied attacks of the enemy. Even cowards, who took fright at the first scent of battle, could not find a way to circumvent danger and escape with their lives.

By the time evening fell, both fleets had been largely destroyed. Both Belesme the Norman and Soren the Fleming had seen their flagships burn and sink; indeed, both admirals had escaped drowning only when the crews of smaller ships had dragged them out of the water. The Normans retained perhaps fifteen of their

²⁶ A very fine, though much later, map of the region can be found here:

http://www.totte.nl/fr/fotos_kaart_zeeland.html

Fans of the Napoleonic Wars will note that the scene of this battle is just along the river from Walcheren Island.

longships, but the crews were in no mood to fight and demanded that Evas should take them back home. The Flemish had maybe five ships, all of the lightest kind, and the sailors, like their Norman counterparts, were in no mood to continue the fight. The whole of the river south of Baarland was choked by the detritus of battle, rendered impassable for some time to come by the burning and half-wrecked hulks now serving as obstacles to all shipping. Even so, there was a sight far more terrible than the ruined fleets; floating over the surface of the water, and some of them already being washed up on shore, were the bodies and body parts of the dead – thousands of them. Some men had survived the sinking or burning of their ships by swimming to shore but they had been few in number; most of the swimmers had been slain in the water, shot by arrows or pierced by spears; others had simply drowned as they tried to navigate their way around the dozens and dozens of ships that were engaged²⁷.

Since it was Summer, and the evenings were very light, the villagers who lived on either side of the river channel had already descended to the shore and were fishing bodies out. They were motivated, apparently, by a peculiar mixture of avarice and piety, for though they would gladly loot bodies of money, armour and valuables, they also considered it their Christian duty to rescue the corpses and bury them with proper religious rites. Theft could be forgiven, but to leave a Christian body to float in the sea, unburied and unrecognised, would be truly unforgivable. During the next week, the fishermen ventured out on this same duty, bringing the dead ashore and filching anything of value. The remnants of the opposing fleets, meanwhile, wandered off, the Normans to Honfleur and the Flemings to Antwerp. When Count Baldwin heard of the foreign incursion and the horrific battle, he was unsure how to react: to feel vindicated in recognising, and reacting to, the foreign threat or to feel dismay at the cost of his “victory”.

On the diplomatic side of things, Henry of Arnhem was sent down to Hesse where he negotiated a non-aggression treaty and dynastic marriage with Franconia. After some fairly feverous debate, the Franconian and Flemish diplomats agreed that the forty-two year old Baldwin VIII should marry the eleven year old Gertrude of Franconia, eldest daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor Heinrich V. As it happened, Count Baldwin, while very happy to cement closer relations with the Holy Roman Emperor, was less than thrilled about finding himself hitched to a preteen.

“Damn it all,” he opined to his chamberlain. “I don’t want to marry a child! People’ll think I’m a whadyacallit... a Hauteville.”

“Sadly, my lord, the Emperor has no other children,” explained the crow-like old chamberlain. “This marriage, whatever its deficiencies, meets two vital requirements – first, it brings us a closer alliance with the Franconians; and, second, it gives Your Grace a wife. You’re really not getting any younger and you should have been married years ago.”

“Don’t know about that,” the Count muttered. “I like being single. Fancy-free and all that. I can go out hunting whenever I want and I get to exercise my *droit du seigneur* all the bloody time. It’s a bachelor’s life for me, I tell you.”

The chamberlain, who had led a very sheltered life, didn’t know what the *droit du seigneur* was, but he imagined it was probably some kind of large hunting dog. Certainly, Count Baldwin was always giving his plenty of exercise, according to the local maidens.

In any case, just before the Winter of 1121 set in, little Gertrude arrived at the Count’s court in Ghent escorted by her father’s Imperial Chancellor. She proved to be a charming little girl with her mother’s ash blonde hair and her father’s wit. Still, she was only eleven years of age and the Count, as has been noted, was no Hauteville. So, instead of marrying, the pair were affianced with the marriage scheduled to take place several year hence, after Gertrude had passed her sixteenth birthday (by which time, presumably, the Count’s *droit* would need no more exercise). In the interim period, Gertrude was to lodge, with nurses and ladies-in-waiting, at the castle of Douai. The Count himself seldom visited his fiancée so that, when he was finally ready to marry her (in 1125), he was pleasantly surprised to find that she had grown into a very pretty and very stout young lady (as Baldwin had grown older, he had become more appreciative of the fuller-figured woman). The two were finally married, amidst much pomp and huge celebrations, on Midsummer’s Day of 1125.

The Duchy of Burgundy



Ruler: Hugh II *the Sailor*, Duke of Burgundy
Capital: none.
Religion: Roman Catholic

While the rest of France was consumed by war, the Burgundians sat back and embraced

²⁷ A quick note on this battle: it was hands-down the bloodiest combat I’ve yet run. It lasted one round, during which each side effectively wiped the other out. Both sides were very similar in most respects, though the Normans had a clear advantage in numbers and leadership. Even so, it wasn’t enough to allow them to prevail.

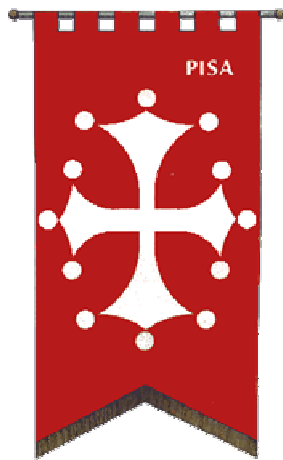
peace. Of course, the Duke of Burgundy's refusal to take sides in the myriad conflicts that wracked France, Italy, Spain and the Empire did not impress his neighbours. Whether it was the Swabians and Occitans or the Imperials and the Papists or the Anglo-Normans and the pretender Curthose – they *all* looked at Burgundy as a potential foe and assumed that Duke Odo was aiding their opponents.

Odo the Red, for his part, did not care a fig about the fears and doubts of neighbouring Kings and Dukes. Let them expend their energies and treasure in pointless wars, he thought, while Burgundy enjoyed freedom from strife. Yet, one could not be too careful when one's neighbours were as nervous as Odo's. In Provence, the Duke commanded that a dozen or so points in the region should be fortified and defended against any invader. Almost at once, small watchtowers sprang up along the Occitan and Alpine frontiers while hefty forts with hundreds of Burgundian men-at-arms appeared on the Southern French hills.

Back in Burgundy itself, the Duke expanded his retinue by recruiting a couple of thousand footmen for permanent service with his personal household forces. Each man was equipped, at the Duke's expense, with a helmet, a suit of good mail armour, a stout shield, a short sword, an axe and a spear. To "inspire" them to do great deeds, these well-armed fellows received higher pay than any other men in the Ducal army and, unlike most peasant infantry levies, they were kept permanently under arms and ready to sally forth at a moment's notice. This led some foreign observers to note that His Grace, Duke Odo, was practically raising a *professional* army, for the first time in Burgundy's history.

Not much else happened save that, in May of 1125, the old Duke's earthly body finally gave out at the age of sixty-five. He was succeeded by his son Hugh the Sailor who, despite some initial misgivings on the part of jealous nobles, was able to assume the Ducal coronet peacefully and without incident.

The Free Commune of Pisa



Ruler: Azzo Marignani, Consul of the Pisan Republic
Capital: Pisa
Religion: Roman Catholic

A grave political scandal struck the Republic as it was revealed that the Consul had attempted to influence certain Venetian Senators. The Venetians, in response, immediately declared that the peace treaty between the two states was null and void; shortly thereafter, the Normans of Apulia did the same thing, declaring that the treacherous Pisans were not to be trusted.

The position of the Consul was severely shaken by this state of affairs, as various members of the Pisan Senate demanded that he should take steps to explain himself and, specifically, why he had risked plunging the Commune into war with Venice by these blatantly illegal actions. His reasons were simple and seemed to be predicated on the idea that it was not actually illegal for Pisa to attempt to influence foreign Senators and that, even if it had been illegal, the advantages that would have accrued to the Commune far outweighed the moral argument against the action.

But, despite widespread concern at the deletion of the treaty and the possibility of future conflict with Venice, most Pisans did not actually object to Marignani's actions but, rather, were irritated that he had been caught! So, even though it seemed, for a little while, as though certain Senators would attempt to remove the Consul from office, he managed to weather the storm and remain in control of the Commune.

Apart from that, the main issue facing the Senate was that of the Pierleone family. These people, pro-Imperialists in exile from Rome, were now resident in Pisa and were using it as a base from which to orchestrate attempts to gain control of Rome and the Papacy. Although the Pierleones were doing nothing illegal, many Senators were extremely uncomfortable about their activities and about the presence of enemies of the Papacy in their city. Maybe something should be done about them...? Or maybe not.

In other news, severe food shortages struck the city-state, causing much discomfort to the citizens.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Norman County of Sicily²⁸

²⁸ A very important alteration has been made to the map so pay attention: *the city of Valetta will now be known as Mdina*. The use of "Valetta" was an anachronism, since the place wasn't built until the early C16th. Mdina is the correct name for the Medieval capital of Malta.

Ruler: Simon de Hauteville, Count of Sicily
Capital: Palermo
Religion: Roman Catholic

The year 1121 saw many preparations being undertaken. In recent missives to the Count, the Zirid Emir had taken an increasingly belligerent line, demanding that the Sicilians withdraw and make restitution for the past two decades of depredations against Tunisia. Many in Palermo suspected that this new tough stance was the result, direct or indirect, of the Zirids' alliance with the powerful Egyptian Fatimids, who had already demonstrated their hostility to the Hautevilles by their iniquitous attacks on Norman forces in Libya. Thus, considerable political momentum built demanding that the fleet should be sent out to keep the seas clear of enemy corsairs and, if necessary, evacuate the troops who currently held Bone.

In Spring of 1122, with the return of Navkratos Christopoulos from his mission to Venice, a very large part of the Sicilian fleet set out – half a dozen of the Count's heaviest dromons manned mostly by Normans whose loyalty to the Hauteville clan was unquestionable; twenty heavy dromons with Sicilians, Greek and Arab crews; a further forty ships, a mixture of Norman longships and Sicilian galleys; and fourteen cogs of various sizes, to ferry any soldiers who might need to be evacuated. To provide some extra muscle, six hundred of Count Simon's finest Norman footmen and retainers were sent along, with about one and a half thousand crossbowmen and swordsmen and perhaps a thousand unarmoured archers.

With this magnificent armament, Count Roger and Christopoulos set out to patrol the waters between Palermo and Malta in the Spring of 1122. They'd been out of port only a few weeks when they spotted African corsairs on the horizon, with the green banners of the Fatimid Caliphate fluttering overhead. The corsairs fled at the Christian approach and, although pursuit was attempted, the smaller, swifter Muslim vessels were just too speedy and outran the Sicilian fleet easily.

Disappointed, the Christians headed towards Mdina, capital and chief port of Malta, to see whether they might find any hostile Arab ships in the vicinity. On a fine and sunny morning – the 3rd of April 1122 - the Christian fleet sailed serenely past the northerly island of Gozo, heading towards the larger southern island of Malta; between these two main islands lay a much smaller island known as Kemmuna to the Maltese and Comino to the Normans and Sicilians; it was, really, not much of an island but more of a huge rock, uninhabited and jutting out of the sea²⁹. The Hauteville fleet passed along the northeastern side of the rock of Kemmuna with no difficulty but, as they cleared the place, a shriek went up from one lookout and then from many across the fleet. They cried warning for they saw, pulling out of the channel just south of the rock, a Mohametan warfleet!

The able Count Roger and even the veteran Admiral Christopoulos had been caught dozing. Yusef al-Matin, commander of the Fatimid fleet, had cunningly placed his ships on the southwestern side of Kemmuna, ready to emerge and waylay the Hautevilles as they cruised past. Yet, in spite of their courage in seeking battle so actively, the Musselmen seemed to have little but surprise on their side – their ships numbered only twenty light corsairs, none of which could withstand a determined attack by a Norman dromon, and forty somewhat larger galleys. Against them, the Normans had almost eighty ships, many of which were heavier and better crewed than anything their Islamic foe could muster. Admittedly, every available space on the Muslim ships was crowded with archers and slingers but this seemed a minor advantage when set against the power of the Normans...

Nevertheless, Admiral Yusef al-Matin was unswerving in his desire that battle should be joined ere this day was over. At a signal, the Muslim galleys surged towards the dromons; men lined the sides of the Muslim ships, peppering the Norman decks with arrows, cutting scores of Christian soldiers down in the first surge. The Norman fleet, caught completely unprepared for this sort of onslaught, found itself driven apart by the Egyptian ships, split into two separate forces – the larger one, under Count Roger, was pressed closer to the shore while the smaller, under Christopoulos, was pushed further back towards the open sea (and, thus, enjoyed much more manoeuvrability than Roger's straitened ships).

While Christopoulos tried to rearrange his flotilla for a counterattack, Yusef directed his ships to begin assaulting Count Roger's force, the section of the Norman fleet that, have been pushed so close to the shore of Kemmuna, was least mobile. From the deck of the *Fatima*, he watched with rapt attention as his men readied their weapons for the assault – the usual stink bombs and grappling hooks were in abundance but, aboard the *Fatima* and the *Mustali*, there was something extra: thick glass jars of Greek Fire, neatly stacked and ready to be thrown at the enemy, as soon they came in range³⁰. Yusef watched as they were distributed to the slingers and those men whose arms were long, whose reach was good, who could cast these fearsome weapons at the Infidel foe. He

²⁹ Nice map here: <http://www.asinah.net/maltamap.html>

³⁰ The Byzantines, who invented the compound, used bronze tubes, extending from the prow of their ships, to spray Greek Fire at their opponents. The Arabs eventually developed a much less potent version of Greek Fire but, instead of spraying it, they just put it into glass jars, which they would throw.

nodded in satisfaction and, half-turning to an aide, commented: "I love the smell of Greek Fire in the morning. It smells like..." And a pensive air spread across al-Matin's face before he finally said, "Victory."³¹

But, in any case, blood was now being spilled. The large and fairly immobile dromons had lashed themselves together, four or five at a time, to prevent any individual ship being swarmed by the more agile enemy. The large Sicilian-Norman ships, even though they carried fewer archers, made excellent platforms whence to fire down upon the Muslim galleys. Staunchly, the Fatimid archers stood and fired up at the Christian ships; sailors flung grappling hooks and tried, somehow, to board and overrun one of the enemy ships; slingers poured their stink bombs and slung their canisters of Greek Fire; but, still, the losses were primarily on the Muslim side. Yes, even on the *Fatima*, the decks were soon stained with men's blood.

As Yusef was contemplating whether to continue the battle or to cut his losses and escape, something remarkable happened. By chance, a Muslim ship had managed to land several grappling hooks on a Norman ship – and the ship was none other than the *Blanche Nef*, the flagship of the entire Hauteville navy and loaded to the gunwales with Norman knights, covered in chainmail and bearing gleaming blades of steel hungry for Muslim blood. The Fatimid sailors, realising that they had picked the wrong target, quickly tried to detach themselves from the *Blanche Nef* while the Normans, who were eager to spill some Infidel blood, tried to keep ahold of the Muslim boarding ropes. Well, it happened that Roger de Hauteville was aboard the *Blanche Nef* and he, being the very embodiment of Norman martial courage, leapt, with a blood-curdling warcry, from the deck of his own ship onto that of the Muslim ship; he hoped – and expected – that his loyal troops would follow him and that he might take this Moorish galley as a prize but, sadly, his armour-clad men were not suited for such sprightly activities as leaping from ship to ship. In the end, only five men followed their Count onto the deck of Muslim galley and, just as the last one landed, a Moorish scimitar sliced through the last of the grappling ropes that held the two vessels together.



Greek Fire in use

The Fatimid galley, her oarsmen working with all their strength, pulled away from the stationary Norman flagship and suddenly everyone realised – Egyptians and Normans alike – that Count Roger was now aboard a retreating enemy warship, almost alone and with little hope of rescue. The bold Count and his men put up a fight worthy of the Hauteville name, dispatching or wounding more than a score of the Fatimid scum, but numbers told and they were overwhelmed. Roger himself fell to the ground, his head cracked by a sailor's cudgel, and was swiftly clapped in irons and dragged off under guard. Signals were sent to Lord al-Matin telling him that the enemy commander had been taken - the most glorious prize anyone could have hoped for had been taken! Huzzah! (It was now almost two hours since the Muslim fleet had first been sighted).

Well, command of the Sicilian-Norman fleet now devolved to that fiendish Greek pirate, Admiral Christopoulos, but, given the confused and divided state of the Norman fleet, his assumption of command was in name only. That section of the fleet which had been under the Count's command remained immobile and could do little but try to hold off any and all Fatimid attacks – and, indeed, it succeeded in doing so quite admirably. The decks of the tall dromons continued to serve as an outstanding platform to fire down onto the decks of Muslim ships. For each Norman who fell, pierced by an Egyptian arrow or burnt by the cruel flames of the Greek Fire, it was a fair bet that two or three Egyptian sailors or marines fell dead.

Meanwhile, Christopoulos' own section, which was still somewhat further out to sea, was now ready to counterattack. His force was made up primarily of manoeuvrable galleys and longships – about forty in all - with only a couple of the larger, slower ships. Christopoulos screamed at his men to row forward, to row faster, to come to blows with the enemy; his men obeyed, driving their ships into bowshot of the Egyptians; at once, volleys of arrows were flying back and forth through the air between opposing ships. Here, as elsewhere in the battle, the Fatimids appeared to have the worst of the exchange, seeming to take significantly higher casualties than their Christian foes and suffering, in particular, from the attentions of some very accurate Norman crossbowmen who had a merry time picking off important Muslim officers.

Yusef, by now, was beginning to feel distinctly nervous about his chances for victory. The sheer weight of the enemy's ships – so much heavier than his own – combined with the admirable quality of the Sicilian sailors and ships made the Hauteville fleet a near unassailable beast. Even surprise had not enhanced his position sufficiently to make victory likely and now, as he looked around, he saw that the morning's combat had taken its toll on his men's morale; losses had been high – higher than wanted, higher than was considered tolerable – and it was probable that, if he failed to order a withdrawal, his captains would take matters into their own hands. With a heavy heart, Yusef made ready to signal the retreat...

³¹ Apologies to Mr. Duvall.

At that point, another thing happened that confirmed Yusef al-Matin as a uniquely lucky commander. Even as Christopoulos was driving the Muslim ships before him, breaking through to the big ships, trapped in defensive blocks with their sterns to the rocky shore of Kemmuna, a stray Muslim arrow caught the Greek sailor in the throat! He slipped backwards onto the deck and, slowly, died. Whether he bled to death or drowned in his own blood, none could say but it mattered not. He was dead and with his leadership gone, all hope of victory vanished for the Hautevilles. There was no-one left to assume command of the fleet so captains tried, in a pell-mell way, to save their ships and their men, to escape out to open sea or in the direction of Gozo. Meanwhile, those Norman ships which were trapped against Kemmuna remained ignorant of Christopoulos' fate; they knew not what had happened but only that, of a sudden, their ships had begun to flee. What it meant, none could say.

Yusef, seeing the chaos that one man's death had wrought, said a silent prayer of thanks to Allah and ordered the withdrawal. With the Christians in such total disorder, they presented no realistic threat to the Fatimid escape. True, Yusef could have chosen to engage the disordered Christians but, in spite of their panic and confusion, they were still more numerous and far stronger than his own men; nor, for that matter, did the sudden collapse of Norman morale change the fact that the Fatimid fleet was feeling rather sorry for itself. So, the two fleets separated. By this time, it was two hours after noon.

For the Fatimids, the *Battle of Kemmuna* had been a remarkable feat during which a small and poorly trained force had, through dint of luck and courage, captured the commander of the enemy fleet, slain his second-in-command and escaped, relatively unscathed, leaving a bewildered foe behind; for the Normans of Sicily, the *Battle of Comino* was a shameful episode – a disaster, and probably a judgment from God, during which the County's two foremost leaders had fallen and a large, well-trained and splendidly-outfitted fleet had been humiliated by a shambling band of Egyptian scows and barges that would barely have passed muster in a Moorish pirate nest. For one side, glory unforeseeable; for the other, humiliation inexplicable.

A few days after the battle, Count Simon of Sicily arrived in the vicinity with the rest of the (considerable) Hauteville fleet. His initial instinct was to chase after the infernal Mahometans, rescue his brother and take revenge for the defeat but, seeing the chaos and disorder into which the embattled fleet had fallen, he realised that he had no choice but to rally his men, gather the lost and straggling ships which had seen defeat at Comino and retire to Palermo to refit and repair. In truth, the Count of Sicily had no other choice.

Sadly, though, the Fatimids, who were just as keen to reach Egypt as the Sicilians were to reach Palermo, decided to stop off en route to their homes and raid Malta. The undefended capital of the island, Mdina, was particularly badly abused, with the Mahometan corsairs stealing anything that wasn't nailed down, robbing churches and carrying off any young ladies that could be found. Perversely, merchant ships were pirated even as they sat moored in the harbour.

After raiding the city, al-Matin's men turned to the Maltese countryside where they had a much less easy time of it, due to the presence of large numbers of forts and castles and a fairly large contingent of Norman foot soldiers. Still, they managed to pilfer a few sheep – and shepherdesses! – before escaping back to their ships and leaving the islands for home, where a hero's welcome surely awaited the victorious warriors of Islam!

The Twin Duchies of Calabria and Apulia

Ruler: William de Hauteville, Duke of Calabria and Apulia

Capital: none

Religion: Roman Catholic

It was foreign policy that held most people's attention at the Ducal Court of Apulia. Roger Borsa had been busier than ever before sending and receiving letters to and from the four corners of Christendom – the Venetians assailed him with complaints and demands about the state of affairs in Italy; the Tuscans and the Pope wrote almost constantly about the need to contain the Antipope and thwart the ambitions of the Emperor; the Byzantines and Bulgarians each wrote to him about the other; and from England his fellow Norman, Henry Beauclerc, upbraided him about "The Incident" (which was how they had tactfully taken to referring to the kidnapping of the King of England's thirteen year old daughter!).

First things first. Roger – and, more importantly, his eldest son William – understood that the abduction of Princess Matilda was an act for which amends would have to be made. Matilda had been the cornerstone in England's foreign policy – an eligible Anglo-Norman Princess to be married off to a possible future King of Jerusalem, thus sealing the bonds between England and the Crusading Franks – but now she was tainted by her "association" with William; England's plans for alliance with the Lords of Outremer lay in ruins because of Hildebrand's opportunism and William's lust. Too, the *honour* of the English King had been mortally stained by the kidnapping and seduction of Princess Matilda; why, some stout Norman knights at the English Court, including even the Duke of Lancaster, argued that a war would be necessary to repair the damage done to Anglo-Norman prestige and to the personal reputation of King Henry.

Like so many fathers before and after him, it fell to the ageing Roger to mend the blunders of a dissolute son. With honeyed words, Roger was able to assuage the righteous ire of Beauclerc; whatever wrongs had been done to Matilda, he promised, would be undone. Thus, it was announced, after Easter of 1121, that William de Hauteville and Matilda of Normandy would be joined in the honourable and praiseworthy bonds of Holy Matrimony. And, to demonstrate William's genuine contrition for his seduction of the girl, the Duke of Apulia would reach deep into his pocket and ensure that this marriage would be an event of unprecedented scale, an event to bring distinction to the reputations of both the House of Hauteville and the House of Normandy!

The couple were wed at Alberobello on Midsummer's Day 1121 in the presence of all the greatest nobles from the Twin Duchies and from surrounding lands; a large contingent of Anglo-Normans, too, had arrived for the ceremony and feast, along with representatives of the Mother Church. The fourteen year old bride was bedecked in the what was perhaps the finest wedding dress ever seen in this part of the world – a pale blue gown made entirely of silk and embroidered with golden thread!³² Around her neck, she wore a beryl and silver necklace, a gift from her mother-in-law and symbolic of purification. But it was the feast and celebrations which really caught everyone's attention! Lasting for an entire week, the town of Alberobello became the scene of a great carnival – roasted quails and turtledoves were served up free to anyone who wished, including even the lowest peasants; barrels of beer and butts of wine were distributed blithely to all comers by Hauteville stewards; jugglers and fools capered in the streets for the delight of all; and, from the distant east, camels and other strange beasts were paraded for the amusement of the masses.

Yet these stupendous celebrations were taking place *outside* the actual manor of Alberobello and were intended only for the amusement of the peasantry. For the actual guests to the wedding, things were even more marvellous: Duke Roger casually dished out gifts of bejewelled crucifixes to all the guests, while every woman who attended received a tiara of orange blossoms imported from the Holy Land at exorbitant expense. Every night, for a week after the wedding, the guests stayed up until the small hours of the morning, dancing and drinking down Occitan cider; every night, a dozen boars would be roasted and served up for the guests, with venison and goose in such abundance that even the beggars, crowding around the castle gates begging for scraps, were more than sated and did not know what to do with the excess of food they received.

Truly, Hauteville prestige – and that of the Duke of Normandy – was polished to a bright and glorious lustre by all of this; so much so that most people were minded to ignore the shameful beginnings of the marriage, the abduction of little Maud and the rumoured birth of an illegitimate child to the couple. However, there was one fly in the ointment: the King of Jerusalem, and many of the other noble lords of Outremer, were deeply offended by what they saw as Apulian perfidy. The hand of Maud of England had been promised to Raymond of Edessa but now they saw her hawked off to a kidnapper and rapist! Their honour could not stand this and, though the King of Jerusalem was in no position to chastise the men who had so affronted his reputation, he nursed the grievance sorely and all noted a cooling of relations between Apulia and Outremer.

But there were other matters of foreign policy that Roger was minded to deal with during his son's nuptials. For a start, the Duke was incensed at the contents of certain missives sent to him from Venice – the Doge, a man whom Roger trusted implicitly, had confided that those insidious miscreants in Pisa had been bribing Venetian officials to act against the interests of the *Serenissima*! Well, that was more than the Norman Duke could stand! He immediately summoned the nearest Pisan envoy and informed him that, in view of these nefarious and treacherous undertakings, the existing non-aggression pact between the Twin Duchies and the Free Commune would be deemed to have expired beginning on the 31st of December, 1125. Curiously enough, in the aftermath of this decision, the Duke undertook a mutual defence treaty with the Margravate of Tuscany. These two Italian polities had much in common – devotion to the Papacy and hostility to the King of Germany being chief amongst them – and, so, this compact made perfect sense.

In any case, with the wedding and all these diplomatic manoeuvres behind them, the Normans were able to begin work on scores of new schemes to make better use of unsown and unexploited land in Apulia. The Duke first proclaimed that all uncultivated land in Apulia was now the property of the Duchy, unless it could be proved that there was a legal owner who could produce a full record of ownership *and* provide an explanation of exactly why the land had been allowed to lapse. With this done, His Grace began to dole out allotments of land to immigrant nobles and knights from Normandy and France and also to many stout men returning from the Holy Land; yet, the knights, by themselves, could do little with these grants of fallow land so they, in their turn, divided their new estates up amongst their squires and peasants, granting each fellow a plot of ground and negotiating the distribution of the fruits and produce of the land. Although it was expensive in the short term (for the peasants and nobles alike could expect no revenue from the soil until they had finished cultivating it – and it might take a year or more to get the fields cleared, organised and in a fit state to be sown!), by the end of 1125, Apulia was thriving like never before.

Leaving his newly-married son to oversee the stewards and bailiffs in this redistribution of the land, the Duke himself went off to visit his son-in-law, Duke Boniface of Spoleto, in the hope that he might convince him of the utility of closer links with Apulia-Calabria and perhaps even complete integration into the Norman state. While he

³² White wedding dresses were not yet in vogue during the C12th.

was on this mission, an ill wind blew upon the Twin Duchies... First, in 1122, Maud of England, daughter of Henry Beauclerc and wife of William de Hauteville, became pregnant – surely a matter for great jubilation, except that, as the pregnancy progressed, it became clear that all was not well with the young mother-to-be, for she was unusually weak and bled often and the bulge of her stomach seemed smaller than was expected. On the 31st of July 1122 (coincidentally the Feast Day of St Joseph of Arimathea), she went into premature labour and was delivered of a daughter, born dead and cold. The exertions of labour left Princess Maud, who was only fifteen years of age, weakened beyond hope of recovery. Having birthed the child at midday, she herself was dead before dusk. In this way, some said, the Lord had punished William for his lascivious use of the girl when she was his captive and had punished Matilda herself for tempting the Norman cavalier with her comely form. Be that as it may, the Lord's Judgment was hard indeed for William to bear and harder still for her father who, when he heard that his child had given up the ghost, sank into the deepest of melancholies.

And this was not the only misery to attend the Twin Duchies, for the bustling metropolis of Naples became a scene of incredible political commotion and upheaval. Just down the coast from Naples, in the city of Amalfi³³, which had been a powerful independent maritime republic until 1075, there was a sudden resurgence of anti-Norman, pro-Republican feeling. Some of the city's leading merchants and burghers stepped forward to demand that Amalfi go the same way as Pisa and Venice by embracing their seafaring and commercial heritage and throwing off the yoke of foreign aristocrats. Their exhortations met with keen ears, as the city-dwellers had been left feeling increasingly sidelined by the permanent Norman concentration on the rurality; too, the burghers seemed outraged by the constant Norman taxes placed on their trade and commerce and they nursed this as a bitter grievance. At last, in the Winter of 1123, the city of Amalfi exploded into action and proclaimed its independence from the Normans. In the weeks and months that followed, cities up and down the coast rushed to support the citizens of Amalfi. By and by, during January of 1124, the Neapolitans were forced to decide whether they would join the revolt and declare their participation in the Republic or whether they would stay loyal to the Hautevilles...

Tearing down the red-and-white Hauteville standards, they raised their own standard – basically, a modified version of the Pisan gonfalone with a blue field instead of the Pisan red and featuring the legend "NAPOLI" at the bottom and "AMALFI" at the top. Thus, the Republic of Naples-Amalfi was born! The Hauteville fleet, at anchor in the harbour and numbering some thirty ships of various types, promptly defected to the Republicans, while a Senate consisting of leading burghers from both Naples and Amalfi was convened in February of 1124. This body elected, as first Captain-General of the Republic, a well-known and well-liked figure named Giacomo delle Colonne; curiously, he was known as a lay preacher and scholar, rather than a merchant, and was a vocal adherent to the Papal cause in the Conflict of Investitures (which is to say, he supported the right of the Pope to appoint bishops).

When news of Naples' revolt was brought to Duke Roger in Spoleto, he grew sick with shock and died within the month. He was already an old man – wizened at the age of fifty-eight and worn out by the cares of politics, war and a vigorous Italian wife who was not yet twenty-five – so his death was not totally unexpected but, still, it created chaos aplenty. Any hope of thrashing the Republican rebels was quashed by the Duke's death; too, the Neapolitans were crouching behind some of the finest and toughest defences on the whole of the Italian peninsula for, in the few years before his death, Roger de Hauteville had reached deep into his pocket to make Naples an unassailable stronghold – never did he imagine that he, or his clan, would find themselves on the wrong side of those walls!

But what of the succession? This was relatively undisputed. William de Hauteville almost automatically became Duke of Apulia and Calabria, being fortunate enough to be the only one of Roger Borsa's many sons who was old enough to lay claim to the ducal throne. Hildebrand de Bacqueville, the Duchy's greatest captain, might have presented a possible threat but he was getting old, losing his ambition and was committed too firmly to the Hauteville family ever to countenance a revolt (too, he was off in Greece at this point). But the Duke of Spoleto, William's brother-in-law, decided to take a leaf from the Neapolitan book and proclaim himself independent. Duke William was sorely grieved by this for he construed it as base treachery but no-one – not even William – could argue that Duke Boniface did not have the legal right to assert his sovereignty over Spoleto and the autonomy of that region.

While all this excitement was going on at home, Hildebrand de Bacqueville had been busy abroad. In 1121, he had taken thirty ships from the Naples garrison and slipped over to the waters of the Aegean where he made contact with some Apulian spies who had been busily observing developments in the region; these agents reported that some provinces – specifically, Thessaly and Macedon – were going to be taken under Bulgarian control... Well, what more invitation did Hildebrand need? The Duke of Apulia-Calabria had put his seal to a peace treaty with the Greek Emperor but no such treaty had been concluded with the Bulgarians, a fact that made them a legitimate target for the rascally and opportunistic Norman pirates!

³³ See this site for a neat little map showing the relative positions of Naples and Amalfi: <http://www.roquery.com/cities/naples/visiting/amalfi/>

Operating from the Aegean, the Normans spent several months during 1122 and 1123 raiding the Macedonian and Thessalian coast. Loot aplenty was taken – and some captives too – and, despite the presence of some Bulgar cavalry, all the pirates had a wonderful time enjoying the pleasures and delights that Greece had to offer. After an impeccable pirating expedition, problems arose when Hildebrand tried to take his fleet back home for, arriving off Naples early in 1124, he found the docks closed to him by the Republican rebels!

So it goes, he thought, and promptly headed for Palermo where he hoped that he and his men could pass the time until Naples was recaptured and they could return home. For their part, the Norman and Apulian sailors seemed overjoyed to be able to visit Palermo, famous for its wine, brothels and slave markets full of long-limbed Saracen beauties! The huge sums of Greek gold they had taken soon found their way into the purses of prostitutes, pimps and barkeeps; yet more money was raised by the sale of captives taken from Greece and that, by turns, was also spent on securing either butts of wine or the favours of Palermo's many comely, talented and deeply lascivious ladies of the night...

Some of Hildebrand's men were less than pleased by the prospect of having to leave Palermo to return to Naples, but the Sicilian authorities made it clear that they didn't want their Apulian cousins to stay in the city one day more than necessary...

The Holy See of the Roman Catholic Church



Ruler: Gelasius II, Pope, Bishop and Supreme Metropolitan of Rome, Vicar of Christ, Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church, Servant of the Servants of God

Capital: Rome

Religion: Roman Catholic

How had such dark times come upon the Vicar of Christ? Every day, the Germans drew further away from Rome, further away from Christ, and became more closely aligned with that lying rogue, Henry, and his pet dog, Burdinus. The pain of this – of seeing so many souls lost to the Church – weighed heavily upon the ageing Paschal, as did the politicking and trickery of Simon of Lorraine who had treacherously promised loyalty to Rome, only to revoke his fealty at the eleventh-hour and return to the embrace of the Antipope. Even now, stories were abounding in Italy that Heinrich of Franconia had proclaimed himself to be the Son of God and Caesar of the World – and these rumours were hammering away at whatever support the Emperor still possessed in the peninsula.

The Pope had tried, for as long as this dispute had run, to be the voice of reason and of moderation; he had hoped to convince the schismatic Germans to compromise and negotiate; but, ultimately, the old man had been thwarted by the malice and duplicity of the Imperialists. His good will had been interpreted as a sign of weakness, something to be used against him by an Emperor whose ruthlessness and amorality knew no bounds. At first, this left Paschal in a deep fit of melancholia but, by and by, anger grew in his breast, supplanting any milder feelings, until, at last, His Holiness resolved to excommunicate the whole damnable nest of vipers.

The year 1121 saw His Holiness draw up Bulls of Excommunication against the Holy Roman Emperor himself, and also against the Antipope, Maginulf, and all his ecclesiastical adherents. The one issued against Henry V was, on the whole, not unexpected and had only minor impact on his standing in Franconia – after all, if Henry denied that Paschal was Pope, it was scarcely troubling if Paschal responded by denying that Henry was Emperor. On the other hand, the excommunication did serve to alienate him from the wider Catholic community and left him even more loathed, if that were possible, amongst Papal loyalists across all of Europe (particularly in Italy). The excommunication of the Antipope, though, came as much more of a shock, for the Holy Father, in his zeal to reconcile, had hitherto refused to condemn Maginulf and had insisted that the Antipope could remain a Bishop of the Church, even while in rebellion against Paschal.

In the following year, Paschal, his rage unabated, commanded that the traitors, Henry of Bavaria and Simon of Lorraine, should be excommunicated from the Catholic Church. These two were, in the Pope's eyes, much worse than the Emperor or Antipope; for Heinrich and Maginulf were merely being true to form – they were both irredeemably evil and crazed by their lust for power. But the Welfs of Bavaria had been an ally of Rome in the past, while Simon of Lorraine had, only recently, actively courted Roman support and had sworn public fealty to Paschal. This made their treachery so much worse. As he placed his seal upon the Bulls of Excommunication, Paschal cursed Henry of Bavaria, and all the Welfs, as snakes, as bad as Judas. He reviled Simon as a sinner beyond redemption, a man whose transgressions against God's law and Church were so great that he could never be forgiven on this Earth.

As it happens, the strain of all this proved too much for the old Pope. In September of 1122, at the age of sixty-seven, his heart finally gave out. To many farsighted and ambitious clerics who aspired to the Throne of St Peter, the death



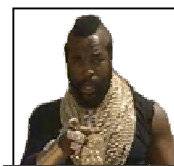
of Paschal was no shock but had been expected for several years now. Before the Pope's body had even grown cold, these hopefuls had mobilised their factions and started the process of lobbying the College of Cardinals for support. As the days ticked by, it seemed clearer that the College was effectively in the pocket of the Frangipani family. Their rivals, the exiled Pierleone clan, responded by inciting a revolt amongst their followers. Riots broke out through the whole of the city, buildings were looted or set afire and scores or even hundreds of people lost their lives; some were murdered wantonly by robbers or hoodlums; many others slain in the factional street-fighting between roving gangs of Pierleone and Frangipani supporters; and others, still, were trampled to death by stampeding mobs or crushed as burning buildings collapsed upon them.

Meanwhile, some troublemakers in the Roman Senate, perhaps inspired by the recent growth of Republican feeling in Italy, set to work stirring up the seething masses of Rome against their greedy overlords, the bloated German imperialists and the scheming ecclesiasts of the Church. The College of Cardinals evacuated Rome immediately, abandoning the Eternal City to the rioters, factionalists and republicans. In a monastery overlooking the city, the Cardinals elected John of Gaeta as the new Pope (he was not the first choice of the Frangipani partisans who dominated the College but he was a reliable supporter of the late Paschal and, in the end, the need to elect *someone* took precedence over factional worries). John was an old man – older even than the dead Paschal – but he seemed in good health and was, by nature, very belligerent towards the Imperialists and all the other schismatics, which made him the best available choice, in the circumstances. He chose the name Gelasius II and was crowned with the Papal tiara on October 13th 1122, which also happened to be the Feast Day of St Athanasius.

Down in the city of Rome itself, the factional riots petered out once people heard that a new Pope had been elected. The republicans seized the moment and announced that the city of Rome was now independent of the Church and Empire and would be governed as a Commune by an elected Senate (the old Senate was outlawed and all its members proscribed). This state of affairs, though, could not last. The Tuscan army, under the brilliant Renaud of Savoy, arrived shortly, suppressed the republican rebels and the factionalists and raised the Church's banner over the walls and palaces of Rome. His Holiness, though, did not enter the city until the Easter of 1123 when he and the Church's senior bishops staged a holy procession through the city. The Holy Father first celebrated Easter Mass in the Church of Sts Cosmas and Damian and then, afterwards, proclaimed that he approved of Bernard of Clairvaux's Charter of Charity and was granting permission for the expansion of the Cistercian Order; this proved popular enough, though it troubled some of the Cluniacs who clustered so thickly around the Vatican. Finally, he and his bishops processed back through the streets of the city (with Tuscan guardsmen looking on) and took up his residence in the Vatican Palace. Some people were quite impressed to note how energetic the new Father was, especially in consideration of his advanced age (in fact, one Cardinal was heard to remark "He might be old, but that's one tough dude. I pity the fool that be messin' with that sucka...").



Bernard of Clairvaux



One Tough Dude

And this burst of energy showed no immediate sign of abating. In the days after taking up residence in Rome, His Holiness issued a brief encyclical reaffirming the Church's traditional stance on usury and condemning any deviation from Canonical tradition. At the same time, the Pope denied vigorously that the previous Father, Paschal II, had ever contemplated any reform of the usury laws and claimed that this, along with the Unam Sanctam, was another filthy Franconian forgery designed to turn the masses away from the Church and Salvation. In point of fact, argued Gelasius, the Emperor was obviously in the grip of Satanic forces for who, other than the Devil or possibly the Antichrist, would actively seek to divorce people from Mother Church? What kind of sick and warped mind could devise plots to tear the souls of Christians away from their only source of Salvation and Redemption? Only a mind that was so utterly diseased and sinful that it actually hated both God and Man alike, that it sought to force people to reject Christ – and, therefore, to embrace Damnation! – as a means to spite the Almighty, a mind so poisoned and deluded that it could claim to be the equal of God, the very personification of the Almighty! Such a mind was that of Henry of Franconia, old Gelasius explained, and it was now the duty of all Christian men to take up arms and defend the Church. Just as, nearly thirty years ago, Urban had summoned the stout manhood of Christendom to do battle for the sake of Christian pilgrims and the Holy Places of the Faith, so now did Gelasius demand that a Crusade be undertaken to liberate Germany from the grip of Satan, to bring the oppressed and suffering masses of the Empire back into the light of Christ and to protect the rest of Catholic Europe from Henry's vitriol, deceit and aggression. Europe had stood aside once before, he went on, and had trusted in Henry's ability to do the right thing; as a result, he had smashed Saxony, most pious and faithful of all the German Duchies, and manipulated foolish and ambitious clerics into a schism to serve his own evil ends.

Sadly, the call to Crusade had no immediate effect. With war in Spain and France, the Mahometans active in the Mediterranean and republicanism apparently running rampant in Italy, most would-be Crusaders were simply too busy to march off to war against Germany. The Hungarians, Bohemians and Venetians, of course, already *were* at war with the excommunicated Duke of Bavaria, and, since that war could easily spread to encompass the other German Duchies, the Pope's declaration of a Crusade was probably somewhat superfluous.

The people of Rome decided that they liked this new Pope who, despite his age (for he was almost an octogenarian), displayed incredible resolve in dealing with the crazed Franconian Caesar. Supporters of the Pierleone family, who had really pinned their colours to the Emperor's flag, became harder and harder to find in Rome. They either recanted, largely in response to Henry's crazed claims to be the new Son of God, or departed for Pisa or Germany to await a time when Imperial power could be projected into Italy once more.

The Castilian War of Succession 1120-??

House of Blois and England

vs.

House of Alfonsez and Aragon-Navarre

Leon, February 1121

A deep – almost palpable – sense of anxiety had settled on the followers of the Child-King Enrique. This apprehension had its origin in the idle tittle-tattle of a gossiping guardsman who had reported seeing shadowy figures slipping into and out of the pavilion of the Regent, Count Stephen of Blois. By itself, this meant nothing but, before long, a dark rumour was snaking its way through the Four Kingdoms: it was said that the Regent's spies had intercepted certain incriminating letters which were passing between a senior member of Stephen's faction and Sancho, the Pretender. These letters, if the rumour mill was to be believed, contained stark and incontrovertible evidence that this individual planned to betray both Count Stephen and his infant son, King Enrique, and defect to the enemy!

In no time at all, this piece of apparently empty talk took on a life of its own. Far from being dismissed as malicious gossip or fabrication, many – maybe even most – of Count Stephen's followers accepted that it was true. Few were willing to discuss the matter openly – for they remembered the unfortunate fate of Ermegildo Cambranes, the last man to try to betray Stephen, and were fearful lest their chatter should incriminate the wrong person or, worse, draw Count Stephen's attention – but it was widely whispered, around campfires and over beakers of good Portuguese sherry, that the likely actor was none other than Vedillo Gonsalvez! Some muttered that Gonsalvez's days were numbered – and rightly so – for Stephen would surely act against the traitor. Others, perhaps sympathising with Gonsalvez, held their tongues.

For his part, Vedillo was aware of the stories that were being circulated. Sitting in his tent in the middle of the loyalist army that would soon march forth to war against the rebels and traitors, he was chilled to the marrow by a warning note, scrawled in Portuguese on a scrap of papyrus, which had been left for him in his tent. "For your own safety, beware," the note read, "for there is no telling what the Norman may do. Remember Cambranes and double your watch!". Vedillo was stricken by fear and anger – how could the Count, or anyone else, believe these scurrilous rumours? But, if they did believe it, what could Vedillo do? How would Stephen react to what he must perceive as treachery? Vedillo's mind kept returning to the fate of Cambranes – to be sure, that man had been a conspirator against the King and had deserved death but the Regent was a ruthless man and it was not beyond the pale to imagine that he might act with supreme ruthlessness to crush this nascent "treachery", if he truly believed that Vedillo was disloyal...

What would Stephen do? What could Vedillo do?

Zamora, Old Castille, January 1121

"How can we defeat this Norman, sire?" asked one of Sancho's caballeros, dismayed. "He is said to be a great warrior!"

"And I am not," said Sancho III de Leon, King of the Four Thrones of Castille, Leon, Toledo and Galicia.

The young knight blanched, "My lord, I did not mean..."

The equally young king smiled mirthlessly. "No, I know what you meant and you are right, Rigoberto. Stephen is my better on the field of the battle. Let me ask you a question, however. You play chess, do you not?"

"I have played the game, sire," replied the young caballero, wondering where his king was going with this. "But it is a foppish diversion – fit only for women and priests and Moors."

"Let us imagine that you were to play a master of the game, Don Rigoberto. And, to make things interesting, let us suppose that the stake in this game was your life. Could you win the game?"

"I do not think so, sire," replied Don Rigoberto Gonsalvez.

"Ah," said Sancho expansively, "but what if you could choose where to play this game? What if you could tie down one of his hands, point a crossbow at his head and bang loud pots near his ears every time he tried to reach for a piece? What if you didn't let him see the board, but only told him where the pieces were? And what if, right in the middle of the game, you took his best pieces for yourself, and perhaps knocked one of his pawns off the board by 'accident'. Now could you beat this master of chess?"

"Perhaps so, my liege" said Rigoberto, understanding.

"You see, my friend," continued the king, "there is a difference between 'war' and 'battle'. I will win the battle because I will control the war."

"But sire, will not Count Stephen be trying to do the same thing?"

"That is why I have called you here, Don Rigoberto. I have a small job for you..."

1121: The first year of the civil war was destined to be relatively quiet with only a little blood spilt on the field of battle.

In Old Castille, King Sancho III Alfonsez de León and his army waited for the inevitable attack by the superior forces of the Regent. Five thousand new footmen were enrolled in the Pretender's army, all decently equipped and almost half with mail coats and helmets; a further two thousand conscripted peasant skirmishers filled out the ranks, though they were armed only with farming tools or whatever rudimentary weapons they had happened to lay their hands upon.

Commanding the army of King Sancho was that elaborately titled Castillian nobleman Don Alvaro Nuñez, Grandee of Toledo and Marshal of the Armies of the Four Thrones, a man renowned for competence and prudence rather than brilliance and daring. Don Alvaro, knowing the hills of Old Castille about as well as anyone (and a good deal better than the Norman pirates), marched his whole army in the far east of the province close to the border with Navarre – in this way, he hoped to draw the invader deeper into hostile country, exposing the foeman's lines of supply. Scouts and spies loyal to King Sancho, meanwhile, were combing the countryside, hunting high and low for any sign of the invading army. As it happened, for the whole of 1121, their activities were in vain for Count Stephen, and the forces loyal to the Infant King Enrique, chose not to attack.

Stephen, as it happened, was quietly positioned in Leon awaiting an attack by the wretched Sancho. Like his brother-in-law, Stephen had raised new troops – four thousand men, half of whom were footmen and the other half loyal knights mounted on fierce chargers and bearing the heaviest armour, shield and blade. So, while this fine army awaited Sancho's offensive, Stephen ordered that the capital – Ciudad Leon, which had declared for King Sancho III – should be cut off and starved into submission. Only a little while after they had begun this operation, scouts reported from the south of the region that Duke Enrique of Portugal was marching into Leon; at first, the Regent's army were perplexed by this – for Portugal, it was known, disposed of only a small army – and for a little while Count Stephen and his partisans assumed that this force was merely the vanguard of the entire enemy army!

In short order, though, it was confirmed that Duke Enrique was all alone, with only fifteen hundred men and was merely trying to distract the Regent with raids rather than seeking actual battle. Well, the Portuguese feint might have worked, had it been timed to coincide with an attack by Sancho's main army, but, instead, the Duke and his small contingent found themselves facing the combined power of the whole of the Regent's army – in all, a little more than ten thousand men plus the garrisons of the local forts. Duke Enrique and his small contingent were attacked by the superior army at Zamora and promptly wiped out. The Duke himself was killed in single combat by a Castillian hidalgo.

With this "victory" achieved (if so one-sided an affair deserves such a title), the Regent and his men returned to blockading the capital until the Autumn when yet more news was brought to them about invaders. From the frontier with Aragon, it was reported that Crown Prince Alfonso of Navarre was invading New Castille, with the avowed intention of relieving Toledo and restoring the region to the rule of Sancho, the rightful King of Castille. The rumours proved to be true and shocked Count Stephen to his bones, for he could not imagine the sheer treachery with which Alfonso of Navarre was treating him nor understand how that fiend could have betrayed little Enrique, only son of the great Queen Urraca.

King Alfonso, in any case, was presented with a surprise all of his own. When he had sent his son to intervene in the Castilian civil war, he had made it abundantly clear that the army should march to Old Castille where it could rendezvous with the army of King Sancho III and, jointly, they could campaign against the Norman usurper. Why, then, did his son and that great caballero, Fernandez de Tortosa, lead the army into *New Castille*? What could have possessed them? Well, poor King Alfonso was never to know because, by the time he found out what was happening, his son and the army were already well inside the borders of New Castille and it was too late to send any messengers to order them to alter their course.

What on earth could have gone wrong with the Aragonese plan? None could say.

Over in Leon, the Regent's army set out for New Castille in late Autumn hoping to catch the invader before he could conquer the province and liberate Toledo. Halfway there, they wintered in the town of Palencia...

Palencia, Winter 1121:

The whole of the year 1121 had been marked by an increasing rift between the Regent, Stephen of Blois, and his most senior lieutenant, Vedillo Gonsalvez. Rumours about Vedillo's alleged double-dealings (and about Stephen's plots to remove this potential threat) had poisoned the atmosphere amongst King Enrique's supporters. Then, over and above that, there was the pre-existing friction between Enrique's Castilian supporters, on the one hand, and the Regent's many Norman supporters on the other. That is to say, there were some Castilian hidalgos who welcomed the eventual rule of King Enrique I, son of Queen Urraca and grandson of King Alfonso VI, but they despised the influence the Normans had over their country and wished to replace Count Stephen.

As 1121 came to an end and the army entered winter quarters in and around the town of Palencia, Count Stephen and the closest members of his entourage ensconced themselves for the duration in a comfortable villa requisitioned from a local caballero who had gone off to Old Castille to fight for the Pretender Sancho. It was here that Vedillo decided to take matters into his own hands. He had resolved that it was better to settle things here and now than to wait until the army was fighting the Aragonese and then let the splits appear.

On a pleasant but chilly evening, late in November of 1121, Gonsalvez sought, and was granted, admission to the Regent's presence. He found Count Stephen seated on a pleasant emperor chair before an open fire; he was only twenty five years of age with an open, unguarded countenance. In his years since coming to Spain, he had shed that distinctive Norman haircut and the ruddiness of his face had been hidden beneath a neat little beard, carefully trimmed; with his soft courtly clothes and the pleasantness of his speech, it would have been hard to imagine that the Regent carried the blood of that most ruthless race of Norsemen. Stephen was an easy man to like, thought Vedillo, and easy to underestimate.

"Sit," said the Count in curiously accented Frankish (for he had never picked up the Castilian tongue – and few Castilians spoke the dialect of Normandy). He gestured at an oak stool near at hand. "Pull it close to the fire and warm yourself."

The older man nodded gratitude and did as he was bade – Vedillo was almost sixty now and felt the cold in a way that he never had in his younger days. "You sought an audience," the Count went on. "So speak."

Gonsalvez sighed heavily and spoke. "There are, let us say, *concerns* in many quarters, Lord. Some say that there is discord just beneath the surface of our cause, that factions are already forming, that the *caballeros* might fall on each other..."

"Indeed," the Count said abruptly, interrupting the old hidalgo; he went on somewhat hurriedly. "But some also say that there are men who are close to the cause of King Enrique – men on whose shoulders rests the future of this Kingdom – who are in secret league with the Pretender. What say you, Sieur Gonsalvez?"

Stephen locked his eyes on those of the older man. No anger was present in them, just an impersonal, dispassionate interest in how the subject would reply. Gonsalvez felt a chill that not even the warmth of the fire could lift – he knew that the Count was a man in whose heart lay the most extreme of dichotomies: if one transgressed against Stephen, one would only need to ask and the sin would be forgiven instantly; if one transgressed against Stephen's only son, the Child King Enrique, one would be met with a cold and brutal ruthlessness, a merciless violence that served to remind all that, though Stephen was, by all accounts and appearances, an uncommonly gentle soul, in his veins flowed the blood of his grandsire, the infamous and pitiless William the Bastard.

"I have also heard the rumours," said Gonsalvez with a forced insouciance he did not truly feel. "I have heard about these splendid letters between myself and Prince Sancho but..."

"What truth lies in these rumours, Don Vedillo?" Stephen asked, once more interrupting.

Gonsalves was taken aback somewhat but rallied to answer as best he could. "My Lord Regent, the story I heard – the story that all of the Four Kingdoms has heard – was that you intercepted compromising letters that revealed some planned treachery on my part."

The older man positioned himself so he was sitting slightly more upright, breathed deeply and let a certain pridefulness creep into his tone as he went on: "I know not whether any such letters exist but I *do* know that I have not plotted treachery against you, nor against His Majesty. I have not written to Prince Sancho, who falsely calls himself Sancho III, and I have not given permission to any of my vassals or the members of my household for them to write to the Pretender. I have remained, in word, deed and thought, loyal to the cause of the King."

"Well spoken!" said the Regent with a warm smile. "Yes, you and I have heard the same rumours. Treachery and plots and all kinds of evil..." He lapsed into silence and all the amiability conveyed by his smile disappeared as he stared into the flames of fire.

At length, he spoke again, quietly. "So, you came to talk to me, Don Vedillo, about some things that concern you... Speak, if you please."

The Castillian nodded, a little nervously, and proceeded with something he had been rehearsing. "As you said, these are evil times. Dark fears and evil lies of every kind are stalking the Four Kingdoms. The gullible, whether high born or low, will often believe the lies or surrender to their fears."

"What is the heart of the matter?" Stephen asked. "The reason you sought audience with me – the nub, sir. Get to the nub."

"Very well. Many men are saying that you have invited Norman knights to come from England and France to help you against Prince Sancho. This silly gossip, I lament to say, is causing real anxiety in our army – the nobles fear that they will be pushed out of their own land by incoming Normans while the peasants are terrified that they will become slaves to Norman barons.

"There may even be some – at least, according to the reports I have heard – who would support Sancho and place him on the throne, not because they think he is the rightful King and not because they admire his abilities to rule, but because they would rather have *any* Spaniard sit on the throne than see the Normans gain any influence over the Four Kingdoms."

"That particular rumour *is* true," Stephen remarked. "Or, at least, it is partly true. I have written to my uncle, King Henry, and to my brother, Theobald, and they will send an army here. They won't arrive in time for the coming campaign season but it is my most earnest hope that they will arrive the following year. Good Norman ships, horses, knights – aye, and axemen and archers too. They'll see that the traitor reaps a bitter harvest and secure this land for my son, for Urraca's son."

"Do you actually mean what you say?" the old Spaniard asked aghast. "Can you really be planning this course? Knowing how much the Castillians resent *you* on account of your Norman blood, can you truly say that you have decided to bring yet more Normans to this land?"

The look on the Regent's face was hard to read – perhaps he was pained or mildly offended at the words of his second-in-command but perhaps just surprised to hear such opinions given voice in his presence. One could never tell with Stephen.

At length the Regent spoke, voice calm. "Enrique is your King, sovereign of Four Kingdoms, but he is my son and Theobald's nephew – aye, and Beauclerc's great-nephew to boot. Yes, he hold the throne because of his mother, not because of me or any Norman blood, but he is still *my* son. He belongs to my house – the House of Blois – and it is my duty to defend his inheritance until he is full-grown. In the execution of this sacred duty, I call upon my blood family – upon Enrique's blood family – to summon their retinues and come here to Spain to defend our family's honour, to defend Enrique's property and his title.

"You tell me not to bring Normans here but, without them, who will defend my son against the myriad enemies arrayed against him? Would you truly ask me to surrender the rights of a father?" And the tone in Stephen's voice was almost melancholic as he finished.

"No!" retorted a more animated Gonsalvez. "I do not ask you to cease being a father but, for the sake of the King and of your House, consider your duties as Regent! If you wish to serve your son's interests, you must first ensure that he *has* a Kingdom to inherit when he finally comes of age! My Lord, how will you protect His Majesty's throne if you estrange all the nobles who currently support them? Lord, can you not see that every Norman knight who sets foot on Castillian soil is a challenge – yes, a slap in the face – to all the Castillian nobles?" As he spoke, he had been leaning forward towards the Regent but now he sat back, looked away, tried to gather himself before going on.

"We are not stupid, you know!" Gonsalvez said at length. "We have seen what Normans do. We have seen Apulia and Calabria – you came there and you never left; worse, you *rule*."

"We do," Stephen conceded calmly. "With the permission of His Holiness."

Gonsalvez seemed not to have heard. "England, too, you took and held, killing a King to take his crown on the field of Senlac!"

"Yes. And there, too, His Holiness gave my grandfather permission."

"Ah!" spat an exasperated Gonsalvez. "You just refuse to see. Every time you Normans come to a land, you end up ruling it. These freebooters your brother will bring – oh, yes, they will win battles for us and maybe even win the war but will they go home afterward? No! Stay, that's what they'll do. Stay, and take our land – estates our most ancient ancestors built and defended against the Moors while your ancestors still worshipped Odin in Norway!"

"God's blood, Count Stephen! People are angry at the mere *influence* the Normans have; what do you think will happen when you bring an army of these people? The whole kingdom will turn against you! Is your brother's army big enough to subdue all of Castille and hold a hostile populace in check? It had better be, because that is the task you face if you bring Norman barons to this country. Our kingdom is already split between Sancho and Enrique. You'll split the supporters of the rightful King and drive men – good men, loyal men with ancient pedigrees and strong blades – right into the arms of that outlaw, Sancho!"

His face now annoyingly expressionless, the Regent spoke. "At least you're forthright..." he said, then lapsing into silence. Gonsalvez, for his part, waited, waited for Stephen's rejoinder to the picture he had laid out. Minutes passed in silence until the weight of unspoken words grew, pressing down on the older man, forcing him to speak out.

"I think you should consider abdicating the Regency. Let a native Castillian take on that station. I am loath to speak so crudely but, after all, you are a foreigner and there are many who distrust your motives. A native would, at least, not be viewed as the vanguard of an alien invasion."

"And I am?"

"If you want the truth, Lord, yes. Some see you as the precursor to a Norman conquest – and the number who feel this way is growing daily and will grow yet further when people hear of the arrival of Norman knights. You must understand that we, who support King Enrique, act as we do because he is the son and rightful heir of our Queen, not because he is a Norman or a half-Norman. We fight so we may sweep away that pretender and opportunist, Sancho, and all his followers; we do not fight so that foreign knights and barons may sail here from France and England to take up our land and sit in positions of power in our Court.

"I ask you," he went on, "to see that you have duties and responsibilities – both as a father and as the Regent of the Four Kingdoms. As a father, you wish to ensure that your son's birthright is unchallenged but the best way to achieve that is to win the favour of the hidalgos of Castille and Léon by showing them that you – and your son, the King – are committed to the defending the ancient traditions of this land; you must see that inviting Norman freebooters to come and make their home here will do nothing but to disaffect those who support you.

"As the Regent of this country, you must comprehend the dangers implicit in your current course of action. No Norman expedition will conquer the Four Kingdoms. No Norman barons can hold this land down and impose King Enrique's rule. If you wish for your son to reign over the whole of this land, without perpetual war, you must seek the support and favour of the great lords and grandees of this land. This means, my Lord Count, that you cannot threaten their position or their wealth or their estates or anything that is *theirs* by introducing Norman warriors to Spain, men who will surely seek to grow rich by taking our property and who will gain status by adopting the titles of Castillian nobles they've slain.

"In the end, the Normans will be seen as invaders – invaders coming, not in support of your House or of your son, but to conquer our land, just as they conquered Italy and France and England. I believe that the coming of the Normans, and the strengthening of Norman influence at court, will galvanise this country behind Sancho. Even your most loyal adherents will face no option but to rally to the banner of Castille, however odious its bearer may be, and fight against the invader." As an afterthought Gonsalvez added: "Just as we have fought the Moor, these many centuries past."

Stephen seemed quite unmoved by the speech of his lieutenant. "I hear your opinions, Don Vedillo, and I promise to give them their proper weight in my ponderings. However, I *am* the Regent of Castille; I *am* the father of the King; and I am also the only person in the whole of this country who may be trusted to have Enrique's best interests completely at heart. I believe that the benefits of having Norman soldiers backing our cause far, far outweighs any danger posed by the estrangement of the nobility.

“So, I will continue to extend my invitation and my request to my brother and my uncle that they should send men here to defend the cause of the rightful King against Sancho, the usurper. As to the question of Norman influence at court,” and here Stephen let a funny little smile spread across his face, “whether the grandees of Spain like to hear this or not, it is a fact that I, a Norman, am the King’s father. God has lain duties and responsibilities upon the shoulders of every father – and no less on mine – so I must take up all my obligations to my son and win his throne back for him. I must do this, Don Vedillo. I and no other,” he finished, sarcasm heavy in his words, “though I be a Norman pirate, hated and feared by all the bold caballeros of Spain.”

Don Vedillo rose gracefully from his seat. “I shall leave now, Lord Regent. I can see that you have made up your mind and that no words of mind will change it. Very well, I respect your wishes. But, still, I believe you are making a mistake and that your son, our rightful King, may have to pay for it.”

“I hope not,” said Stephen, affably. “I should feel quite discomfited if my son underwent any suffering on my account.”

Gonsalvez nodded, not fully understanding what Stephen meant, bowed stiffly and departed the room and the villa. His efforts to salvage the cause of Urraca’s son and to forestall Norman intervention had been destroyed completely by Stephen’s intransigence and shortsightedness; but, on the positive side of the ledger, Stephen seemed to believe that Gonsalvez was not, in fact, conspiring with Sancho and this meant that he, Gonsalvez, would probably manage to avoid the gruesome fate of old Cambranes...

Stephen’s Villa in Palencia, January, 1122:

While King Enrique’s army celebrated Yule and the New Year and toasted themselves with rich wines, all of the Regent’s mental energy was being directed towards the planning for the coming campaign. As soon as the warmer Spring weather descended, the whole army would continue its progress against the invaders from Aragon. Little time, then, was left for Stephen to celebrate, and his preoccupation with martial affairs was reflected in the heavy traffic of messengers, heralds and assorted officers of the Crown passing into and out of Count Stephen’s villa; while the ordinary soldiers made merry, the great nobles and leaders of the army were kept busy by this seemingly incessant string of messages from the Count calling upon them to ensure the readiness of their men, to gather sufficient supplies for the campaign, to prepare squadrons of scouts; in short, to spend their every waking moment priming themselves for a campaign that would not begin for at least a couple of months. Needless to say, Count Stephen’s Norman zeal was not appreciated by the hidalgos and caballeros...

As chance would have it, on the second Sunday of the New Year, the Regent took a break from his usual round of martial planning to attend a fine Mass which was planned for that day – every noble in the army would attend this Mass, where prayers would be given for victory, and a blessing received from His Grace, the Bishop of Palencia (one of only a few clerics to express support for the child Enrique). Unsurprisingly, Count Stephen took particular care with his personal appearance on a day of such significance – his barber carefully trimmed his hair and beard; his Steward brought out his finest rings and jewels; and his laundress was instructed to prepare the most opulent clothes in the Count’s wardrobe. On this day, at this Mass, Stephen planned to make a real impression on his men; as his personal servants filed into the room to dress him, Stephen eyed his bejewelled red velvet tunic, its collar embroidered with a Saxon English pattern, and at his boots of kidskin and smiled. On this day, he would be very well-dressed before the eyes of the assembled dignitaries. On this day he would, in fact, dress to kill.

A bare ten minutes after the dressers³⁴ entered their liege’s presence, a piercing cry tore the otherwise still villa: “THE REGENT HAS BEEN TAKEN ILL! SUMMON A PHYSIC AT ONCE!!”

The Regent’s guards burst into the chamber, servants and personal attendants following and, bringing up the rear, Count Stephen’s personal leech – a Norman by the name of Aylwin. Inside, they found the Count flat upon the floor, his dressers stooped over him impotently searching for some way to assist their master. Aylwin strode to the stricken Count’s side and found him barely conscious, unable to move, his breathing laboured. At the medic’s command, Stephen was picked up from the floor and carried back to his bed where a closer examination could be made. By and by, as the sick man’s strength waned yet further and the crowd in the room grew yet more fearful, Aylwin made his diagnosis.

“Poison,” he said flatly, turning away from his patient to address the swarm of grandees and servants who now filled the Regent’s private chamber. “I know not what poison nor how it was administered but this,” and he gestured to the prostrate Stephen, “is the work of some noxious toxin.”

Most of the people in the room were hustled out at Aylwin’s command, with only a few of the more important nobles being allowed to stay to discuss the likely fate of the Regent. While the Norman doctor and the Castillian peers conversed, servants began to undress the Count (who was still clad in the finery he had planned on

³⁴ i.e., servants who would help a noble to dress.

wearing to Mass) and, as they tugged his tunic from his body, one of them let out a violent oath that caused all in the room to turn.

“Look at His Lordship’s body!” shouted a servant in a coarse Spanish dialect, amidst extravagant gestures. “Look at those marks!”

Although Aylwin could not understand the exact words used, he followed the man’s gesticulations and saw, covering the Count’s pale and clammy torso, a dozen or so little red marks, small blotches that only appeared really prominent because of their livid colour. Bending close to examine the blemishes, Aylwin ignored the chorus of demands for explanation coming from the others in the room and, instead, gingerly – *very* gingerly – picked up the Count’s fine shirt that lay at the foot of the bed, where the servants had dropped it. After a couple of moments’ examination, the doctor, face now ashen, turned to the assembled courtiers, held out the shirt and spoke; the words came jerkily and all the usual blustery Norman self-confidence was absent.

“Somebody has hidden little needles in the Count’s shirt. They must have been tainted with some poison or other...”

“Nonsense!” barked the Steward of the Royal Household, a gangly and insecure old Léonese nobleman. “This cannot be so! The servants would have noticed if there were needles. Why, the Regent himself would have noticed if he was being pricked to death by poisoned needles! An absurd idea!”

The attack caused Aylwin the Leech to recover a little of his buoyancy. “The needles are small, good Steward. Their pressure on the skin, even if they broke it, might not cause anything more than a little discomfort. Look at them for yourself... And, with that, he passed the shirt to the nearest hidalgo who did as he was bade and scrutinised the garment closely. Sure enough, here and there tiny needles – pieces of sharp metal so small they scarcely deserved the name of “needle” – had been affixed to the inside of the shirt; some were stuck onto the backs of the jewels with which the tunic was bedecked; others were attached to the inside of the collar.

“What manner of poison is on the needles?” asked a young caballero.

Another, older, gentleman spoke over him: “Who would have been able to do this? One of the dressers? We must put them to the torture and find out who is behind this!”

“Sancho is behind it!” cried the Steward. “No other would profit from the murder of our Lord!”

“He’s not dead yet,” the medic muttered darkly but he was forgotten in the general uproar. The room soon emptied as the great nobles of King Enrique’s cause rushed off – some to arrest servants; others to spread the news that the Regent had been struck down by an assassin; still others to sneak off to their friends and allies in the hope of gathering enough support to seize the Regency. Aylwin sighed. The deaths of princes were always such messy affairs...

In any case, a couple of things of import happened during the rest of that day. First, careful investigations and more than a little torture found that Count Stephen’s trusted seamstress and laundress had disappeared from the city and, apparently, from all human knowledge. She had last been seen on the prior evening when she had prepared his fine clothing for Mass, just as might ordinarily be expected, and had then passed them to the servants who cared for the Regent’s wardrobe. Curiously, she had given strict injunctions to the other servants about the need to be especially careful in handling the Count’s clothes – she had claimed the jewels and fabrics were uncommonly rare and delicate and might be destroyed beyond her skill to repair if mishandled. When the lady’s personal quarters were searched, only one suspicious thing was found, viz., a vial – clearly of exotic, perhaps Oriental, origin – which contained a strange yellow-white residue later identified as the venom of the cobra!

Second, the Count’s body proved unequal to the stresses placed upon it and he gave up the ghost early that very evening. The next day, Vedillo Gonsalvez, broadly respected on account of his age and seniority within the Court, was granted the powers of regency by the nobles following a brief election in the Cathedral of Palencia. In public, Gonsalvez swore upon the Bible and upon sacred relics of martyred saints that he would be faithful to King Enrique I, govern the realm wisely on the King’s behalf and turn over control of the state as soon as the King reached the age of majority.

No-one said so openly but it was widely felt that the poisoning of the Count had worked out very much to Vedillo’s advantage – with Stephen dead, he had no need to fear any possible retribution from that direction; and he was now finally in a position to thwart the cancerous spread of Norman influence in Castille, something which Vedillo had always felt was the greatest threat to uniting the country behind Enrique.

Be that as it may, Vedillo oversaw arrangements for the interment of Stephen IV, Count of Blois and Regent of the Four Kingdoms. With the death coming so suddenly, no grand tomb had been prepared but a fairly respectable vault was found belonging to a local family who had run off to join Sancho; with little formality, it was requisitioned

in the name of King Enrique and used to house the mortal remains of a Norman Princeling who had come all the way from France to be a consort to the lamented Queen Urraca and had ended up fighting a war to place Urraca's child on the throne.

Spring 1122: With Count Stephen firmly in the embrace of the tomb, Vedillo, now acting with total authority on behalf of King Enrique, took his place at the head of the army and marched to drive the Aragonese invader out of New Castille. For their part, the leaders of the Aragonese army, Crown Prince Alfonso and Don Fernandez, were not especially happy with what they found in New Castille. Having been led to expect a welcome from a populace which broadly supportive of King Sancho, they found, instead, a hostile people who cursed Sancho and his Aragonese lackeys. More importantly, the Crown Prince was expecting to link up with King Sancho so that, jointly, they could crush Stephen's revolt. Sadly, neither Sancho nor his army were anywhere to be found in New Castille!

In any case, during April of 1122, these two armies engaged in a series of complicated manoeuvres. The Aragonese were severely constricted, as they marched and foraged, by the presence of half-a-dozen stout castles and hillforts whence raiding garrisons would sally to cut supply lines and ambush scouting parties. Eventually, by the start of the last week of April, the two armies were brought to face each other across the broad and dusty plain outside the little city of Alcalá de Henares. On the western end of the field of honour, beneath their quartered Lion and Castle Banner, stood an army of Castille y León, loyal to King Enrique I de Blois and led by that proud old caballero Don Vedillo Gonsalvez. They numbered something less than ten thousand men, about a third of whom were mounted; they were further augmented by a force of fifteen hundred Moors under the allied Emir al-Zazaqah of Salamanca. The all, effectiveness of Vedillo's army was enhanced somewhat by the presence of several forts and castles in the area which had severely curtailed the movements and other activities of the Aragonese invader.

On the eastern end of the field, the Aragonese drew up their lines. They numbered around eight thousand men and at their head stood the King's most trusted and brilliant knight, Don Fernandez de Tortosa, the glory-covered champion of a hundred tournaments, a master of the arts of combat and a veteran fighter of unparalleled courage. Also skulking around this army was the less-than-martial Crown Prince Alfonso who, though neither a coward nor a bumbling incompetent, certainly lacked both the imagination needed to be a worthy general and the mastery of weapons needed to be a great warrior. Despite the fact that his princely rank placed the burden of command squarely on his shoulder, the Crown Prince had deferred in all decisions to the great Tortosa who became, in effect, leader of the Aragonese force.

Battle took a while to commence. In Summer, the armies would have fought and decided the issue as early as possible, preferably before the harsh noon sun made the business of war impossible to conduct. Yet, these April days were cool and pleasant (and even a little chilly in the morning!) so there was but little need to hurry. It was around eleven in the morning before the army of Aragon and Navarre finished its deployments and made ready to start shedding blood; the Castillians were a little quicker, having readied themselves a half an hour prior.

Confident in the strength of his army and well-informed by spies and scouts about the weaknesses and deficiencies of the force which opposed him, Tortosa took the initiative and *attacked!* His army he spread in a north-south line on the eastern side of the battlefield; the knights in their heavy armour, some two thousand in number, formed a great mass held back on the southern side (his left flank), ready to rupture the enemy line; four thousand feudal infantrymen, half spear-armed peasant drafts commanded by non-noble bigwigs and half well-trained men-at-arms under their lords, formed the bulk of the army; they were drawn in thin lines that resembled a phalanx. Behind them, providing a little support, were the hand-picked corps of Navarrese archers, men who owed fealty to no lord or baron but only to the King personally. Finally, at the northern end of the army (the extreme right flank), more than a thousand horseless knights of the King's Household; with the weather being so cool, they were able to wear *all* their armour without fear of suffering heatstroke – mail coats clad them from head to foot; iron helms protected their heads and faces; their shields, too, would ward off the blows of enemy blades. Last but not least, the King's personal regiment of five hundred horse archers – armed in the Moorish fashion and riding only small horses – was held back in reserve. Fernandez decided, for the duration of the battle, he should stay with the dismounted knights who, he fully expected, would push straight through the Castillian lines with ease and perhaps decide the battle. The Crown Prince, in keeping with his high dignity, stayed with the mounted knights and would, when the time was right, lead these men in a momentous and devastating charge. So much for the Aragonese plan...

On the western side of the field, old Vedillo was only too happy to take the defensive rôle and let his advantage in numbers and quality tell. To oppose the thousand or so dismounted Aragonese knights at the north of the field, Vedillo set two thousand of his own finest footmen; facing the Crown Prince and his horsemen at the south, another thousand heavily-armoured Castillian caballeros were deployed, all of whom were men whose loyalty to King Enrique was above question; in the centre, the defenders disposed of about four thousand infantry (a mixture of Castillian yeomen and their Moorish allies from Salamanca), a thousand archers plus two thousand cavalry, half of whom were Moors and the rest Christian.

A little while before noon, Fernandez de Tortosa signalled the advance and the whole army of Aragon and Navarre trundled slowly but determinedly across the flat expanse of the plain. The Castillians held their ground

quietly, awaiting either the enemy's charge or the order to advance, but neither order came. Instead, the long line of the Aragonese army halted, in a cloud of its own dust, about three hundred yards away from the Castilians; there, Tortosa's men dressed ranks and made ready... On both sides, the wooden shafts of arrows clacked against bows followed by the strum of a thousand bowstrings propelling the missiles skywards, then to plummet down onto the men opposite. Arrows fell, tearing flesh and piercing armour, and the first blood was shed in this, the Battle of Alcalà de Henares. All at once, the opposing commanders – Vedillo Gonsalvez for Castille and Fernandez de Tortosa for Aragon – ordered their men to attack!

The Aragonese attacked on the flanks – their heavy infantry on the northern end of the line and their knights charging at the southern end; in the centre, between the flanks, their infantry and archers were simply to hold the line and nothing more. The Castilians employed a somewhat different strategy. Recognising the vulnerability of the enemy's centre, Vedillo opted to hold tightly to the defensive on the flanks while counterattacking hard in the centre. The Castilian hope was that the enemy's centre would crumble and the men on the flanks would be left with no option but to retreat. Needless to say, it was a risky manoeuvre for if the Aragonese were victorious on the flanks, they could wheel around and destroy the Castilian centre with ease...

In any case, battle was now joined. To the north of the battle line, Fernandez personally led his best footmen against the very cream of Castille's infantry. Progress in this quarter was slow because, with men on both sides wearing such heavy armour, mobility was extremely inhibited. The lines of iron-clad nobles clashed and pushed one another back and forth for almost an hour but little was achieved, no ground was taken and losses were surprisingly light; occasionally, a man might fall and be hacked or stabbed as he lay immobile on the ground but such losses were the exception and, really, very few men died on this part of the field during the first hour.

To the south, things were also progressing less well than the Aragonese had planned. Crown Prince Alfonso had been supposed to lead his knights in a great charge that would sweep the Castilian southern wing from the field at exactly the moment when Fernandez attacked on the northern wing. Sadly, poor Alfonso was not entirely up to the job for, despite some personal bravery, he did not really understand how to lead a force of fighting men and had not been able to array his cavalry for this vital attack. Bizarrely, while the Aragonese knights dithered and waited for nearly half an hour, waiting for their Prince to signal the charge, the Castilians opposite actually got bored waiting and decided to stage a countercharge! About eighteen hundred Castilian caballeros, shouting their warcry of "*Blois!*" threw off the fetters of defensive warfare and charged across the three or four hundred yards that separated them from the invader. The weight of this initial charge was considerable and it pushed the poorly-organised and unsuspecting Aragonese back far and hard.

In the centre, meanwhile, Vedillo and the Muslim Emir of Salamanca personally led a frontal assault against the foe. The Aragonese line held their own, at first, with the support of some very effective Navarrese archers who split the blood of many a fine Castilian that day. Yet, the Aragonese centre depended too heavily on the commitment of untrained and ill-equipped peasant drafts. These men, who formed about half of the entire army in this sector, could only hunker down behind wicker shields, hoping that the battle would pass them by and depending on the better-trained men-at-arms to do the actual fighting. When the Castilian infantry got close enough to strike them, many of the peasants quailed and ran. When the Moorish and Léonese cavalry charged, all the rest fled, running from the fields and hoping against hope that they might survive this terrible day and reach their homes once more.

At this point, things were clearly going badly for Aragon-Navarre. Their cavalry were being pushed from the field by a bold Castilian charge and their centre was ruptured with almost half their total strength actually routing. Things, though, could perhaps be salvaged. Don Fernandez de Tortosa, a bold warrior and cunning strategist, might still reclaim the initiative and save the day. But the Hand of the Lord moves in mysterious ways and, on this day, He chose to strike the bold cavalier of Aragon down. While the two phalanxes pushed back and forth on the northern wing of the army, Tortosa, typically leading from the front, was knocked off balance and fell to his knees. In this vulnerable position, he was struck a glancing blow by a Castilian mace and lapsed into unconsciousness. The blow was certainly not enough to kill him and, had he been rescued, he would surely have survived but, prostrate on the field, he was trodden on time and again by the two vying corps. His final fate was not ascertained until the evening after the battle when looters, searching for valuable armour from the fallen heroes, discovered a disfigured corpse with the distinctive livery of the House of Tortosa.

But, in any case, upon seeing him fall (and assuming that he was already dead), the troops of Aragon-Navarre's northern wing were stripped of their fighting spirit and, like their compatriots elsewhere on the field, chose to withdraw and abandon this fight. With Tortosa gone, there was no-one to rally them... No-one except, that is, the Crown Prince! But where was he? This was a question none could answer. Crown Prince Alfonso had simply disappeared from the battlefield! The answer to the mystery was only uncovered when the Castilians were inspecting some of the prisoners they'd taken and found that one of them was none other than Crown Prince Alfonso of Aragon and Navarre!! He and a few of his entourage had been overwhelmed and captured during the Castilian countercharge.

What a tragedy, what an humiliation for Aragon-Navarre! Her finest captain lay dead; her Crown Prince was a captive; and two thousand of her dead were strewn across the field of honour. But, for Castille, this was a day of

unwonted glory and one that would surely be celebrated for centuries to come as the greatest triumph of Castilian arms for generations!

So much for the battle. As the remnants of the Aragonese-Navarrese army scrambled out of New Castille, the Regent was able to settle down and starve the city of Toledo into submission over the Summer. No offensive was made by the partisans of Sancho in Old Castille.

Towards the end of the year, a messenger from Normandy showed up with a letter bearing the seal of the County of Blois. It was a missive from Stephen's brother, Theobald, stating that he and his loyal band of Norman chevaliers were coming to Spain to secure the throne for his nephew (the infant King Enrique) and to defend the rights of the House of Blois. Upon reading this, the Regent could think of only one thing to say: "Bugger."

Spring 1123: As the comfortable Spring weather was beginning to give way to the heat of Summer, a convoy of strange-looking ships was spotted off the coast of Galicia flying a strange banner that seemed to quarter the red-and-gold lion standard of Normandy with the familiar lion-and-castle banner of Castille. The significance of the fleet (and its curious flag) was quickly apprehended by the Galician nobles – the fleet, they guessed, was a Norman relief force, come to Spain to help shore up the cause of the infant Enrique.

Panic gripped the whole region for the Galicians were universally committed to the cause of King Sancho III and the House of Alfonsez (or, rather, the nobles were committed; the peasants and fishermen, for the most part, didn't care). Within a couple of weeks of the fleet's presence first being reported, it dropped anchor in a large bay on the northern coast and troops began disembarking. A total of four thousand footmen and almost fifteen hundred horsemen were counted. The infantry were mostly Anglo-Norman men-at-arms, though their numbers were stiffened by a thousand Saxon bowmen recruited mostly from Northumbria (which was the home and fief of Robert de Mowbray, stepfather of the brothers Stephen and Theobald of Blois). The cavalry were made up entirely of Norman and Frankish cavaliers, mostly younger men from minor or impoverished families who hoped, by participating in this expedition, to improve their fortunes. The Galicians looked upon them, quailed and fled south to Portugal as quickly as their horses would carry them, leaving behind their estates and property to be picked over by the invader.

The Anglo-Normans, then, had a very easy time establishing control over the region of Galicia. Their leader, Count Theobald of Blois, took great care to impress upon everyone that he was coming not as a conqueror but as a liberator and, more importantly, as the defender of his nephew's sovereign and legal rights to the Crown. As if to emphasise that he did not wish to subjugate the people of Galicia, Count Theobald ordered that the army should completely bypass the city of Santiago de Compostela. Knowing that his men had a short fuse and would be apt to plunder, the Count was fearful that, if he took the great religious centre by siege or storm, his men would plunder it and probably reduce the whole metropolis to a smouldering pile of ash.

As it happened, Theobald was worrying about nothing. Scouts, sent ahead of the main army, poked their noses into the vicinity of Santiago and found that the walls were almost non-existent and there was no garrison! By a stroke of luck, they managed to seize the gates before the citizenry could shut them. In this way, the great and ancient city was captured without the spilling of a drop of blood! Joyous was the entry of Theobald and his conquering army, though it took a lot of effort on the Count's part to prevent his men from looting the place. In fact, sad to report, the only way he could dissuade his ravenous legions from ransacking the city was to promise that they would be allowed to pillage the predominantly Muslim region of Portugal...

Back in Léon, meanwhile, the Regent had surrounded the capital yet again and, this time, was able to compel the city to surrender by blockading its supply of food. With no expectation of relief and facing its third siege in as many years, even Sancho's most loyal adherents thought that capitulation was the more sensible option.

Summer-Winter 1123: Theobald marched on from Santiago into Portugal. Although the Catholics nobles of the place had, like their Galician counterparts, enthusiastically embraced the rule of King Sancho, the lower classes (being largely, though not entirely, Muslim) were much more keen to see King Enrique succeed to the throne, for they hoped that he, as a Norman, would treat them more tolerantly than the Alfonsez Kings had. But, even amongst the aristocrats, very few were prepared to take up arms to resist this Norman invasion. Too many Portuguese caballeros had fallen in 1121 during the ill-fated incursion into Castille; a greater loss of life could not be risked.



Pesky Normans steal stuff from the Portuguese.
(Picture filched from the British Library).

So it was that Theobald's army advanced easily, meeting no resistance. But things were soon to change, for the Norman soldiers remembered that their leader had given them a free hand to loot the country and that was exactly what they planned to do! Marching down from the northern frontier at a leisurely pace, they raided every village that they came across – food and drink were consumed on the

spot; livestock was carried off to provide food for the army as it marched; crops were put to the torch. The homes of the wealthy were targeted, too; the manors and villas of caballeros and emirs were stormed, their furnishings taken or destroyed, according to the caprice of the looters; all valuables – whether coin, jewellery, gems or tapestry – were looted by the Norman soldiery. Nor was the suffering of the people of Portugal insubstantial – Muslim women and girls suffered terrible outrages against their persons; those who resisted – and any men who tried to defend them – were slain; many other Portuguese were kidnapped by the Normans, to be sold into slavery when the opportunity arose. For those who survived the passage of the army, the grim spectre of starvation loomed.

Count Theobald, although he did not actively participate in spreading this terror, did nothing to stop it. Indeed, his only action was to issue a proclamation that forbade the enslavement of or theft from any Catholic who was loyal to King Enrique; and, having done that, he promptly decreed that a full quarter of the loot raised by his army would become his personal portion (the Count also managed to acquire a private harem of half-a-dozen captive Muslim girls who, it was reputed, now served as his mistresses). Thus, even if he did not actively steal or rape or slay, Theobald still profited from the crimes of his men who did all of these things.

Coming, at length, to the predominantly Catholic town of Braga, Count Theobald took a particular pleasure in noting that this place was the Archepiscopal See of Mauritius Burdinus, believed by some to be one of the chief architects of the German schism. Visting the city's magnificent cathedral (the only one in all of Portugal!), he commented acerbically that it was a pity such a beautiful edifice should be the seat of so corrupt and impious a man as Burdinus. The local people, knowing that Theobald and his family were bitter enemies of the German Emperor and, by extension, the Archbishop of Braga, grew nervous and feared that they would be punished for their master's crimes.

As it happened, Theobald was not without reason. He understood that no-one in Spain or Portugal seriously supported the German Antipope and that to sack or otherwise injure a Catholic city would, in the first instance, be unjustifiable and, in the second, would neither harm the Germans nor strengthen the Roman Papacy. Instead of violence, the Count had recourse to more subtle measures. On the last Sunday in June, 1123, he ordered that the treacherous Burdinus of Braga should be deposed, stripped of office in and authority over the See and Cathedral of Braga. In the ousted Archbishop's place, Count Theobald installed his own personal confessor upon the throne of the Cathedral; this confessor was, to the chagrin of most Castillians, a tall, thin Norman named Werinbert of Caen, with a hatchet-face and cold, cruel eyes.



The Cathedral of St John, Braga

When questioned by some of his own followers about the legality and wisdom of dethroning an Archbishop of the Catholic Church, Theobald scoffed. "Our apostate Duke of Franconia believes that it is within the purview of Kings to invest Bishops. The current mouthpiece of the schismatic German church is none other than the Archbishop of Braga – and the See of Braga is subject to the Castillian throne. Yet all claimants to the Crown of this country have declared for Paschal and Rome. Does that not make the position of the Emperor's understudy something paradoxical?"

It was generally agreed that, while the removal of a churchman was outwith the authority of any nobleman and even went beyond the power of any monarch, the Emperor had created the precedent. If it was legitimate (as Henry of Franconia maintained) for a monarch to appoint or remove a bishop, it was legitimate for Theobald to remove Burdinus (on behalf of his nephew, King Enrique). The only way in which Henry or Burdinus could protest the move was if they denied their own doctrine of royal supremacy – or so Theobald and his men claimed (actually, there was another way they could protest, viz., to deny that Enrique was the rightful King at all and, by extension, to portray Theobald's actions as those of a brigand devoid of the least degree of legitimacy – which was exactly what they did!).

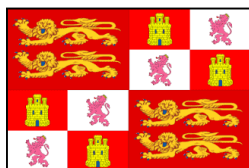
In any case, from Braga, the Norman army marched south along the coast towards Lisbon. The Count, upon starting this campaign, had seemed to have no interest in taking the city but his assessment was ignored by the fighting men who longed to plunder and loot the city, with its large community of wealthy Muslim and Jewish merchant. So, they marched, in spite of the Count's aversion to the plan, to seize Lisbon! When they were only a few days' away from the city, his scouts reported that, just as with Santiago, the city was undefended and practically unwallled and, indeed, surrendered at the mere approach of the Normans! Once more, Theobald's men took a city that was loyal to Sancho without a fight! Some looting followed the capture of the place but it was on a limited scale and restricted only to non-Christians; certainly, there was less violence in Lisbon than there had been in the hinterland.

1124-1125: The war settled down into quiet inaction. The partisans of the House of Alfonsez continued to stand on the defensive in Old Castille, waiting for an attack that would never come, while the partisans of Blois contented themselves with their victory over Aragon-Navarre. The arrival of Count Theobald seemed to have

tipped the scale in this civil war, depriving King Sancho of many of his most loyal adherents along the oceanic littoral and in the great cities of the realm. Yet, even when the Count and his Norman army marched up to the liberated capital of Ciudad León in the Spring of 1124, the Blois faction did not attack Old Castille.

1125 finished with Vedillo Gonsalvez and Count Theobald of Blois in León, commanding the two distinct sections of King Enrique's army (viz., the native Castillians and the Norman incomers); meanwhile, King Sancho III was stewing in Old Castille with his own exclusively Castillian army...

The Christian Kingdoms of Castille, Leon, Toledo and Galicia (House of BLOIS)



Ruler: Vedillo Gonsalvez, Regent for King Enrique I of Castille, Leon, Toledo and Galicia (*House of Blois*)

Capital: Ciudad León

Religion: Roman Catholic

On the whole, King Enrique's faction had a good time of it, regaining much of the Kingdom from the hands of Sancho the Usurper. So successful were their reconquests that, by the end of 1125, the skeletal civil service could no longer effectively govern the kingdom; nor could any ministers of state be spared to assist in the administration of the land. As a result, tax revenues were much less than they would otherwise have been.

In any case, with the recapture of Ciudad León in 1123, many high courtiers and other nobles were able to return to the royal capital and take up their old lodgings. For reasons of security, the child Enrique kept out of the city and resided, instead, at a royal estate in the countryside where he was cared for by trusted servants and nurses; but the Regent took residence in the capital and, from there, began executing all his duties, including the reception of foreign ambassadors and native aristocrats.



The Late Stephen IV,
Count of Blois
Regent of Castille

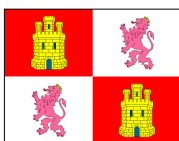
For those who paid attention to the doings of the court, it was clear that there was some relief in many quarters at the death of Stephen of Blois. Had he lived, he would probably have invited many Norman nobles to Spain to help secure his son's inheritance; inevitably, these foreigners would have acquired lands, estates and titles (probably culled from the dead or exiled supporters of Sancho) and, in a short space of time, Castille would have become like England or Sicily or, increasingly, France – no more than another subject province of the Norman Empire. Yes, Stephen's death seemed to remove many sources of instability, seemed to ensure that Castille could remain under the rule of a King who was Castillian in his attitudes, language and culture (even if he were half-Norman by blood).

It was, then, a matter of much horror for the Castillians in general (and for Vedillo in particular) when news was brought informing them of the arrival of Stephen's brother, Theobald of Blois, and five thousand Norman warriors. Admittedly, these men could easily tip the balance in the war and perhaps assure a victory for King Enrique *but* they probably would not wish to return to Normandy or England once the war was over; no, they would want Castillian land. Most people agreed that Theobald, being the uncle of the child King, would probably demand to be made Regent in place of Gonsalvez. Anxiety descended, once more, on this careworn land. Some even wondered aloud whether Theobald would seek vengeance of his brother's murder; perhaps the Count of Blois and his Norman army would take vengeance on Vedillo Gonsalvez, who was said (in some circles) to have been responsible for the heinous deed.

As luck would have it, when he finally arrived at the capital in 1124 (after conquering Galicia and Portugal and looting the latter), Theobald did not try to take the regency, nor did he deliberately interfere in the decisions and arrangements that Gonsalvez had put in place. However, his position as the King's closest blood relative (other than Sancho, who was also Enrique's uncle) made him a man of some influence, so that no decisions could realistically be taken by the Regent without first considering how Theobald would react. To make things even more tense, a small but steady stream of Norman chevaliers *did* arrive in Ciudad León and became regular fixtures at the Regent's Court.

The old Castillian-Leónese banner – featuring the castle-and-lion – was retired and replaced by the one that Theobald brought, quartering the old arms with those of the Duchy of Normandy.³⁵

The Christian Kingdoms of Castille, Leon, Toledo and Galicia (House of ALFONSEZ)



Ruler: Sancho III Alfonsez, son of Alfonso VI and True King of Castille, Leon, Toledo and Galicia (*House of Alfonsez*)

Gemmill for creating the flag!

Capital: None.

Religion: Roman Catholic

Troubled times for the House of Alfonsez. It looked as though the whole Kingdom might fall into the hands of Urraca's half-Norman brat – Portugal and Galicia were both gone; the great cities of the realm, strongholds filled with Sancho's supporters, had all fallen to the enemy; Norman reinforcements poured into Spain; and even the Crown Prince of Aragon-Navarre, bringing aid to Sancho's cause, was a captive, his army scattered to the winds.

If there was any hope for Sancho's cause, it surely lay in the widespread dissatisfaction at the Norman presence in Castille. Why, even the Muslims, who had been wholehearted in their support of Urraca's heir, now bridled at the outrages which Theobald's Norman mercenaries had perpetrated in Portugal. Sancho looked at his army, still sizeable and not lacking in courage or competence, and then he beheld the widespread fear, apprehension and, in places, outright hostility that was provoked by the presence of the Normans...

All at once, this cunning politician realised that there was still much to play for. Smirking to himself at the apprehension of so many new openings, he suddenly knew that the jig was not yet up. Indeed, the dance might not even have begun yet!

The Christian Kingdoms of Aragon and Navarre



Ruler: Alfonso I *el Battalador*, King of Aragon and Navarre

Capital: none

Religion: Roman Catholic

The civil war in Castille-Leon called for an urgent and decisive response, not least because Aragon-Navarre was bound by treaty to aid the Crown of Castille in times of trouble. The problem, though, was that there were now *two* claimants to the Crown of Castille and each had a compelling case (indeed, each was the child of a previous Castillian monarch!). The easiest option, of course, was that Alfonso of Navarre should simply stand aloof from the war and let the two factions beat each other bloody – a palatable enough idea, because it would make Alfonso's realm the pre-eminent Christian power in Spain while Castille was weakened and undermined by internal strife. But, in the end, an enfeebled Castille would merely encourage the advance of the Almoravids so, no, Alfonso could not sit back and let this war take its course; instead, he had to obey the strictures of his treaty and support the rightful heir to the Castillian throne.

But just who *was* the rightful heir? Well, to King Alfonso it was clear enough. Although Urraca had been lawfully crowned as Queen of the Four Kingdoms and had reigned for the duration of her life as the legitimate monarch, the defensive treaty which linked Aragon and Castille had been signed by Pedro I of Aragon-Navarre and Alfonso VI of Castille-Leon. This, in turn, implied that the two dynasties were committed to preserving each other and, since Sancho was the *son* of King Alfonso VI while Enrique was only a grandson (a grandson, what is worse, whose claim was staked on an inheritance that descended through the *female* line!), it naturally followed that Pedro I's son – Alfonso el Battalador of Aragon – should go to the aid of Sancho III, son of the late King of Castille and (in Aragonese eyes) rightful claimant to the throne of the Four Kingdoms! Huzzah!

Despite his warlike nickname, King Alfonso was not enthusiastic about leaving his kingdom in at this time to engage personally in a foreign war whose end was indefinite. Instead, he summoned one of his foremost champions – that famous knight and champion of a hundred tournaments, Fernandez de Tortosa – and his eldest son, the eighteen year old Crown Prince Alfonso. To them, he entrusted command of a formidable host: two thousand fine Spanish knights, mounted on the fiercest chargers and weighed down with the heaviest of armour; more than a thousand dismounted knights, all members of the King's household or men who held land in direct fief from the King (hence, men whose loyalty and commitment to King Alfonso was absolute); somewhat less than a thousand of the best archers that Christian Spain could produce, drilled and trained constantly to the peak of the bowman's art; about two thousand ordinary pikemen; and a similar number of untrained peasant levies (or "arrow fodder", as the unkind took to calling them) who had mostly been drafted into the King's army, equipped with a spear and sent on the march to war all in the same day. With the exception of these last fellows, it was a potent force and perhaps a sign that martial blood of the Visigoths still flowed strongly in the veins of the Spaniards.

In the Summer of 1121, this army marched off to battle and – as time would eventually show – calamity (*See The Castillian Civil War for details*). And while they campaigned, King Alfonso turned to more peaceful matters. First, Victor Rodrigues, the most annoying man in all of Spain, was sent off to Seville to negotiate a peace treaty with the dreaded Yusuf ibn Tashufin, Sultan of the Almoravids! Despite Victor's obvious lack of suitability for the job, he actually managed to produce a reasonable peace treaty *and* an agreement that the Berbers would sell the Balearic Islands to Navarre.

In that connexion, young Prince Jaime (who was all of seventeen years old) was sent off to the Balearics to encourage the local Muslims to view Christian rule as a sort of liberation. The islanders, who were a crude sort of people (by comparison with the sophisticated Moors of Andalusia) and who mostly made their living by preying on

merchant shipping, were less than enthusiastic about this proposed commencement of Christian rule; apart from the obvious fact that their new Christian ruler would probably take a dim view of their piratical depredations, they remembered the brutality that Alfonso's rule had brought to Valencia, the tales told of forced conversions and of members of the Faithful forced to taste pork flesh at the point of a sword. The islanders made it clear that the Aragonese were not welcome here and that any attempt to impose Infidel rule would not go unopposed. With such sentiments as these greeting him wherever he went, Jaime was soon compelled to leave the islands altogether and return to the mainland. Even though his mission had actually failed, he sailed for home with a feeling of supreme gladness and some sense of accomplishment (the fact that he convinced the Muslims *not* to cut his throat was, in its own way, something of an achievement...).

Back home, the only other major news to grip the Court of Aragon-Navarre was the death, in 1122, of the King's nephew – the twelve year old Pedro, son of King Pedro I, Alfonso's brother and predecessor. Courtiers commented that there were now only *three* of the late King Pedro's sons remained alive and capable of contesting the eventual succession of Alfonso's own sons, Jaime and Juan... Never were trees so tangled as the family trees of the Spanish Christian dynasties.

The al-Murabit Berber Sultanate

Ruler: Sultan Faouzi ibn Abd-Allah al-Murabi

Capital: Seville

Religion: Sunni Islam

The Sultan's mind was mostly occupied by matters concerning those infernal Christian Kingdoms to his north. Castille looked certain to be torn apart by civil war between the supporters of the half-Norman son of the late Queen Urraca and the partisans of Sancho, Urraca's half-brother. Meanwhile, according to certain sensitive rumours, Alfonso of Aragon was getting ready to intervene in the conflict, though it was not clear whose side he would take. If the two northern Christian states were to be ripped apart by the spectre of war, what would it mean for the Sultanate? Well, Sultan Yusuf ibn Tashufin was quite certain that the Almoravids could not fail to profit from this war. If the Christians were to fall on each other like wolves, the Almoravids, as the vanguard of Islam in Spain, could comfortably grow stronger while the Infidels grew weaker, shedding the blood of their finest men in war against their own kind. At worst, the borders of Moorish Spain would be more secure; at best, the Infidels might even bleed each other so gravely that the Sultanate could roll back the frontier of the Ummah and reclaim lands which had been lost the Christian *reconquista*.

But such things were a consideration for the distant future. Here and now, the Sultan's policy was simply to do nothing – he would stay out of these Christian civil war and let his neighbours settle things amongst themselves, as they saw fit. Indeed, not only would he stand apart from the brewing war, the Sultan actually decided that he wanted better relations with his Christian neighbours! So, in 1121, the citizens of that most beautiful and sun-drenched of cities, Sevilla, were treated to the bizarre sight of an Aragonese nobleman – one Victor Rodrigues, lately His Majesty's representative to the Duchy of Aquitaine – coming to beg an audience with the Sultan on behalf of King Alfonso the Warrior of Aragon-Navarre.

Why should this be a bizarre sight? Because the Almoravids, having burst out of the desert only a few decades ago with a religious zeal rarely seen in the Islamic since the days of the Prophet, had never cared much for treating or parleying with the Infidels. The Almoravids were fighters, not talkers – indeed, they seldom even bothered to maintain cordial relations with their fellow Muslims – and few of their sophisticated Moorish subjects had believed these Berber warlords to be capable (or desirous) of rational discourse. Nevertheless, here was Victor Rodrigues, travelling under a flag of parley and welcomed, with apparent affability, by many of the Al-Murabit grandees, chieftains and emirs.

The results of Rodrigues' presence were ambiguous. At a personal level, he failed to impress the Almoravid leaders in any way and, in fact, caused some offence. Just as his overbearing personality and perpetual drunkenness had irritated the Occitans a few years earlier, so it enraged the ascetic and abstemious Mahometans who now ruled over Muslim Spain. Still, in spite of their personal (and very intense) dislike of the Aragonese ambassador, the leaders of the Sultanate managed to reach a constructive accord with the pig-eating Christian dogs – under a document that came to be known as the Treaty of Seville, the Sultanate and the Kingdoms of Aragon and Navarre agreed to refrain from war and settle their differences by negotiation; in addition, the Sultanate agreed to divest itself of the Balearic Islands (of which the Sultan was, nominally, guardian) in return for a substantial amount of tribute from the King of Navarre.

Well, the sale of the islands caused some discord within Almoravid ranks. The great clan leaders and chieftains, who had come to understand the nature of politics and who thought that chests of Christian silver would be more useful than a titular claim to some barren rocks, supported the Sultan's decision to sell the islands. The lesser clansmen, though, and the more zealous Muslims completely rejected the idea of selling fellow Believers into the hands of the Infidel – what kind of man was the Sultan if, having led the Berber tribes out of the desert on a *jihād* to conquer the decadent emirs of al-Andalus, he now betrayed the Islamic ideals for which he had striven all his life? Things were rendered more egregious by the memory of the swordpoint conversions that Alfonso el

Batallador had forced on the Muslims of Valencia... Insurrection and mutiny was only avoided when it was pointed out, loudly, by many leading Imams that the inhabitants of the Balearics were largely pirates who made their living plundering not only the Infidels but even Muslims! The Sultan, as rightful defender of the Islamic world, could not be expected to extend his protection to a mob of seaborne criminals who used the name of Islam as a shield to defend themselves against rightful retribution. In any case, the furore eventually died down and the Almoravids seemed to forget all about it.

In unexciting governmental matters, the skeletal civil service that the Sultan utilised grew exponentially. Hundreds and hundreds of new scribes, literate slaves and eunuchs were employed in the public service and a number of ministries were even formed, staffed by educated Moorish gentlemen who would preside over the day-to-day running of the Sultanate. One consequence of this – perhaps negative, but certainly intentional – was that His Highness was no longer so completely dependent on the Almoravid clan leaders and nobles but now had, instead, a fairly efficient system of governance and administration that relied on professionals, not on the whims or fancies of tribal elders whose way of thinking had never changed since the day they left the desert.

Apart from that, most other things in Muslim Spain were uneventful until, in September of 1125, the Sultan suddenly died of a stroke at the age of fifty-one. Less than a week later, his brother-in-law – Muhammad ibn-Sa'd ibn Mardanish Amir al-Mursiya – conveniently died following a hunting accident. Muhammed had formerly been the quasi-independent Emir of Murcia but, in 1101, had become the first Spanish Moor to be accepted into the ruling clan of the Berber Almoravids; understandably, his opportune death was welcomed by those elements in the Almoravid Sultanate who despised the Moors as effete and who wanted to keep true to the tenets of *ihad* for which they had left the desert.

Be that as it may, Yusuf was succeeded quickly and with no fuss by his half-brother, Faouzi, whose first act was to grant greater autonomy to the magnates of Cheliff. Henceforth, the locals would be allowed to govern themselves and maintain an independent military force, provided said forces were put at the disposal of the Almoravids whenever the Sultan deemed it necessary.

West Africa

The Kanemi Empire

Ruler: Akavai Sefawa, King of the Kanemi

Capital: Ngazargumu

Religion: Sunni Islam

Slept.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Hausa States

Ruler: Dunama Dibbalemi, Sarkis of Daura, Paramount Chieftain of the Hausa tribes

Capital: none

Religion: African Pagan

Slept.

The Songhai Emirate of Gao

Ruler: Nkruma Muhammad, Emir of Gao

Capital: none

Religion: Sunni Islam

Down in Ghana, where the gold fields are so rich, the Vizier Okoto was continuing his negotiations with the leading elders of Kumbi-Saleh. While a tight rein was maintained on the surrounding countryside, the city itself had been granted considerable freedoms since the conquest; although a strong Muslim garrison was in place, Kumbi-Saleh had escaped the worst excesses of the invader - there had been no enslavement of the population and no forced conversions to Islam (all in stark contrast to the behaviour of the Almoravids when they conquered the city fifty years ago!). And it now appeared that this moderate policy towards the conquered Ghanaians was paying dividends in Okoto's talks with the city authorities.

Seeing the leniency of Islamic rule, the pagan elders of the Kumbi-Saleh were well-disposed to the Vizier's proposals for closer integration of the city into the Songhai Emirate. Many of the city's leading figures were members of the old pagan aristocracy who had dominated Ghana in the days when Niyabinghi was Emperor; now, these selfsame men, many of them veterans of the wars against Songhai, willingly and freely took the knee before the representative of the Emir. The final agreement they negotiated with the Vizier gave the elders of Kumbi-Saleh full rights to maintain their own laws, religion and traditions within the city if, in return, they voluntarily surrendered the right to raise taxes within the city.

Sadly for Okoto, the missions to Kumbi-Saleh was to be something of a last hurrah for, in 1125, before he had even left the city to return to his home in Timbuktu, the Vizier became ill and died. His death was not a surprise in view of his advanced years (he was forty-nine).

Away from the conquered lands of Ghana, Muslim clerics were extremely active in Songhai itself, trying to convince the pagan masses to abandon animism and ancestor-worship and to embrace the Faith of the Prophet. On the whole, these busy Mahometans had absolutely no success. The overwhelming majority of Songhai's inhabitants were pagans and slaves and neither group had much interest in embracing the strange rituals of their ruler (this did not mean they were *disloyal* or that they felt particularly oppressed - they just didn't take to the Emir's faith).

Meanwhile, the Emir was overseeing considerable economic development. His home city of Timbuktu saw a great deal of expansion - new merchants were attracted by the increased flow of trade out of the conquered regions; not only did gold pour forth from the interior in unheard-of quantities but slaves, an equally valuable trading commodity, were brought out of Ghana in great long caravans. The merchants would, in the fullness of time, sell their cargoes, both human and mineral, in the great bazaars of Marrakesh, Cairo and maybe even Seville or Baghdad. Aye, these were times when people in Songhai could make good profits from trade! And, with the economy booming on the back of Ghana's destruction, the Emir could afford to dole out some modest grants to local Koranic scholars to establish madrassas.

Beyond the walls of Timbuktu, a lot of new irrigation systems were dug at Nkruma's command; swathes of arid land were, at a stroke, made arable and were handed out to leading members of the Emir's extended family (and not least to the Emir himself!) to be cultivated by the army of slave-farmers who worked on and cared for all the Emir's ample estates.

Apart from the unfortunate issue of having to live amongst a bunch of unsaved pagan slaves, these were pretty good times for the Emir.

The Kingdom of Benin

Ruler: Edewa, Oba of Benin
Capital: Benin
Religion: African Pagan

Slept.

The Yoruba Kingdom of Ife

Ruler: Oranmiyan, Oni of Oyo and Ife, Oba of Yoruba, Lord of the First Men
Capital: Ife
Religion: African Pagan

Oranmiyan was starting to feel his age and the weight of his responsibilities. He was, perhaps, not as old as Jumoke, but then that old campaigner would live exactly as long as he continued to see action. So long as he was allowed to continue his slave raids into neighbouring lands, Jumoke would probably live forever, thought the Oni. So, partly to keep his most favoured warrior busy and partly because he always desired new workers for the fields, the Lord of the First Men commanded Jumoke to assemble another fleet of ships (thirty in number) and a stout body of fighting men for a long expedition to Gagnoa, far to the west along the coast beyond the lands of the Akan tribes.

Needless to say, Jumoke was most pleased to active once more, with troops and ships under his command and a clear objective. In 1121, he sailed forth from the port of Ife, passed the gold-rich lands of Akan and onwards to Gagnoa where he did what he did best - took slaves! Gagnoa was a fairly prosperous place, by local standards, dotted with many villages that gained their livelihood through fishing in the sea or raising crops of yam and sorghum. When first the native people of this region saw Jumoke's ships on the horizon, they thought that a trading fleet must have arrived from Badagria or Accra, a common enough sight on this part of the coast. Horror seized every heart when they realised that this was, in fact, a force of Ife slave-catchers come to drag the people from their homes and families to toil in a distant land. In a matter of days, most of the coastal villages had been abandoned and the people were fleeing to the interior...

During the first few weeks of his expedition, Jumoke secured some abandoned villages as bases from which to launch incursions. Then the real fun began! The people of Gagnoa, though not usually aggressive, were more than willing to defend themselves and they rallied to their nobles and chieftains and begged to be led into battle against the invader - after all, the men of Ife were fewer in number than the men of Gagnoa (Jumoke only had two thousand skirmishers while the natives of Gagnoa could muster nearly three thousand fighting men, a lot of whom were more heavily-armed than the raiders). So, by Spring of 1122, the tribes of Gagnoa had arranged themselves into a sort of army, led by one of their more respected noblemen, and marched towards the coast to retake their homes. Unfortunately for them, Jumoke was far too wily to be caught unprepared; when first he arrived in Gagnoa, he had managed to take a small number of captives, both warriors and civilians, and now he tortured them liberally, forcing them to reveal, in great detail, the topography and terrain of the province. Using this information, he was able to set numerous ambushes with smaller but much more mobile army. The fighting was pretty paltry in scale but it demoralised Jumoke's enemy and netted many prisoners. By the end of 1122, the local army had largely dissolved before ever facing the invader in a serious battle; the men of Gagnoa had become convinced that Jumoke's force was much larger than they had realised and, in any case, they despaired of ever actually catching them in open combat so, instead of engaging in a corporate region-wide effort to defend Gagnoa, the warriors simply wandered back to their families in the interior and tried to defend themselves as best they could when the raiders came.

With the collapse of most organised resistance in the province, Jumoke's fighters were able to gallop from one end of Gagnoa to the other taking prisoners by the hundred. Peasant farmers and fishermen were taken, along with talented craftsmen and artisans; not even the nobles of Gagnoa were able to escape the chains of the slaver. And all the while, Jumoke looked on with the very warm feeling that only comes from seeing a job being done well. Strong workers and cunning artificers had been taken on this raid - nearly two thousand of them! - and fine-looking women too, some of whom would grace his own mansion in Ife while other were reserved for the entertainment of the Great Oni himself. Tragedy struck in 1124, just as the expedition was preparing to return home in glory, when the all-conquering general (who was getting on in years) exerted himself rather too much while in the company of a comely Gagnoan slave-girl. He suffered a stroke and, after lingering for three days in a quite distressing state, finally passed out of this world and joined his ancestors.

Back at home, meanwhile, Oranmiyan had been worrying that his brother and heir, Adedayo, had not yet produced any notable offspring despite being almost forty. It could be, the Oni mused, because that Yoruban wife of his was neglecting her *iba*³⁶. Oranmiyan was particularly fond of his children and, indeed, one of the reasons that he stayed so close to his palace in Ife, instead of leaving to see his wider realm, was that he wanted to watch them grow. Too, he certainly did not think that he was so old that he might not enjoy the embraces of his many wives and continued his efforts to beget more children with gusto - efforts which met with some success when a daughter was born in 1123 and another strong son in 1125.

The arrival of another male child reminded the Lord of the First Men that his oldest and most favoured son, Odadua, would soon be of age, and then Adedayo would probably be called upon to surrender his position as the designate heir. On the whole, Oranmiyan was not certain about the wisdom of passing the throne to his son instead of to his brother; after all, Adedayo's abilities had been tested while a younger man - even if he were the Oni's son - would, of necessity, be an unknown quantity. Too, it had not escaped the Oni's notice that Adedayo had been responsible for doing much to strengthen the Kingdom by drawing the tribes of Nupe and Yoruba into Ife's orbit. The succession would, it seemed, be a much-vexed issue but thankfully it could be put off until a later date. In the meantime, Oranmiyan looked towards improving his patrimony by ordering the slave handlers to press his newest acquisitions into service increasing the already extensive network of fields and irrigation canals around the capital. On top of slave labour, His Majesty spent no small amount of gold on these endeavours, for he was committed to building Ife into a greater, wealthier and happier empire than any other realm in the vicinity. His Majesty also (grudgingly) vouchsafed some expenses to his tribal historians and scholars who insisted that more money was needed if Ife was to ensure that an unblemished oral record could be made of the Kingdom's cosmology and history. Too, with the appearance of a few refugees from the now-defunct Gold Empire of Ghana, there were those who felt that the ancestral practices and traditions of Ghana ought to be made note of and remembered, particularly since the remnants of that culture might well disappear as old Ghana languished, prostrate, under the heel of the Muslims of Gao.

While the Oni distributed his largesse and directed his new slaves, Adedayo was staying happily in Yoruba where he continued to cultivate the alliance with the wonderfully urbane Yoruban nobles. The Yorubans paid great respect to Adedayo because of his high rank and unparalleled lineage but, more than that, Adedayo felt that they genuinely liked him (by contrast, the people of Ife *hated* Adedayo with a passion...). Things were made almost perfect when the Oni directed that Adedayo's wife, Folashade, should be sent out to join him during his sojourn in her homeland. The Yoruban elders, meanwhile, were quite impressed that the heir was spending so much time with them for, to their eyes, it suggested that the rulers of Ife valued the friendship of Yoruba; they were even more impressed - and more convinced of their importance to Ife - by the gifts of fine jewellery, statuary, spices, textiles and assorted gewgaws that the Lord of the First Men had sent with Folashade. She, for her part, drew great pleasure from distributing these gifts amongst the Yoruban elders and relished assisting her husband. These happy times were punctuated by frequent trips to Badagria, where Folashade especially shined. By the time 1125 closed, Adedayo had managed to rearrange the local diplomatic scene quite radically - Yoruba, feeling that the next Oni was effectively "one of their own", integrated fully into the Kingdom of Ife by pronouncing that Oranmiyan was now their Oba. Many of their leading chieftains established residences in the capital so as to maintain a presence at the court of their new ruler, the Oni. In Badagria, meanwhile, the leading merchant-nobles of the port agreed to become a part of the Kingdom in all but name, retaining certain rights to control their own laws but surrendering tax-raising powers to the Oni and placing their warriors under his command.

But not all diplomatic activity had been so rewarding for the Kingdom. The wandering emissary Ajamu quit Badagria in April of 1121 laden with ocean conches, slaves and other similar gifts for Abiodun, the foremost tribal leader in Nupe; in particular there was a wonderfully-wrought piece of ivory, with his stylized likeness. The image made him appear strong and agile, something which Abiodun would surely appreciate appreciated.

In any case, the welcome he received in Nupe was warm enough and there was much quiet satisfaction at the gifts on offer. Too, Ajamu set about finding himself a politically useful wife - the daughter of some great chieftain - but things did not go at all well. Firstly, the Nupe chieftains assumed that Ajamu was seeking a wife for his master Oranmiyan or for one of the other princes of the Royal Family so, when they found out the truth (viz., that the wife was for himself!), people became much less willing to entertain the notion of marriage. And, apart from such political matters, Ajamu was a very handsome (not to say *vain*) man and resented the idea that he should take some ugly Nupe woman as his wife; this off-putting and grudging attitude shone through during his various abortive attempts at courtship and, by the end of 1125, poor Ajamu was still a bachelor. As if all that was not enough, Ajamu managed to ruin even the diplomatic side of his mission by completely mishandling his exposition of the danger posed to Nupe by the growing power of Songhai and Kanem; in part, the difficulty arose from his refusal to use an interpreter when talking to Abiodun (Ajamu had been trying to learn the local Hausa language but, sadly, was not an apt student and frequently left his hosts confused and, by turns, exasperated) but, too, Ajamu was just not very politically astute and not only proved unable to formulate convincing arguments but actually managed to offend his hosts by a number of his comments.

³⁶ A prayer of praise to the spirits/ deities responsible for the Creation.

The result of the mission to Nupe was that Abiodun and the elders decided to rescind their earlier military commitments to Ife. From now on, they would allow the Oni's men to travel through Nupe in safety but they would not send their warriors to serve him nor would they pay him any tribute until he could present a convincing case to the contrary.

The Akan States

Ruler: Paramount Chieftain of the Akan Tribes

Capital: none

Religion: African Pagan

Slept.

Southern and Eastern Africa

The Eparchate of Makouria

Ruler: Nazares *the Bold*, the Negus Negesti, the Bahr Negus, Eparch of Makouria

Capital: Dunquhla

Religion: Coptic Christian

Slept.

The Christian Empire of Abyssinia



Ruler: Ras Ishmail, Bitwoded of Abyssinia, on behalf of Sazana, All-Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, King of the Highlands, Negusa Negest za Abyssinia, Guardian of the Ark of the Covenant, Emperor of Abyssinia

Capital: Aksum

Religion: Coptic Christian

The newest Emperor of Abyssinia was finding that the indulgent lifestyle at the Fatimid court was much to his taste. Beautiful slave girls attended his every need and there was always the finest food to eat and wines to drink; too, instead of the rather coarse garment he was accustomed to wear in Aksum, he now had fine silken gowns and a pearl diadem as a mark of his eminence - gifts from the Caliph himself, whose prodigious wealth dwarfed the pitiful income of Abyssinia. Yet, Aeizanas realised that if he did not return to his far-off and undistinguished capital, he would probably not have his throne for very long. However pleasant life in Cairo might be, further dalliance could not be risked so, in March of 1121, he set out from the Fatimid capital with surprisingly little fanfare but a respectable caravan of horses and slaves lugging the gifts with which his Mahometan friend, al'Amir, had showered him.

The journey through Upper Egypt was slow but, by the end of the year, His Majesty had passed into Nubia and the dominion of the Eparch of Makouria; at last, Aeizanas had set foot on the sanctified ground of African Christendom and, with every step, he brought himself closer to his own home in the mountains and the people over whom he would rule for the rest of his days...

But what was happening in Abyssinia while the Emperor was abroad? Well, in the Empire's newest province, Djibuti, there was (as usual) much dissatisfaction amongst the local Arabs and Muslim Africans at the imposition of Christian rule. This discontent became all the more rabid when it became obvious that Djibuti was, for all practical purposes, completely cut off from the distant Christian capital of Aksum but, luckily, the presence of a very large Abyssinian garrison, in addition to the personal forces of the local governor, forestalled any possibility that the rebelliousness might grow out of control. Meanwhile, Seyoum, the Abagaz³⁷ of Djibuti, meanwhile, had come to the conclusion that only by actually settling the area with Coptic Christians from Abyssinia could one absolutely safeguard the authority of the Emperor. That being so, he submitted a request to Aksum that a portion of the Imperial forces in Djibuti should be demobilised and given allotments of land on which to settle, build homes and raise their families. In this way, Christianity would become a permanent feature of life in Djibuti.

In due course, Seyoum's request was granted and many thousands of Christian warriors were dismissed from the army and given new homes on a strip of land along the coast which, for some reason, they called *Dikhil* in memory of a small city in Djibuti, many many miles inland, where they had once been garrisoned. In any case, quite a few local Muslims were displaced by the construction of this Christian colony and that compounded the existing ill-feeling towards the occupiers. Too, since contact between Djibuti and Abyssinia was patchy at best (because, you see, it had to pass through the hostile and uncontrolled region of Adal), the demobilised soldiers

³⁷ *Abagaz*: the Governor of a district or region.

were, for the most part, unable to bring their wives and families down from the Abyssinian plateau; the Abyssinians solved this by taking local wives - both from the Arab population and from the Muslims Africans - but, as one might guess, this caused grave offence to the Muslims who balked at the idea of their daughters and sisters marrying Infidels and raising Infidel children. (For what it's worth, it also caused some offence to the Abuna of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church who disliked the idea of men abandoning their Christian wives to embrace heathens).

Things seeming to grow more tense by the day and finally came to a head when, at Easter of 1122, a band of Muslim assassins ambushed the entourage of the Abagaz as it passed from his palace to a local church. Several Christian officials were slain in the first rush but Seyoum himself, by a quirk of fate, managed to escape the knives of his would-be murderers who were all dispatched when the Abagaz's bodyguards rallied and counterattacked.

Against such a background of religious strife and conflict, Seyoum felt certain that his position would be lost if did not do something to secure his lines of communication with Abyssinia. So, gathering together his personal troops, he marched westward into Adal to crush the rebellious desert tribesmen; at precisely the same time, Ras Ishmail was marching down from the plateau with most of the Imperial army. Between them, the two men had absolutely no trouble smacking the locals into the ground but, as 1122 drew to a close, some very serious news reached the generals of Abyssinia that made all their victories count for nought...

Not long after arriving at Aksum in 1122, the Negus had become ill; indeed, he had become ill on the long journey back home and seemed only to get worse when he was finally ensconced in his palace. Fevers wracked His Majesty daily and he gradually lost the ability to keep any semblance of control over matters of state. Seeing that death was only a matter of days or weeks away, Aeizanas was transported to a monastery on an island in Lake Hayq where he was quietly cared for until he succumbed to the inevitable.

The death of a Negus was always a difficult affair but it was doubly so in Aeizanas' case for, as his heir, he left behind only a little boy of ten (named Sazana). There was much fear that some wily nobleman might seize the throne or that Ras Ishmail, down in Adal with the army, might march on the capital and proclaim himself Negus; too, the Muslims might seize advantage of any internal disorder to revolt...

The people of Aksum did not have to wait long for events to get exciting. A certain nister named Atsbeha, who had been a rising star of Aeizanas' court because of his uncommon political talents, gambled that he could mobilise enough support to seize the throne. Only two days after the death of the Negus, Atsbeha and a small band of sympathetic nobles stormed the royal palace at dawn and tried to snatch little Sazana; he planned either to kill the child or to force him to abdicate his claim to the crown. Yet, Atsbeha's plan was stymied for he found the palace empty except for servants and slaves - on the orders of the wily old Abuna³⁸, Sazana had been spirited away to the very same island monastery where his father had just died. Much more troubling than this, though, it turned out that Atsbeha had miscalculated - the people of Aksum, far from being indifferent to the fate of Sazana, actually rose up in defence of their rightful Negus and, by the time dusk fell, Atsbeha was barricaded in the dusty old sandstone palace of Aksum surrounded by an enraged mob...

Meanwhile, in Adal, Ras Ishmail was as deeply concerned as anyone to hear of the death of Aeizanas. Fearing just such a coup as the one Atsbeha had staged, he marched his army at once back towards the capital and, after some delay, arrived outside the sturdy walls of Aksum. To his shock (albeit a very pleasant shock), he found that all was well in the city and that the Abuna was now effectively leading the government of the empire on behalf of the Boy-Emperor. Soon, the full story came out: after his failed coup, the angry Aksumite mob had stormed the palace and lynched Atsbeha and his partisans; their mutilated bodies had been dragged through the streets and finally suspended by the feet above the main gates of the city. Sazana, meanwhile, had been brought back to Aksum from his monastery stronghold and was, in short order, crowned Emperor, to the acclaim of the masses.

Now that Ras Ishmail was present, the Abuna was only too happy to surrender all powers and authority to that most eminent gentleman. A special council of the senior ministers, courtiers and ecclesiastical officials rubber-stamped Ishmail's appointment as Bitwoded of Abyssinia - senior minister of the government and *de facto* regent until Emperor Sazana came into his patrimony. When one considered what might have happened, it seemed like the Abyssinians had a very easy time of it...

The Zani States

Ruler: Khalifah bin Haroub, Emir of Zanzibar

Capital: Zanzibar

Religion: Sunni Islam

³⁸ Abuna: the head of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church.

Slept.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Chwezi Dynasty of Kitara



Ruler: Tzuto Chwezi, King of Kitara and Great Chieftain of the Ten Tribes of the Mask
Capital: Kasese
Religion: African Pagan

The Great Chieftain left Burundi and struck out on a diplomatic mission to Luba, a strange and not altogether friendly place. The tribes of Luba were distant kin to the Chwezi chieftain (of course, in the Great Lakes, *all* tribes were related) but they generally remained aloof from those around them and eyed the ambitions of Kitara with much suspicion. At the best of times, they were not known for their congeniality or neighbourliness and now, seeing the rapid expansion of Chwezi power amongst the other lacustrine tribes, there was no guarantee that

King Tzuto would come back from his expedition unharmed.

In Luba, Tzuto was received by the local chieftains with a certain chilliness but no open hostility. The tribes acknowledged that they and the Kitara were a kindred people and that they shared a common ancestor but any tendency to show fondness for the visiting Chwezi monarch was inhibited by local fears at the growth of Tzuto's influence, which now extended both to the east and the west of Luba. The King had an uphill task if he wished to win over the locals but his diplomatic abilities were great. Tzuto offered many pledges were made to the chiefs of Luba, insisting that Kitara would not seek to usurp their ancestral freedoms but that he and his dynasty only wanted the tribes of Luba as allies. To guarantee that Luba would enjoy a unique place in the Chwezi state - viz., that it would remain functionally independent while becoming an ally of Chwezi Kitara - the King arranged for his son, Likala Chwezi, to wed the daughter of a local chieftain. In recognition of this new dynastic connexion with the Lords of Kasese, the main chiefs of the tribes of Luba pledged their spears to the service of King Tzuto. They would not tolerate his tax gatherers in their land and his laws would have no force in Luba *but* they would follow him to war if necessary and follow his commands in battle.

Elsewhere, the great minister Tchamba left Burundi for the wide open spaces of Masai, a legendary place where the warriors were tall and bold beyond all belief. The Masai tribesmen were even more sceptical than the Luba when dealing with the Chwezi although for very different reasons - while the folk of Luba feared that the Chwezi dynasty wanted to extinguish their independence, the Masai had only the faintest idea who these Chwezi fools were and had but little respect for their emissaries. Poor Tchamba had a hard time even gaining a simple hearing from the locals - whenever he tried to present his credentials or explain his mission, he was met with puzzled glances from people who had never heard of Kitara. By and by, after more than two years of hard work, he was granted an audience with some of the leading chieftains but they proved disdainful; admittedly, they did not dismiss Tchamba out of hand nor did they deliberately disparage the name or honour of the Chwezi King *but* they made it abundantly clear that they saw no point in trying to form an alliance with the ruler of a people who lived so far away as to be beyond the knowledge of all but the most adventurous Masai travellers. Two things, though, caught the attention of the Masai and stopped them from dismissing Tchamba altogether: first, there was Tchamba's rich gold jewellery which suggested that the Chwezi must be wealthy and could, perhaps, be finagled into sending gifts to the Masai; second, Tchamba made a great personal impression when he slew three adult male lions during a single hunt! The Masai were always respectful of a bold warrior and strong hunter and they were minded to pay attention to any man who could slay three great lions. In view of this, the Masai acquiesced to some of Tchamba's petitions and agreed that representatives of the Chwezi King would be allowed to pass through Masai lands unhindered. It was less than Tchamba had hoped for but it did, at least, open a route to the Arab traders of the coast.

At home in Kasese, Crown Prince Likala received his new bride from Luba and immediately began the business of begetting children upon her. Sadly, she died from complications six months into her first pregnancy - on the one hand, it was a misfortune because it left the dynasty without a clear heir but, on the other, it made Likala an eligible bachelor once more.

Across in Burundi, large numbers of people began settling around the large town of Bujumbura on the Great Lake. With the region now being a part of the Chwezi realm and trade between Ankolye and Burundi flowing at an unprecedented rate, a lot of folk wanted to get their part of the wealth that this burgeoning commerce offered.

The Sulahyid Emirate of Yemen



Ruler: Sayyida Arwa, Queen of Yemen

Capital: none.
Religion: Shi'a Islam



Sayyida Arwa

The legendary Queen of Yemen was now in her seventy-fifth year and wondering when Allah would call her to the eternal rest she had earned. Despite her uncommonly advanced years, she showed no signs of diminishing either physically or mentally; she remained healthy and active and in firm control of the reins of government of her desert empire. All this was much to the chagrin of her significantly younger husband, Al-Muwafaq Al-Dawla, who thought that *he* ought to be running the country; after all, he had been recruited from Cairo some years before for the express purpose of becoming Arwa's successor - it irked him, therefore, that he was not being *allowed* to succeed!

Wise as ever, Sayyida kept her bothersome husband quiet by filling his already extensive harem with ever more diversions in the form of slave girls, most of whom were almost sixty years younger than herself. Al-Muwafaq, though ambitious, was not a particularly deep man and accepted that, if he could not have real political power, a harem full of saucy concubines and all the other hedonistic trappings of royalty would be the next best thing. And, indeed, the harem of the Emir Al-Muwafaq was fast reaching epic proportions: over and above those ubiquitous Arab dancing girls, long-limbed and smooth-muscled, who could be found frolicking half-naked before any self-respecting Muslim potentate, Sayyida Arwa bought dusky East African beauties from the slavers of Zanj; she imported exotic Turkish playthings from the north, women whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers had ridden free on the steppe; there were Circassians, Armenians and even a few Slavs with golden or red hair; and even Hindu women were to be found, the daughters of Brahmins sold to Yemeni traders by their Ghaznavid captors. Indeed, there were young girls of every hue, from every corner of the known world, there to serve Al-Muwafaq's needs and desires; fine silken couches were provided for His Highness to recline upon and sweet fruits and wines were always on hand...

Of course, he knew very well that the never-ending stream of women with which his wife plied him was no more than a collection of toys and bibelots in female form - a distraction to keep him from interfering with the Sayyida's enterprises - but, just so long as he could indulge his many passions with these women and this opulent lifestyle in the many palaces of Aden and San'a, it proved surprisingly easily to make him forget about his high political aspirations. All the same, Arwa realised that shutting him entirely out of the government could be counterproductive so she allowed him to take some small part in the day-to-day administration of the realm - court cases and law suits were to be heard before him; foreign emissaries would be allowed to present their credentials to him; tax collectors could report to him; tribal representatives could deliver their tribute to him.

The Sayyida's purpose in allowing her husband to be involved in the government was twofold: first, she believed that by giving him some modest share in ruling, she might satisfy him for a little while and keep him from becoming obstreperous; second, and perhaps more importantly, Arwa planned to leave Yemen for a while on a diplomatic excursion to the African mainland and, in her absence, it was vital to have some trustworthy to supervise the realm; sadly, her husband was all she had...

So, leaving Al-Muwafaq in temporary control of the state, Arwa first set out for the highlands of Sheba. The local Emir had recently become an ally of the Sayyida, pledging the blades of his followers to serve the Sulahyids, but Arwa had high hopes that she might convince the Sheban clans to give up *all* their independence and cleave themselves to her rule. It seemed like a lofty and unrealistic goal - to convince a clannish and cloistered people to become part of some larger whole - but Arwa was a legendary figure throughout Southern Arabia and her mere presence, at nearly eighty years and still hale, had an electrifying effect on the Shebans. Though she stayed amongst them for only six months, she had no trouble in prevailing upon them to line up behind her for the sake of their shared Shi'a faith and their common desire to see the rightful Caliph prevail over the Sunni heretics. By the time she left Sheba to return to Aden, at the start of 1122, she had successfully integrated that region into her Emirate and, indeed, had convinced at least a few of the Sheban chieftains to relocate to San'a or Aden.

In 1122, Arwa set out from Aden with eight dhows and sailed off to the strange and isolated island of Socotra. She found a sparsely inhabited but quite pretty place inhabited by a mixture of nomadic Arabs, who dwelt in the wadis of the interior, and Arabic-speaking African fisherman who lived in little coastal villages. Seldom did the two communities mix but, at the same time, there was little or no strife between them. Well, in any case, the Sayyida's arrival caused quite a stir as the island had never ever had any important visitors before and there was no government on the island more complex or centralised than the elders who governed each village or tribe. This present Her Highness with a peculiar problem: she very much wished to extend Yemeni power in the Southern Seas and had seen Socotra as a potentially important part of that plan, hence her diplomatic mission to the island; yet, now, she found there was no-one to parley with, no leaders to negotiate with, no overlord to receive her... Well, in spite of everything, Arwa traipsed over the island for the better part of 1122 and extracted promises of fealty and loyalty from every single village and tribe on the island. So long as the natives of Socotra granted her men completely full and free access to the island and the waters around it, she, in return, promised that she would not undermine or erode the native peoples' traditional liberties (and, being a sharp woman, she realised that the cost of governing this island directly far outweighed the revenues she might collect from it).

The start of 1123 saw the Sayyida's little flotilla sail off towards Africa and, specifically, the region of Berbera. There she found a situation where Sunni Arab nobles and traders were ruling over a largely Islamicised African population. Her presence, as representative and ruler of a potentially very threatening Shi'a state, was not exactly welcomed by the locals overlords but a degree of pragmatism restrained them for Berbera was, at present, threatened by the growth of Abyssinian power to the west. It occurred to the rulers of Berbera that some benefits could be gleaned, in the way of increased security, by paying tribute to the Yemeni Sayyida. So, after only a brief stay in rugged Berbera, Arwa was able to return to Aden bringing with her a promise from the natives to pay an annual tribute to the Emirate of Yemen.

While she had been away, things had been quite busy in and around Yemen. Shi'a clergy, at the instigation of al-Muwafaq, had been extremely active in Hadramuht, engaging the Sunnis in debate and working hard to undermine the grip that Orthodox Sunnite Islam seemed to have on the locals. While their successes had been limited, they were able to present a number of converts (or backsliders, from the Sunni perspective). The Shi'ites had found that one argument was singularly effectual at gaining people's attention, viz., that the fall of Damascus to the Christian barbarians and Mecca to the Fatimid Caliph were surely signs that Sunni Islam, as represented by the Abbasids and their Turkish hirelings, was failing. Well, needless to say, the overwhelming majority of people were unconvinced but enough converts were gained for the missionary work to be considered a real success. Elsewhere, the Sayyida's emissaries were less effective at dealing with the Sunnis - a diplomatic mission, led by one Abd al-Aziz, had been sent to Asir, only to be rebuffed in the most discourteous way by the local Sunni tribesmen who were far from impressed by the sudden growth of Shi'a power in the region...

Back home in Aden, one of al-Muwafaq's rowdy parties took a very unfortunate turn when Abd al-Azrad, a renowned Yemeni nobleman and minister, got involved in a singularly unpleasant altercation with another guest. This guest, an uncultured tribal chieftain from hinterland who also happened to be rather the worse for drink, manhandled a dancing girl who enjoyed al-Azrad's favour and, to general approval, tore most of her skimpy attire from her body. Before anyone could stop him, al-Azrad (who was none too sober himself) was on his feet, knife drawn, cursing the guest as the misbegotten son of a swine and a whore. With both men so mortally offended, with such harsh words having been spoken, there was only one possible outcome - bloodshed. In the duel that followed, Abd al-Azrad came off the worst and ended up with his opponent's knife buried, up to its hilt, in his belly. He died instantly.

Finally, by way of good news, al-Muwafaq's regular dalliances with the ladies of his harem had some pleasant dividends when three healthy baby boys were born to him - one each in the years 1123, 1124 and 1125. To reward the concubines and slaves who had given him such invaluable gifts, al-Muwafaq was formally married to each woman the day after she presented him with a male child. Too, in celebration of his fine luck and the fruitfulness of his loins, Muwafaq dished out some very generous subventions of gold to the poets and scholars who perpetually hung around Arwa's court. Before long, Yemen's reputation as one of the centre's of Arabic poetry and literature was on the road to recovery after a couple of decades during which it seemed to wane.

The Chewa Kingdom of Marawi

Ruler: Chewa King of the Marawi

Capital: none.

Religion: African Pagan

Slept.

The Xhona Tribes of Mwene Mutapa

Ruler: Great King of the Mutapa Tribes

Capital: none.

Religion: African Pagan

Slept.

The Kingdom of Kongo

Ruler: Abwanze, King of the Bakongo

Capital: none.

Religion: African Pagan

For the past three decades, people had been settling in ever-growing numbers at the mouth of the Kongo River, at the point where it met the endless waters of the ocean. The place had once been the site of a village called Matadi but things had changed. The village was gone, swallowed by the sheer weight of people coming to make their homes in this area; neighbouring villages, too, had been united into a single great settlement and the King had been only too happy, in these peaceful times, to settle his warriors in and around this new city which, by the end of 1125, contained more than eight thousand souls! Naturally, so many new people meant many new

opportunities. The farmers, fishermen and hunters from the hinterland found a handsome trade could be had by exchanging their surplus meat, milk, fish and game for the merchandise produced by the city-dwelling craftsmen.

In news away from the coast, the King sent an ambassador by the name of Masanwe upriver to the region of Bandundu. The jungle tribesmen here spoke a quite different language from the dialects of the coast and, of course, were much less rigidly organised than the Kongolese, with nothing approaching a centralised government or a single monarch. Still, after several years of very hard work amongst these people, Masanwe was able to send a message back to King Abwanze informing him with pleasure that the Tshiluba-speaking tribes of Bandundu had undertaken to pay an annual tribute to the fearsome King of the Bakongo, the size of whose domain was beyond the imaginings of any of the petty chieftains of Bandundu.

The only other matter of significance in Kongo came when Abwanze's young daughter, Sistango, died in 1123 at the age of nine after being infected by parasitic worms.

North America

The Anasazi Pueblos

Ruler: Poqanghoya, Father of Ceremonies

Capital: Kishiwv

Religion: Northern Amerind

The Anasazi elder Haaa took himself up into the mountains to the north, into the region of Moache. Having been so successful in attracting the nearby kindred tribes into the councils of the Anasazi, it was hoped that he might achieve similar success with the unrelated clans. Luck, though, was not on Haaa's side. The Moache clans were not totally inhospitable to their visitor but they were very suspicious of his intentions and of the wider purpose of their southern neighbours. They had seen the power of the Hisatsinom grow unabated for almost thirty years; they had heard that the Hohokam of the south were growing restive, at the least, and perhaps even bellicose; and they knew that cannibal raiders, from the farthest reaches of the southern deserts, were active and that even the Anasazi had suffered at their hands. Everywhere, the Moache tribes saw instability and felt insecurity gripping the lands and peoples to their south; and they were determined, to the point of recalcitrance, that they would not allow their relatively peaceful and quiet existence in the highlands to be disrupted, that they would not be dragged into the quarrels of the southerners and that they would not become a tributary of the Pueblo Dwellers.

Politely but firmly, therefore, they declined all of Haaa's many entreaties and overtures. They emphasised, in so many words that they did not seek to be antagonistic to the Father of Ceremonies or the elders of the Anasazi but that they were a people apart and saw no reason, at this time, to compromise their liberties and autonomy by becoming part of their neighbours' sprawling polity.

Down in Anasazi and Tiwa, meanwhile, the Father of Ceremonies decreed that yet more cliff forts and watch posts should be built to defend the lands and stores of the Hisatsinom from foreign raiders. The Anasazi elders were aware that, even as their crop yields multiplied and their wealth and influence increased, so too grew the jealousy of the O'odham; nor was the fear absent that raiders from the far south might return to raid Anasazi and Hohokam lands indiscriminately. Still, the Anasazi did not give their attention solely to war for, even as the forts were being built, so too were the labyrinthine network of irrigation channels being extended; by guiding the infrequent rains and spreading their water far and wide, these canals allowed an otherwise parched land to blossom, made growing conditions just a little more favourable - and, of course, made the lands of the Hisatsinom so much more attractive to hostile foreigners. Even as the land was made richer, so the defences of the people had to be made stronger...

Back home, at the northern end of Chaco Canyon, Poqanghoya fathered three sons - one each in 1121, 1122 and 1124. To see his woman bear him strong male children was a great delight and source of solace in what was, in some other ways, a very trying time; it had not escaped the notice of the Father of Ceremonies that his twin brother, Palangawhoya, enjoyed a greater following in the tribe, that he was more popular than Poqanghoya and received awed respect for his martial abilities. The Father of Ceremonies wondered whether he could actually hold his position should his twin choose to challenge him and grew despondent as he fathomed that he never could... Against so melancholic a canvas, Poqanghoya found succour where he could and the birth of his fine, strong sons was one such source.

The Hohokam Villages

Ruler: Chul-tek O'odham, First Among the Elders of the Tohono O'odham

Capital: Casa Grande

Religion: Northern Amerind

Slept.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Aztalan Mississippians

Ruler: Ogaleeska, the Peace Chief

Capital: Aztalan

Religion: Northern Amerind

Quiet internal development was the order of the day in Aztalan. The previous few years had seen an intense expansion of the land available for cultivation and the construction of very many new villages and mounds; and Ogaleeska was determined that there should be no slackening of the pace now! Almost every acre of arable land in the whole of Kickapoo was made available for agriculture and, all along the Great River, little collections of bark-built houses sprang up to exploit the bounty that the waters offered (i.e., fish!). And, towering above each new village, would be a mound where one of Ogaleeska's appointees or relatives would build a lodge from which to rule over the inhabitants. Meanwhile, in addition to these fixed dwellings, some of the more itinerant elements of the tribe (or just those who disliked the intrusive rule of the aristocratic chieftains) set up lodges out in the plains, where they could make a fine living from hunting the plentiful buffalo.

All in all, this was a time of unusual plenty and peace for the people of Aztalan. In keeping with the spirit of the age, the heir, Wambleeska, set out on a tour of the local villages around Aztalan; his goal was to find a wife but not just any woman would do - his future bride had to be beautiful but also strong enough to bear children and she had to belong to an aristocratic family. It proved impossible to fulfil all these criteria so Wambleeska settled for a very lovely but rather fragile noblewoman (the daughter of a powerful medicine man who happened to be one of his father's cousins). The two were married in March of 1121 and, by the end of November, she had given birth to a son who, despite being born prematurely, proved a very healthy child. Within six months, the girl was pregnant again but this time she miscarried and, in the aftermath, grew ill with a fever and died.

While all this tragedy was going on, the Peace Chief Ogaleeska had gone off to Cahokia on a diplomatic mission. He viewed the growing power of Cahokia with alarm and wanted to assure himself of their good intentions - and to assure them that Aztalan was not their enemy. By the time he returned during the Summer of 1125, Ogaleeska was able to report that he had enjoyed very profitable discussions with the White Chief of the Great Southern City and the Ani-Kutani priests and chieftains; it was Ogaleeska's belief that Cahokia, though a growing force of unparalleled strength, would not threaten the freedom of the tribes of Aztalan. Everyone thought this was pretty good news.

The Moundbuilders of Cahokia

Ruler: Arrow-Keeper, White Chief of the Ani-Kutani

Capital: Cahokia

Religion: Northern Amerind

Arrow-Keeper, after many years during which he was scarcely to be found in his capital, had decided to remain quietly at home in his great lodge in Cahokia. His reasons for doing so had little to do with any love for the place - or for remaining sedentary; rather, the White Chief expected that, at any time, emissaries of the neighbouring states of Aztalan and Adena would appear to speak with him. As Cahokia's power increased to the point where she was the unchallenged mistress of the Great Snake, so the fear and jealousy of lesser states increased. To forestall the almost inevitable animosity and to ensure that the Moundbuilders of Cahokia should not have to take up their bows, spears and atlatls in defence of their dominion, Arrow-Keeper would strive to convince his neighbours of his goodwill and to guarantee that their liberties would not be threatened by the eminence and power of his own people.

Annoyingly, no emissary came from Adena so poor Arrow-Keeper was deprived of his chance to be ostentatiously magnanimous. On the other hand, Ogaleeska, Peace Chief of Aztalan, *did* show up in Cahokia where he was fêted by the Ani-Kutani and welcomed in a manner befitting only the greatest of potentates. The Peace Chief's visit - and his long, long sojourn - allowed the elders of Cahokia, the masters of tribal lore and religious tradition, to recount their ancestral tales of how the peoples of Aztalan and Cahokia were originally one people with a common genesis. And, indeed, Ogaleeska was pleased to hear these stories recounted and to be reminded that the blood of the Ani-Kutani flowed through his veins, that he and the rest of the Moundbuilders of Aztalan belonged to a greater and more glorious culture than the lesser tribes who lived around the Peace Chief's domain.

Curiously, just as the Mississippian Moundbuilders were celebrating their superiority to the other tribes and making remembrance of shared lineage, a less-than-popular Ani-Kutani chieftain - Eager-Beaver, by name - slipped out of the city and across the Ohio River to the largely uninhabited region Kaskinapo which he reconnoitred thoroughly but, finding no-one there and no evidence that anyone had recently passed through there, he went west into Quapaw. None lived in that rugged and untamed region but it was known that some wandering tribes from the west would occasionally visit the place to fish from the river or to hunt game and maybe to pass a

season; it was Eager-Beaver's hope that he might chance upon one of these tribes and open some sort of dialogue on behalf of the Moundbuilders. And, as luck would have it, he did just that! One day, in 1123, while Eager-Beaver and his retinue of twelve hundred warriors were stomping around the banks of the Missouri River, they stumbled into an enormous encampment belonging to one of these tribes - the Pawnee!

The first meeting of the Cahokians and Pawnee was a curious one. The latter tribe seldom ventured into Quapaw in large numbers but, to Eager-Beaver's surprise, they were now present in many thousands, with their hide tents visible across several neighbouring valleys. They were, to put it mildly, disconcerted by the intrusion of the Cahokians into land that had, since the most ancient times, been part of the wide hunting grounds of the Pawnee; too, the martial spirit was strong in their breasts and they were minded, at first, to slaughter the interlopers and float their bodies down river on canoes as a warning. Fortunately, calmer heads prevailed and they agreed to talk to Eager-Beaver and find out exactly what he wanted and why he was trespassing in a country that was not his own but that was not without problems of its own for poor Beaver was not very bright - he did not speak the language of the Pawnee (which was very similar to Caddoan) and, anyway, did not clearly understand what Arrow-Keeper hoped to achieve by sending him out on this expedition. As one may imagine, the Pawnee were not well-satisfied by Beaver's responses - time and again, they would demand to know why he intruded in their land and, time and again, he would answer (with a man from Hahiwai acting as interpreter) that the White Chief had sent him to find out which tribes dwelt in these parts. In the end, the Pawnee only agreed to let him and his men leave unhindered in return for a promise that the Cahokians would soon send a proper delegation to explain what their intentions were and that they would never again enter Pawnee territory in force and without invitation.

Elsewhere, Scioto saw much activity. The White Chief had taken it into his head that this tributary region, so near to Cahokia geographically, was going to be dragged much closer to the Cahokian political orbit. Diplomats scoured the place making compacts and conventions with the local chieftains, promising to respect the legal authority and traditions of native rulers and tribal chieftains in return for the right to levy taxes and tariffs. Further, the Cahokians took it upon themselves to begin earmarking large chunks of vacant land in this region for future development and settlement; a few small mounds were raised and many forests were cleared to make room for crops. The tribes of Scioto were not entirely sure what to make of the behaviour of their neighbours - to be offended at their presumption or gratified that they were making more land available for cultivation - so they opted for an outward display of insouciance while they awaited developments....

The Adena Moundbuilders

Ruler: Tooantuh, the Great Sun

Capital: Adena

Religion: Northern Amerind

Slept.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

The Atakapaw Ishak Tribes

Ruler: Otsitat, Lord of the Tribes of the Sunrise and the Sunset

Capital: Ayoel

Religion: Northern Amerind

Slept.

The Jatibonicu Taino of Capa

Ruler: Kelepi, Great Chieftain of the Taino

Capital: Capa

Religion: Northern Amerind

Slept.

(NO ORDERS RECEIVED!)

Central America

Toltec Empire of Tula Tollan

Ruler: Topiltzin, Birth of the Fifth Sun, Emperor of Tula Tollan under the Sun God Tezcatlipoca, Priest of the Jaguar and the Eagle.

Capital: Tula
Religion: Meso-American

The Hegemony of the Itza Maya

Ruler: Ah-Chiam, Lord of the Night, Halach Uinic of the Itza Maya
Capital: Chichen Itza
Religion: Meso-American

The Tarascan Empire of Purepecha

Ruler: Tangaxoan, the Lord of the Men of the Wind, Warrior King of Tzin Tzun Tzan
Capital: Tzin Tzun Tzan
Religion: Meso-American

South America

The Huari Empire

Ruler: Anquimarca, the Ciquic, Supreme King and Overlord of the Wari
Capital: Huari
Religion: Southern Amerind

The Supreme King's engineers and planners continued their unending mission to link the constituent parts of the empire by building yet more roads. From the capital, they traced new routes northwards to Wairajikira and down to the lowland city of Pachacamac. The paths they devised took them over countless treacherous Andean ridges and across crevasses and canyons that had to be bridged. Many thousands of the Ciquic's slaves and peasants were set to toil on this onerous and dangerous chore, their numbers swollen further by the treasure that poured out of the royal counting houses to hire ever more workers. While the work was too hard and the terrain too demanding to allow the roads to be completed in anything less than a decade, the attention His Majesty was paying to the empire's infrastructure gave something of a boost to the national economy; in particular, there was a conspicuous increase in the flow trade from the highlands of Moche and Wairajikira into the coastal city of Chanchan, whence it was conveyed southwards, to Nazca and Chavin, by boat.

The Ciquic's attention, though, was not entirely fixed on such matters as these. Large cash allotments were set aside for the scholars and learned men of Huari. Previous investments by the Supreme King had left the city with an admirable reputation for the quality of education which the young received and now, with all the additional royal patronage, things could only get better. Indeed, the whole capital seemed to undergo what might have been the start of a cultural and artistic renaissance with many new monoliths raised in honour of Anquimarca and decorated garishly with motifs and symbols that celebrated his benevolence and peaceful accomplishments. This was quite a strange thing for Wari society which valued martial prowess and achievement in battle above all things but *ç'est la vie*...

The only other events of note came in the form of certain grand ceremonials concerning the royal family. First, in 1121, a company of Tiwanakan warriors marched quite unexpectedly up the great highway from Solo to Huari; this body of men was, in fact, an armed escort for a much larger crowd of very high-born and aristocratic Tiwanakan ladies; this group turned out to be the cortege of none other than the Princess Anas-Collque, daughter of the late Yatiri Coyllas and, until very recently, the nominated successor of Curi-Paucar! The common people of the capital all turned out to watch this most impressively exotic panoply - a parade of Aymaran warriors and women marching, in serried ranks, through the avenues of Huari, passing temples, palaces and great monoliths until, at last, they came to the huge mansion of the Ciquic where a party of priests and Wari aristocrats waited to greet and receive them.

The reason for the coming of this band only became apparent when, a few days after the Princess arrived, it was proclaimed that the Ciquic's brother and nominated heir, Anta-Accla, would take the woman as his second wife. This caused quite a stir - the Wari were notorious for their fixation about keeping their culture pure and did not usually engage in the practice of exogamy. Some of Anquimarca's rivals, the leaders of great clans who hoped or believed that they might have an opportunity to seize the throne, began to make a lot of noise about how this match would diminish the values and blood of the Wari people. The situation was made worse because Anta-Accla's first wife was a pure-blooded Quechua-speaking Wari woman from the province of Nazca; thus, to some

xenophobes (which, in the Huari Empire, meant just about everybody), it looked a lot like the heir was, in effect, overthrowing his existing marriage to a Wari lady so he could take some foreign strumpet into his bed!

Anta-Accla tried to assure everyone that he did not intend to favour his new wife over his old one while Anquimarca made many pointed references to the very strong relations that already existed between Huari and Tiahuanaco - after all, what harm did it do to formalise this relationship with a marriage? - but this did little to calm the inflamed passions of the warrior aristocracy, especially in Nazca where feelings were running particularly high. Things might have taken an uglier turn but for the intervention of the War Chief Atoc who implied that he would gladly take out the army and crack some mutinous heads if things didn't quieten down quickly. Needless to say, the rabblers hushed up but the Empire was left with the sense that civil war or, at least, civil unrest had only just been avoided...

In any case, in 1123, Anas-Collque bore her husband a son, a sickly little child but one in whose veins flowed the blood of the ruling families of both Tiahuanaco and Huari. The general weakness of this runty little baby was interpreted by some as an indicator of exactly what would happen to the Wari nation if its blood was ever intermingled with that of a weaker, less martial and more decadent people. And, down Nazca way, Anta-Accla's in-laws (the family of his *first* wife) fumed quietly at the insult and affront they had suffered by seeing their daughter spurned in favour of a foreigner...

With all that excitement behind him, the Supreme King undertook a grand tour of the empire in 1125. It was His Majesty's intention to bring the glory of his royal personage out to the provinces so that the lesser people - the rural *fixi*³⁹ and the peasants and serfs - could see that the Ciquic was a real person who really existed, not merely a legend upon whom they would never set eyes. His Majesty's route took him through Chavin, Moche (where he celebrated a great month-long festival at the ever-growing city of Chanchan) and finally Wairajikira.

And that was about all that happened in the Huari Empire, except that the minister Canchari managed to hector the nominally independent city of Pachacamac into allowing the Supreme King to extract taxes from them.

The Aymara Hegemony of Tiwanaku

Ruler: Curi-Paucar, Yatiri of the Gateway of the Sun God, First Among the Great Chiefs

Capital: Tiahuanaco

Religion: Southern Amerind

As with the Wari to the north, the first order of business in Tiahuanaco was with the construction of the many new highways with which the Yatiri was opening up parts up the realm that, heretofore, had been nearly inaccessible. In particular, many serfs and slaves - together with hired workers and those excellent Tiwanakan engineers - continued extending the road that steered from the capital to Solo and thence to Wari-controlled Cuzco. Work on the highway was not completed by the end of 1125 but, still, considerable inroads had been made into the task and an end was actually in sight..

Away from the roads, the Yatiri send his officials out across the whole hegemony to count all the people who lived under his rule and calculate the worth of their property and the dues they owed him, their temporal overlord and spiritual protector. The work took much less time than one might have imagined and, before the end of 1122, the royal archives (actually a large collection of knotted *quipu* strings⁴⁰) were fairly bursting with newly-gathered information about the many different clans, villages and towns who owed fealty to the Yatiri. In due course, the grim-faced bureaucrats in the capital, whose it was to calculate the imposts and duties owed by the subject villages, would issue their reassessment of the revenues that were payable to the Yatiri and then the poor and much-abused peasantry of the Andean mountains would find themselves with even less than they had before. Life is never easy for a peasant...

For a great ruler such as Curi-Paucar, on the other hand, life has so much more to offer. In particular, the Yatiri was concerned with organising the marriages of both his daughter, Toctollssica, and his niece, Anas-Collque; the former was to be wed to the eldest son of one of the leading provincial clans, in an attempt to cement relations between the ruling family and its potential internal rivals, while the latter was to be packed off to Huari where she was to marry the Ciquic Anquimarca himself to guarantee continued peaceable relations with the Wari warlords. Of course, by sending Anas-Collque off to Huari, the Yatiri also divested himself of the embarrassing political problems that had attended him ever since he appointed the silly wench as his heir; this pleased the clans, who were able to rest assured that the future Guardian of the Gate of the Sun God would be of the male ilk (but it didn't much please poor old Anas-Collque...).

³⁹ "*fixi*" - minor rural landowning warrior, akin to a European knight.

⁴⁰ GM confession: I don't actually have any evidence that the Tiwanakans used the *quipu* method of record-keeping (of course, I don't have any evidence they *didn't*) so maybe this is a bit of creative history-writing. I hope you'll forgive any factual errors in this respect.

Well, the marriage of Toctollssica went off brilliantly - in 1121, at the age of seventeen, she was gladly received into as wife by a son of one of the leading clans of Caranga, an Aymara-speaking province south of the great cultic and political centre of Tiahuanaco. The other marriage, that of Anas-Collque, went less well: for a start, the Wari Ciquic had no intention of marrying the woman and, instead, passed her on to his brother and heir, Anta-Accla. The couple were eventually wed and, in 1123, the marriage even had male issue but various political rumblings resulted from the match and it was not at all clear what the long-term ramifications for the Huari Empire would be.

The Marajo People

Ruler: lawi, the Sun Chief

Capital: none

Religion: Southern Amerind

Peace and quiet, as usual, were the order of the day amongst the Marajoara. Tuia, the Water Woman, continued to receive instruction in how to fulfil her duties while her father, by now a decrepit forty-one years old, tottered on, persistently and stubbornly refusing to die.

Yet, the outward lack of dynamic activity did not mean that Marajo society was totally lifeless. In fact, things were changing radically just under the surface. lawi had led his people for more than two decades - a fabulous length of time almost unheard of amongst the peoples of the Great River, where few people would live beyond the age of forty. For most of the Marajo tribes, lawi had reigned for the whole of their adult life and only the oldest people in their fifties or even sixties could remember a time when he hadn't governed them. This created a subtle change in the attitude of the Marajo people towards their Sun Chief; instead of seeing him as a mere leader and first among equals, they began to defer to any and all of his wishes and paid him a strange obeisance of the kind usually reserved for the spirits of the forest and river. In short, he ceased leading his people to ruling them.

For lawi, who had no real desire to become so powerful or enjoy such unprecedented honours, it was most perplexing. He tried as hard as he could to make his people see that he, lawi, was no more than an ordinary man who had been blessed (or cursed) with long life by the spirits but it was an uphill task. As the years slipped by, the great tribal councils warped into a sort of royal court; debate or argument ceased and, instead, the councillors and tribal elders sought lawi's instructions and expressed their willingness to follow his orders. In outlying areas, too far away to be controlled directly by lawi's authority, officers and magistrates began appearing to carry the Sun Chief's will to every corner of the land. Slowly but surely, the traditional jurisdiction of the lesser chieftains was eroded and supplanted by the power of the almost divine Sun Chief.

Tuia, who had now grown to become a fine but unmarried woman of eighteen years, was left to wonder whether the various tribal chieftains and elders would give her the same kind of obedience and homage that they paid to her father. It troubled her deeply that she should be the heir to so magical a leader as lawi. As he grew older and older, showing but little sign that death would ever take him, it became apparent that he was uniquely blessed and that he had been ordained to lead the Marajo tribes into a new epoch. In short, he would be a hard act to follow.

In other news, the riverside village where lawi dwelt grew considerably in size and importance as chieftains, priests, traders, farmers and administrators flocked to it. The chieftains came to be near lawi and to increase their own prestige by associating with the Sun Chief; the priests came to perform sacred rites and to receive the blessing of their great leader; the traders came to sell their valuable wares to these rich and important people; the farmers came to sell their produce, pay their tribute and request the blessings and benedictions of lawi. The name of the village was, simply, "The Council", called this because, for endless generations beyond memory, it had been the site of the tribal council that governed the Marajoara.