

A Witness of the Year One Thousand, Five Hundred and Fifty Nine, by the Everlasting Grace of our Divine Lord and Savior, and His Defenders of the Faith that hath made this record possible.

The Reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, Caliph and Caesar of the Ottoman Empire

Covering a major portion of Macedonia and the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire began from an invasion of Turks coming out of the Persian wilderness and turned into one of the most powerful forces of the Middle Ages. Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566, ruled 1520-1566), known as “the Sultan of all Sultans, the shadow of God on Earth, Caesar of all the lands of Rome,” has brought the Ottoman Empire into the forefront of European culture and importance. Foreign dignitaries plead with the Sultan for patience and beneficial trade contracts, and “gifts” routinely appear from the Islamic states of Africa and Persia. To be an Ottoman Turk at this time is truly a blessing.

During the decline of the Roman Empire and the initial spread of Islam a series of Jihads had been declared against the Byzantine Empire. These propagated further into Byzantine territory with each successive generation, until the final Jihad claimed the great city of Constantinople in 1453. After a glut of destruction in which most of the churches and temples of the city were razed to the ground and many tombs were shorn of any adornment, the city was renamed Istanbul. Towering Mosques and Minarets now glowed in the light of day replacing the sheen of gilt edged roofs and stained glass paradises. The fractured Ottoman Empire then rested for a time, digesting its successes. An opportunity in 1517 presented the Ottoman Turks with a chance for true relevance. They could own the Roman Empire’s last footholds AND control the scope of Islam worldwide. After a prolonged battle the Sultan of Egypt was brought before Selim I, Suleiman’s father, and was forced to surrender the title of Caliph. Suleiman is the first Sultan of the Ottoman Empire to be born with the title of Caliph, even though it was rarely used in documents. This process gave him instant indirect dominion over every Muslim nation, through fatwahs (religious decrees) and direct commands (as head of the powerful Ottoman Turks). However, as of 1559 this control had not been used to its full extent.

After consolidating the taxation and transportation aspects of the Crimean region, the Empire has an iron grip on the lucrative spice and silk trade. Saracen privateers prowl the Mediterranean and the armies of the Most High Sultan threaten the foundations of Europe with dissolution. Trouble stands on the horizon, however. After a rash of military victories in Europe, the warriors of the Empire have become mired in Hungary and locked in pyrrhic stalemate after stalemate with the Holy Roman Empire. Of major importance was the total lack of assimilation of conquered populations into the Empire and into Islam. Hungary, Bosnia, Moldavia, and Wallachia all resisted conversion with thousands of civilians being put to the sword by zealous holy warriors. The resistance has changed into bitter revolt and has propagated from generation to new generation. In fact, a campaign to destroy one Hungarian resistance leader for all time backfired and resulted in Suleiman’s death in 1566, scant years after major concessions were made to the Europeans to ease tensions in conquered regions, which included the ceding of the Transylvania region in the 1560’s.

1559 stands as a critical point in European History, where the juggernaut of the Ottoman Empire became mired in rebellions and troubled territorial occupations, ceasing most of its expansion for all time. The scope of the Ottoman Empire would continue based on inertia for some time, and then would contract greatly in future years. The Ottoman dominance over ALL trade routes into and out of Asia gave it untold wealth and influence, and Europe shortly chose sea routes for most of the silk and spice trade that existed. This marginalized the Empire’s economy and forced it to rely on self generated income, which was incapable of supporting the mammoth bureaucracy and the occupational military forces. Staunch resistance that persisted in the Kingdom of Hungary and Persia with the Order of the White Sheep assisted in Ottoman decline, forcing the Empire to turn its attention toward the Eastern Enemy rather than the European one. What this meant to Europe of the mid 16th century is that the Ottoman Empire would no longer be dictating diplomatic terms to the whole of Europe and Muslim armies would no longer be knocking on the doors of historically Christian lands.

The Revolution of Thought

As people and culture evolved from the mix of mysticism and superstition that was the hallmark of the dark ages, they began to desire more from their surroundings, each other, and their leaders. This caused the common man who had the ability and the means to improve his condition, and to strive with his fellow man in order to do so. Nations are equally seeking to improve their condition as they evolve from the primitive groupings that they were in the past. All throughout the civilized world people are exploring their environment, their thoughts, and each other through philosophy, art, literature, architecture, and science. People with names like Leonardo Da Vinci, Copernicus, Kochanowski, Erasmus, Boticegli, Michelangelo, and Bramante have led the charge towards enlightenment. As the lives of the common person improved they wanted finer things, and the trickle of expensive imports allowed through the Ottoman Empire was just not enough to satisfy the need. Trading houses from England, France, Italy, and Portugal were determined to capitalize from this bottleneck in goods and services and forge new trade routes – not only back and forth to the New World, but to India, and the Utter East.

As the restrictions on trade eased people found themselves part of a larger world. What happened in the far reaches of their Kingdom, or to their colonies could impact them at their homes. Facing the insecurity of a larger world they clung to their homes and leaders more as the harbingers of peace and security in a tumultuous world. This renewed faith in their leaders also came with the easing of feudal culture and society throughout Europe. Instead of struggling to meet the tax burden of the local lord, craftsmen were making things for a living and selling them. Governments made a living not by taking the peasants food, but by taking a portion of their profit. These liberating forces gave the average person a new concept of self with respect to the abstract national identity. The idea of being part of something bigger than themselves was an incredible driving force for the evolution of culture and society throughout the middle ages.

Present within the breadth and scope of the World was the realization that the Earth was a smaller place than had been previously thought. Science had taken its first steps with Galileo and Copernicus. People as a result began to understand their surroundings with a clearer eye. This had the unintended effect of limiting the supernatural to the whispers and shadows rather than to popular culture. Art had the Triumvirate of Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci and Raphael. The learning of these men has shown that the beauty of the mind's eye can truly be shown to others, if only through study and hard work. Music had scores of adherents to enlighten the soul and loosen the tongues of the listener. Anyone passing close to any of the Grand Cathedrals of the day would be warmed by the beautiful strains of light and life coming from within.

This causes the world to act in a much different way in which it had before. Gone is the relaxed way of interacting of the dark ages. As people's conditions have improved, so have their personalities been reinforced by their intensified self image. Soldiers are more militant, aristocrats are more elitist, and religious people are more intolerant than ever. Society is more understanding, however. As the level of superstition has decreased, so has the desire to find ghosts and ghouls behind every rock and tombstone. There is still a fairly high level of religious intolerance, though. Islam is against all Christians, Catholics are against all Protestants and just want the Mohammedans to leave them alone, and the Protestants are against all other religions and anyone that doesn't agree with them – even themselves. The traveler should be wary when dealing with intolerant people in this new age of enlightenment and understanding.

The British Isles

The Kingdom of England

After 12 years of political and religious unrest, Queen Elizabeth I, known as the Virgin Queen, ascended to the throne on the 15 of January, 1559. This is the beginning of the Elizabethan Era, during which would see the ascension of English power and influence throughout the world. The worlds of Catholicism and Anglicanism clash here in England like strident lions fighting for meat, with petty schemes and abuses occurring daily to test the poor of the slums and countrysides. Playwrights such as Shakespeare and their troupes will entertain the indigent, and lapses in political acumen are tolerated for the soporific effect that the plays have for the populace. The Settlement, which created the Church of England and solidified its continuity against the vagaries of Royal Authority, was also approved during the spring of 1559. Common to the landscape of England is sporadic outbreaks of smallpox and various diseases. Also, impending war looms on the horizon between England and France.

Kingdom of Scotland

Due to the recent ascension of the adolescent Mary (soon to be called) "Queen of Scots", ties with England to the south remain tense due to her claim on the British throne. George Wishart's martyrdom at the hands of the Catholic Cardinal Beaton in 1546 still resounds with the populace, with the formal adoption of Calvinism coming in the early years of the 1660's. Sporadic violence haunts the more hidden areas of Scottish cities, with gangs promoting different religions coming into open conflict in the streets after bouts of heavy drinking.

The Lands of Irish Heritage

Tir Connail

Ruled by what many view as a pretender to the distinction of having been descended from Niall of the Nine Hostages, Tir Connail sees an uneasy peace between local lords and their personal armies. Pressure from England has been felt in recent years to increase duty on trade and to deliver a higher portion of revenues taken to the British crown. An alliance of Lords across Ireland opposes this increase, as well as any input into their autonomy. This movement is very strong in the lands of Tir Connail. With the exception of the occasional bandit raid or clan dispute, life is peaceful in the earldom.

Tir Eoghain

Tir Eoghain is caught in the crossfire of rising conflict between the Irish Lords and the British Crown. The populace is tense as the local armies demand ever more from the countryside in preparation for eventual military action. Unfortunately this threat is more likely to be realized from Tir Connail than from a flotilla of British Ships and Marines.

Candleby

Seen as a stepping off point to English territory, the British Crown's presence here is strongly felt. A pro-English Earl sits in judgment over a restive populace that resents the presence of British advisors and tax-collectors. The occasional raid is launched against nearby British forces by an Irish underground based here. This creates bitter border clashes, and very often the English will pursue their attackers into Candleby and search homes and businesses for suspects and contraband, in defiance of Law and Treaty. With the exception of the military actions, crime is at a minimum here except for the infrequent smuggler or two.

Mayo

Home to a major shrine to St. Peter called *The Shrine of Knock*; Mayo is off the beaten path as far as most travelers are concerned. While many come to pay homage to the Mountain called *Croagh Patrick* to honor the place where St. Patrick fasted for forty days and nights, others come there for far more nefarious purposes. The Moy River is also a source of a salmon industry that surpasses sheep herding as the most important for the area.

Sliga

Sliga is also known as *Sligeach* due to the Sligeach River that passes its way through the Kingdom. A vast majority of smoked shellfish that wends its way through Ireland is brought from the banks of the Sligeach every spring and summer (get it fresh though... fresh mussels out of season are the subject of many a tough man's bet in Galway bars during summer festivals). Sliga is also an important trade crossroads due to its notoriously low taxes and permissive Lord. Smuggling tends to be a problem at night and at times of poor weather.

O'Rourke – Brefni

The O'Rourke branch of the Brefnis rule here, caught in a bitter land dispute with their cousins the O'Reilleys. The taking of O'Rourke captives by the O'Reilleys for ransom purposes is not uncommon, and members of Clan O'Rourke travel with heavy bodyguard. These bands are bitterly intolerant of anyone in their way, and many are the stories of travelers being run down by a hurried procession of O'Rourkes.

O'Reilly – Brefni

The O'Reilleys live here in a scant few hundred acres seen by many to be fairly arable croplands. The land has been brought to ruin under the O'Reilleys, who blame the O'Rourkes for their misfortune. They raid the O'Rourke lands when they run low on supplies, and occasionally ransom captives for extra income. They are intolerant of strangers, and their lands are lawless, except for the displeasure of the clan Lord.

Galway

This Mayordom is named for the walled city of Galway, which is situated on the Corrib River. Clan strife is singularly absent from the city, which is heavily pro-English, due to a series of laws that prevent Clan dignitaries from entering therein. The O'Flahertys raid the cropland that surrounds the city at least monthly, mostly striving to be a nuisance rather than to acquire a living from the banditry. Men-at-arms in the city do not travel out into the countryside as they fear reprisals from the local peasantry. The Mayor, Thomas Og-Martin Fitz-William has carried out a vicious campaign of repression against anyone that acts in a clannish manner, even persecuting those with distinguishable clannish accents.

Offaly

Home to a small clan, the Peerage of Offaly is peaceful for the most part. Trade is slow and most of the populace is poor. The region is the subject of many jokes throughout the region, due in part to the destitute manner some of the poorer peasants live. Much of the food here is tainted with cholera or disease, the locals having developed some measure of resistance to the plagues.

West Meath

Home to a mostly pastoral culture, Meath still suffers from the reputation its former lord had for being the “Betrayer of all Ireland”. Its citizenry consists of sheep farmers and simple folk, and the Earl maintains a sizeable army for the monitoring of county roads and taxation. Banditry is a problem in some passes, and many do not travel the roads after dark. Some of the constabulary has taken to banditry to supplement their incomes, as working for the Lord has not been kind to their pocketbooks.

Trim

The trade routes that pass through Trim destined for the British holdings on the coast are subject to heavy taxation by the local Earl, however much of that money goes right into British hands. It is part of a plan of the local British Overlordship to alienate the peasantry to the Irish Earl that has rule over the small Kingdom, and that is his price for autonomy over the everyday ruling of his demesne. The Underground movement that mounts attacks from out of Candleby also operates out of Trim, causing numerous small incidents that the Earl has to deal with.

Leix

A settled, small region of hilly pasture land surrounded by forests, the county of Leix is mostly forgotten by its neighbors. A fusion of Catholicism and ancient tradition has taken root in this backward land, and so few visitors travel here that word will never reach the regional authorities that such heresies are actively taking place.

Kildare

A troubled border land, Kildare is a target of the Irish resistance due to its ties to the British aristocracy. Still autonomous due to the treaties that govern most of Ireland at this time, Kildare receives direct support from the Lord’s cousins in England, and a levy of troops from British holdings in Ireland. This draws unrest from the younger portion of the peasantry, and isolates Kildare diplomatically from its neighbors. Add the occasional attacks by the Irish militias and you have a worrisome mess. Travelers should beware while passing through, to avoid any “incidents”.

Thomond

Ruins of the ancient Viking invaders litter the coastal areas, many of them having been picked clean by grave robbers over the years, and abandoned villages dot the roads at infrequent intervals. Thomond is having a hard time with all the unrest caused by the reformation and protestant prophets haranguing local citizenry at the walled city of Limerick. There have also been strange happenings at the old Roman Barracks at Clarecastle. Overall the peasantry is dealing with the disruptions rather well, but after a few riots had to be quelled with the sword,

Ormond

Thomas Boleyn was given the peerage of Ormond as a favor by his involvement with British Aristocracy (Being the grandfather of the Queen helps, too). While this has not been the easiest of lordships, it is still considered auspicious. The lands of Ormond are rich and fruitful, and the rivers teem with fish. The populace is secretive, however. A number of scandals involving the Lords of the land and the castle in Wiltshire have given the peasantry good reason to be distant from the aristocracy. They were deemed tainted by a court of the clergy and excommunicated, and their line was ended with their Lordship. Lord Boleyn has resisted all legend and rumor, mayhap due to his constant traveling back and forth to court in England. Many that live in the surrounding lands tell of strange dreams, and protestant prophets avoid the region, as the local populace will hang any that preach against the Catholic Church.

Leinster

Leinster rests among many rivers and plains, and its harbors boast large fishing fleets. Great is the trade between England and Ireland from ports in Leinster, and the region is growing economically. The desire has been increasing to form trading companies to more properly exploit opportunities overseas, but that movement has so far not really materialized in force.

Desmond

Trouble is brewing in Desmond between the Fitzgeralds that rule the Earldom and the envoys of the British Aristocracy. Seen as pariahs in the English court, the Fitzgeralds not only oppose raising taxes but refuse to convert to Anglicanism. This has caused frequent problems between the two groups, as well as causing local resistances to swell in support of the Earl of Desmond. In 1569 the tensions will erupt in large scale open warfare, culminating in 1583 with the elimination of the Desmond Line and the settlement of the former earldom with English settlers.

Wexford

The Earldom is named for its governmental seat in Wexford. Mostly peaceful, life in Wexford is banal with the exception of the occasional storm or two. Travelers have little to fear in this peaceful corner of Ireland, and most of the trouble surrounding the British control of Ireland seems to avoid Wexford, at least for now.

Western Europe

Kingdom of France

France is a pariah partially thanks to the unpopular Italian war of 1551-1559. Henry II of France is forced to accept *The Peace of Cateau-Cambresis* on April 2-3 of 1559, which returns Piedmont and Savoy to the Duke of Savoy. Henry also had to relinquish all claim to Italian lands. The war was mostly born out of Ideological differences between Henry and Charles V, and Charles's refusal to persecute the protestant heretics within the lands of the Holy Roman Empire. The prosecution in France of the Huguenots officially began on 27 June 1551 with the Edict of Chateaubriand, which instructed the authorities of the Kingdom to hunt down and repress all protestant activity within France's borders. Most of the populace share the same beliefs as the King, and any who espouse leaving the boundaries of Catholicism face loss of at least a third of their property, imprisonment, torture, as well as possibly having your tongue forcibly ripped from your body. Taxes are high, and crime is at an all time low, what with the Armies of the kingdom being on foreign soil and the impressment gangs traveling from town to town gathering up any lightly burdened individuals that can be easily found. The calls of heretic are regularly heard by traveling magistrates, who dole out justice on the quick so as to ensure their timely arrival in the *next* town. The failure of the French armies to capture the whole of Italy has embittered a large portion of the population as well. Strangers are mostly looked upon with suspicion, unless Catholic membership can be demonstrated easily.

Kingdom of Navarre

Staunchly Calvinist due to the conversion of Queen Jeanne III in 1556, Navarre supports the Huguenots living within France and renders them whatever aid they can, despite official French Persecution. The production of Basque Language versions of the Holy Bible also increased the tensions between Navarre and France. Henry III, the son of Queen Jeanne, is the sole heir to the throne of France, and there is no small amount of covert attention being applied to that fact.

Crown of Aragon

Philip II rules the Crown of Aragon through a Viceroy, spending most of His time attending to the Crown of Castille. The wide spread of the territories of the Crown require significant attention to maintain, and are subject to frequent Pirate attack by forces of the Ottoman Empire. The Isle of Majorca is a primary jumping point for anti-piracy campaigns by the Aragonese Fleets.

Crown of Castille

The Crowns of Aragon and Castille are held in Personal Union by Philip II. Philip rules Castille almost exclusively, however. Court excesses are blamed on terribly high taxes, and repression of the Muslim Moors living within Castilian has developed a burgeoning rebellion that will bear fruit in 1568 with the Morisco Revolt. The very thing that the anti-Muslim edicts were intended to prevent brought about rebellion. Travelers in Castille face high transportation taxes, surly government officials, and intermittent towns afflicted with the Plague.

The Kingdom of Portugal

Sebastian of Portugal oversees a vast colonization and maritime trade effort. Diplomatic efforts with the English, French, Austrians, and Polish are rewarding the country with new trade contracts and opportunities. The blessings of which benefit the home country greatly. This has enabled the King to enact a series of changes to the laws of the land that enabled Portuguese citizens to live as if years ahead of their backwards neighbors. The suffering of the Brazilian Indians has been brought to the attention of Sebastian and he is preparing legislation to ensure their fair treatment in the future. Currently there are many problems with the judiciary, greedy landowners in the colonies, and repeated bouts of devastating Bubonic Plague. Projects are underway to prepare dozens of long term care facilities for those sick with the plague, and generally the populace's views are optimistic and upbeat.

Northern Europe

Kingdom of Norway

Currently in a decline, the Kingdom of Norway still suffers from the effects of the Black Plague that occurred in 1349. Isolationist practices and the annihilation of the Fairhair Royal Line resulted in a scarcity of claimants to the throne. Some towns still lie desolate from the depopulation that occurred from that period, superstition holding sway over common sense and discouraging people from moving back. The local bishoprics have recently been dissolved, and since 1537 it has been unlawful to practice Catholicism within the borders of the Kingdom. This has caused a cessation of religious pilgrimages to the Nordic Saints, and a resulting trivialization of Norway among the international community. King Frederick of Denmark rules Norway through the Kalamar union, but does not visit the country, viewing it as a burden rather than an asset. Life is hard here, and food is scarce.

Kingdom of Sweden

King Gustav Vasa has clenched the whole of the Kingdom in a tight fist, persecuting any he perceives as agents of the government in Denmark. The King's Sheriffs conduct random searches of the peasants and intolerance of any disrespect of their authority is met with lethal response. Lingering after a recent pyrrhic campaign against Ivan the Terrible of Muscovy, which came to an end in 1557, Gustav spends his frustration raging at the peasants. He will meet his end in a few short years and be succeeded by Mad King Eric XIV. Mad King Eric will then drag the country into a vicious war with his brother King Frederick II of Denmark in 1563 that will not come to an end until 1570.

Kingdom of Denmark

King Frederick II ascends to the throne in the summer of this year, his father King Christian III dying slowly of a wasting illness. He contrasted with his peaceful father in that his reign was marred by a procession of military conflicts and wars. Taxes remained high during his reign to support his armies, and his friendship with Queen Elizabeth (he courted her for years) led to his kingdom being led by a cadre of competent administrators. His eventual marriage to his wife, Sophia of Mecklenburg was loveless and rumors of infidelity by both parts dogged his later years, until his eventual death in 1588. During his war with his cousin Mad King Eric XIV of Sweden, which raged from 1563 to 1570, Frederick saw large portions of his kingdom laid to waste repeatedly by Swedish armies. Travel through the countryside is safer the further from Sweden that you go. Vast areas of the country are empty, either as a result of conscription for the war effort or as a result of being made a victim to the incessant warfare that raged since King Christian's time. Copenhagen is the notable difference, with most of the population being present within its administrative region. Therein jobs exist in the merchant marine traditions and in artistic and skilled craftsmen careers. Travel to the countryside is considered unnecessary by many therein, and visiting the backward ancestral lands is unheard of.

Central Europe and the States of the Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire during the times of the Habsburgs was a loosely managed confederation of nations and territories that gave a tithe of money, materials, and men to the Imperial Throne. In exchange they received the general support of the Imperial Army and diplomatic redress as necessary. Charles V had just abdicated the throne in 1556, giving control of the Crowns of Aragon and Castille to Philip II and giving the remainder of the lands and the Imperial Rights to his brother, Ferdinand I of the Austria Habsburgs. This left the Empire in somewhat of a disarray, as the allegiances which had been building for so long had now just been dissolved into a big continent wide mess.

The Italian states were currently aligned with the Republic of Venice which was holding off the massive Muslim armies of the Ottoman Empire by sheer force of will. The French – Italian war is starting to wind down, with the failed attempt by Henry II of France to capture Italy (... Rome) still ringing from town criers throughout the continent. Ferdinand I is mostly concerned at holding back Suleiman the Great in Hungary and Bohemia while still trying to politically and militarily recapture the occupied territories.

The main justification of the Holy Roman Empire was that the Catholic Church certifies the Emperor as the ruler according to the Rule and Order of God. With the rise of the Protestant Churches, the mandate that the Emperor is Ruler by divine will has suffered. Protestantism under Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism has taken root all across Europe, with monasteries and churches across Europe being burned out of revenge for years of mismanagement and apostasy.

Many of the small territories are like nations unto themselves, with the different noble houses keeping private armies and minimalizing the role of Emperor as peacekeeper and protector. Only as a defense of the terrible hordes of the Ottoman Turks does the whole of the Empire trust Ferdinand, the Habsburg Emperor.

Kingdom of Friesland

The Kingdom is currently enjoying a time of peaceful growth. The lands are filled with grazing cows and grain. Windmills dot the landscape, and all the land sleeps contentedly. The local militias guard the roads vigilantly; anxious as to whether the wars and conflicts of the nearby lands will spill over into their homes. Strangers are not unwelcome, and may be treated with friendship if they do not act in an unkind manner to others.

Duchy of Mecklenburg

Being led by the standing Emperor has its benefits. Taxes are low, even with all the conflict over in Hungary and the people peacefully prosper. Joining the military traditions of the Empire is important to the Youths in the rural towns, and many a swarthy youth goes to the cities to enlist into one of the martial orders. Banditry is almost nonexistent, with incidents prosecuted by the sheriffs swiftly and efficiently. Import taxes are somewhat stiff, and travelers may be searched by greedy customs officials if they are suspected of "holding out".

The Lands of the Brunswick – Luneburgs

The conflict that has enveloped the Danish lands can be felt in the northern reaches of the territory, with refugees from Denmark and Sweden arriving daily from further North. This has placed somewhat of a strain on local resources, as the farmers strive to keep up with demand, and the countryside's ability to generate food is stretched thin. Costs for basic foodstuffs and supplies are

more expensive here than in most other places where no conflict is ensuing. Taxation on goods and services has fallen slightly as exporting has fallen due to high demand at home. Banditry is a somewhat common occurrence in out of the way places where the local militias have a hard time reaching, such as deep forests or river crossings that are not near towns.

The Lands of the Brunswick – Calenburgs

A recent levy of soldiers has just been sent to the Emperor for use in the Ottoman front. Weapons are scarce as families sent their sons away armed, leaving local supplies strained. With the slight depopulation that has occurred food is plentiful and inexpensive.

The Lands of the Brunswick – Wolfenbuttel

A stiff levy of soldiers has been sent to the Emperor in '55, and the economy has not recovered yet. The levy included many able blacksmiths and their journeymen, and this has caused the populace to import much of their forged goods from abroad – mostly from Hesse. Women and children are commonly seen without their husbands, and everyone is simply just trying to survive the event without suffering too badly. Banditry is not common as the militias that remain see it as their duty to protect the families of those that are gone. Incidents of violence or thievery are ruthlessly dealt with.

Duchy of Guelders

Nominally peaceful, Guelders thrives on the trade brought by the roads along the coast. The young lord, Ambrose, is convinced of his superiority and hangs his title over the people of the Duchy. This places him at odds with his Father, who is often away at the court of the Emperor Ferdinand I, advising him on policy. Aside from the local irritation of the ducal family, times are peaceful. Some smuggling occurs at night along the coast, using the darkness to avoid the tax-men.

Duchy of Cleves

The far flung apportionment of Cleves depends on the smooth functioning of the feudal hierarchy. Some unrest with the peasantry lately has caused the Duke to acquire mercenaries to supplement his regular men-at-arms. Apples are somewhat plentiful in the Duchy, and a good dinner can be had with a watchful eye, some skillful climbing, and a small fire to heat the apples with (during summer and fall).

County of Ruppin

Assigned to a liegeman of the Emperor, the county of Ruppin is run by his cousin, Seneschal Wirrith. Taxes are higher than one would expect, and mercenaries hold the rule of law within the county. Protestant morals are reinforced by strict enforcement of morality laws, and strangers are treated with a certain amount of disdain by the authorities.

Principality of Anhalt

Close relatives of the Habsburgs, the family that holds Anhalt is not very powerful politically. Prince Maximilian spends time brooding in his castle, leaving the local liege lords to run the principality as they see fit. Petty crime is common, as taxes on the peasantry are somewhat high and the land is not the best, agriculturally speaking. Also, rumors of evil spirits haunting a burned out monastery are causing a stir locally.

Electorate of Brandenburg

Held by the sitting Emperor, the electorate holds a voting seat on the council that elects the Emperor upon the death of a previous one. Brandenburg has a high cost of living, but there are plenty of wooded lands with game in them. That is, if you are willing to risk the ire of the local gamekeepers. Trade with the Kingdom of Poland is a profitable venture here, and the militias are well staffed and well armed.

Electorate of Saxony

The Duke of Saxony is currently visiting the armies on the front with Suleiman, the Ottoman Emperor. His claim to the vacant throne of Hungary has led him to send envoys to Suleiman requesting a diplomatic resolution to the Ottoman conquest of Europe. All of the Duke's military forces are in Hungary holding off Ottoman forces. Local taxes are high to support the war effort, with regular shipments of weapons and supplies being sent to the deployed army. The peasantry is suffering under the burden, but crime is at a low point due to a feeling of unity with the deployed soldiers. The older soldiers have remained to protect the electorate, and travel heavily armed due to their relatively few numbers.

Duchy of Saxony

As in the Electorate, the Duke of Saxony is currently pressing his claim to the lands and title of the Hungarian Kingdom. His troops are at the front with the Ottoman Forces, engaging in hit and run tactics until a diplomatic resolution to the Hungarian occupation can be found. Taxes are high in the Duchy, and weapons and supplies are hard to come by. Life here is more difficult than in the Electorate, due to the bandit raids that occur from across the border of Bohemia. Also, refugees from Hungary are present, keeping the economy from properly stabilizing.

Landgrave of Hesse

The Landgravate is still recovering from the imprisonment (under the Emperor Charles V's orders) of the Landgrave Philip. Concessions were made by Philip to the Catholic Church in order to secure his release. Protestant Churches hold the majority of power in Hesse, but the Catholic Church, by merit of the Augsburg Interim, has protection within the Landgravate. Weapons made in Hesse are sought after, due to a large workforce of skilled metalsmiths and gunsmiths. Hessian troops are also sought after as mercenaries, with Philip serving as the facilitator and receiving a cut in any deployment that occurs. Mistrust and religious intolerance are commonplace in Hesse. The Landgrave is currently working out a deal with Queen Jeanne III of Navarre to send a large number of troops to assist the Huguenots in the Kingdom of France. A long distance war is about to begin.

County of Nassau

The protestant Reformation has been strongly felt within the county, with a large number of burned out husks of churches still littering the countryside. Any who declare themselves Catholic, or who show a rosary might be set upon by an embittered public. The Count has distanced himself and his family from the turmoil, while making a public showing of Protestant support. What no one knows in there is a secret Catholic Chapel on his estate, and the Count assists a Catholic underground movement with limited smuggling and bodyguards.

Lands of the House of the Austria – Burgundies

Trade with France drives the Austrian Economy here, as French goods demand a premium in certain sections of the Empire. Ferdinand I is currently building up the military forces of his lands, in preparation for a massive counterassault in Hungary against the forces of the Ottoman Emperor, Suleiman. Goods and foodstuffs are at a premium here in the family territorial lands, as much of the export capable materials are funneled into the war effort. Smuggling occurs as people divert materials destined for the Army to their own selfish pursuits. Law Enforcement is somewhat corrupt, as sheriffs have a heady notion of their own power and abuses are common.

Duchy of Berg

The Ducal lands are somewhat peaceful at this time, as the Emperor is satisfied to keep Berg supporting his war effort than needing troops, at this time. Taxes are somewhat low, a crop levy and supply shipments suffice to fill the demands of the Empire. A rebuilding effort has been underway to restore some of the Churches and monasteries that had been burned, including a movement to turn a former Dominican monastery into a refuge for people with consumption.

Duchy of Julich

Vocal supporters of the French cause, the Duke regularly visits Henry II in France, leaving his administrators to run the Duchy in his absence. This has created friction with his liege lord, Ferdinand I. As the Duke still has not sworn fealty to Ferdinand, however, there is no official relationship between the two. This has caused a military buildup to occur between the Emperor and the Duke as tensions have risen along with the threat of war. Many of the freemen in the cities have sent their relatives to live abroad; as the anticipation of the common man is that the Emperor will invade Julich to force the Duke into swearing fealty.

The Territory of Palatinate (Upper)

The local economy has suffered as the ruling interests reside in the state of Palatinate which is over a week's travel from the borders of Upper Palatinate. Corruption, smuggling, abuses by the sheriffs, and outright banditry have plagued the countryside for as long as the people can remember. Only the general lack of serious backing keeps a revolt from happening against the feudal liege lords.

Palatinate

A number of forces have conspired to keep the Count from governing effectively. For the last several years the Countess has suffered from nerves and a lingering consumption, and the Count has been by her side almost the entire time. While this is normally a good thing for the family side of the Count's welfare, the constant parade of leeches and doctors who have a miracle cure for the Countess have been a drain on the wealth of the Count and an embarrassment in the eyes of the political world as a whole. Also, the Count's administrators are far from efficient, as graft and corruption plague the countryside. The populace sympathizes with the Count, and this is the only thing that keeps a rebellion from occurring.

Baden

The state of Baden (named for Baden, the city) stands as a bastion of the Renaissance, with numerous universities and skilled craftsmen providing an enlightened state of living for all present. Tension with Württemberg has caused no small amount of tension amongst the aristocracy, and plans are being formulated to deal with the Duke as soon as possible.

Duchy of Lorraine

Friction with the traditionally allied French has caused turmoil to persist within the Duchy. The transition to Protestantism was violent here, with many emotional and physical scars still visible on the land and in the actions of the populace. Taxation is stringent here, as the Duke is preparing a military force to aid the Huguenots in France in preparation for war.

Duchy of Württemberg

A territorial dispute with Baden has turned nasty as assassins are deployed both and forth between the two territories. Seeing heavily armed men stalk through the countryside is not uncommon as the populace try to “ride it out” and not become involved with the political quarrels of the aristocracy.

Teutonic Prussia (also known as the Duchy of Prussia)

The military forces of the Teutonic Knights are embroiled in a war of attrition with the Grand Principality of Muscovy, led by Ivan the Terrible. Even though severe taxation has stretched the peasantry to the breaking point, based on rumor and fact of Ivan’s actions to conquered territories the populace as a whole support the Knights. Military raids go back and forth across the border areas between Muscovy and Prussia, and the regions frequented by troops have been thoroughly depopulated. It is not uncommon to see unburied corpses still smoking in torched farmsteads. Scars from the Polish – Teutonic War that ended in 1521 are still healing, and the conflict with Ivan is wearing the land down.

Kingdom of Poland

Poland and Lithuania have been in personal union with Lithuania for many years now, and the open mindedness and respect that the aristocracy holds for all men is known throughout Europe. Religious tolerance has united the people with a national ideal, and scientific advancement has aided the economy and lifestyle of the populace. Nicolaus Copernicus and the University of Krakow are shining jewels in the crown that is Poland. Jan Kochanowski has achieved acclaim as a preeminent authority on classicist writing. Times in the Kingdom are truly enlightened and golden. Polish cavalry and army is the envy of the world.

Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Suffering under the onslaught from Ivan the Terrible, Lithuania is a major staging area for the Polish armies that have engaged Muscovite forces. Suffering losses over the last few years, the army is still undaunted. Frequently undermanned and against great odds the Polish – Lithuanian forces have slowed and stopped Muscovite forces under Ivan many times over the past years, but the toll is starting to show. Refugees from the stricken areas flood the cities, and sporadic reports of Plague have come in from several overcrowded regions. On the Southern Front with Ottoman forces in Moldavia, the standing armies basically stare at each other from the banks of the river bordering the two titans. The only thing that keeps open warfare from occurring is treaties that Suleiman recently signed with the King. Settlement is sparse across the breadth of the land, with the cities and metropolitan areas providing most of the troop levy for the armies of the Union.

Bavaria – Landshut

The Landshut branch of the House of Bavaria supports the war to liberate Hungary, and contributes many skilled huntsmen and woodsmen to the effort. Bavarian Cavalry also has been dispatched with great success to the Ottoman frontier. The people here are stolid and unemotional, except when festivals are underway. Foreigners are regarded with little love unless they distinguish themselves to the populace.

Kingdom of Hungary (under Occupation by Ottoman Forces)

“*Much was lost at Mohacs...*” For the past 33 years Hungary has been dying a slow death. King Louis II of Hungary fell by chance in a pitched battle with Suleiman at Mohacs in 1526. In the resulting chaos that ensued from the death of the King Ottoman forces were able to penetrate halfway through the Kingdom. Forces from Emperor Ferdinand and Saxony, along with Hessian and Bavarian mercenaries conduct small but fierce battles across the Hungarian countryside. In the protected north and west the Hungarian men stream into the army and resistance movements to strike back at Ottoman forces. Much of the original Hungarian aristocracy has been assassinated by Suleiman, and gangs of heavily armed rangers and huntsmen prowl the regions near where the Ottoman armies lie seeking a way to catch Suleiman, himself, unprotected.

Ottoman forces present within Hungary are subjected to vicious partisan attacks and sabotage, as the forced conversion of captured areas to Islam was stopped out of how galvanized the staunchly Catholic Hungarians were. The Hungarians paid a dear price... The bodies of those that refused to convert adorn many Ottoman pikes throughout the southern Expanses. So bitter has the fighting been that in the Transylvanian region several legends have begun about various counts and aristocrats making satanic pacts in order to gain victory over their enemies. Crusaders have been seen scouring the more obscure regions of the country seeking the Holy Crown of St. Stephen, rumored to have been lost early in the War.

Time and again treaties made with Suleiman have been broken by Ottoman sneak attacks and slave raids. In 1563 the territory lines will be reformed, creating the Transylvanian Autonomous region and ceding large tracts of land to the Ottoman forces. The Dhimmi Tax has been instituted along with shariah law in occupied lands making Christians second class citizens, and is forcing many of the peasants there to default on their assigned tax debt, sending them into slavery and giving open land for Islamic settlement. Travel is fraught with peril as both sides, wary of assassins and mercenary involvement will oftentimes strike without declaration of

standard or side if proper colors are not visible. Also several slave gangs are operating in the southern expanses, attacking those who are not obviously Muslim and selling them at markets scattered throughout the Mediterranean.

Bavaria of Munich

Home to many skilled craftsmen, weapons and supplies stream out from Munich destined for the fronts of the Ottoman aggression near Venice and in Hungary. The taciturn people of the land take the extra taxation in stride and do their part to ensure the freedom of the European Continent. Food is expensive, and with the exception of official holidays, very little waste occurs in the province.

County of Gorz

Liege – bound to The House of Austria that borders Hungary, Gorz (pronounced Gōrts) is caught between the fronts of the Hungarian occupation and the Ottoman aggression towards the Republic of Venice. Mostly the populace is keeping their heads down, wary of getting in the path of any of the conflicted sides. Where the troop movements have occurred through the county there is no wild game, and the roads are rutted and next to useless.

House of Austria

The construction of Schönbrunn Palace close to the Mediterranean coastline is considered a mark of the power and prominence that the Habsburgs have risen to. Close to the staging grounds for the resistance armies, Austria's Ancestral lands serve as a conduit for much of the support that passes directly into Hungary. Crime is swiftly dealt with, but with so many people passing through, enforcement is oftentimes difficult.

Kingdom of Bosnia (*Under Occupation by Ottoman Forces*)

Mountainous and ungainly, Bosnia straddles a fine cultural line. Many of the easily accessible regions, including most of the cities, have seen forced conversion to Islam by Ottoman forces. Much of the populace in the mountainous regions has taken up partisan warfare against the occupying forces, but the active movements are small in number and desperate. Travel for non-Muslims is dangerous through this country, as any non-practitioners face heavy taxation, unfair treatment under the law, random attack by religious police, and outright fraud in the marketplaces. This has occurred so quickly since many Ottoman citizens have emigrated here under the promise of favorable treatment and free (or nearly so) land.

Duchy of Mazovia

Part of the necessary buffer between the Kingdom of Poland – Lithuania and Teutonic Prussia, The Duchy of Mazovia had suffered from some of the worst of the warfare between the Teutonic Knights and the Kingdom of Poland. Healing is coming slowly to this land, but already there is hardly a burned town to be seen as one travels the countryside. Farming is taking off as the primary occupation, and while there might be a shortage of refined goods and things of advanced workmanship there is a dearth of food supplies and raw materials. Due to the noted absence of warfare, and the high rate of employment, there is little crime here.

Confederacy of the Swiss

Swiss expansion at the expense of its neighbors ceased in 1515 after the forces of the Habsburgs stopped the Swiss at the Battle of Marignano. This did not mean that the Confederacy was vulnerable; it simply meant the limit that Swiss forces had reached in their ability to protect their lands they held. Still treated by the international community as a pariah, the Swiss will not see general acceptance until 1648, when the Treaty of Westphalia cemented their independence from the control of the Holy Roman Empire and the politics thereof.

A Swiss Protestant Reformer, Zwingli, faces reprisals from his virulent campaign against the Catholic Church in several cantons of the Confederacy. The open warfare that resulted from his tactics during the Kappeler Kreige of 1529-1531 left deep divisions in much of the proudly independent populace.

Travel through the Confederation is still slightly chaotic, as all the cantons have yet to agree on taxation and policing of their highways and byways. Some roads have fallen into disrepair as a result, and there can be found at times roads that simply lead into abandoned valleys and forgotten forests with no human habitation whatsoever.

Duchy of Savoy

The Duchy still has substantial numbers of French assets within its borders. The Italian War has stalled and left Henry II of France stuck in several regions around Europe, looking for a way out. In April 2-3, 1559 Henry will sign the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis and bring an end to his desires to lead Italy into a wholly Catholic future. This will lead to a wide rejection of the heavy handedness with which Henry and France persecuted the Protestants, giving them more legitimacy in the eyes of the unrefined peasantry. Savoy is still partially occupied at the beginning of 1559, so game is scarce as the armies attempt to forage for food and other supplies to supplement what comes to them from along the supply chain. Food prices are high, and housing is also scarce, a significant number of houses having been razed as part of the war effort. Burned and blackened churches of all religions also dot the landscape, and the faithful among the peasantry are the only real losers in the conflict.

Duchy of Milan

Having suffered both at the hands of the Swiss and the French, the Duchy of Milan has suffered recently from piracy and military action against its shipping in the Mediterranean from Ottoman Raiding fleets. The general lack of a functional military has caused the functioning of the Duchy to be partially subsumed by the Duke of Savoy. This is the result of Treaty, but taxation has begun to increase as demand from the Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand and the populace is unhappy with the resulting loss of quality of life. All of these combined things have led to a relatively high unemployment rate amongst the peasantry, as land is taken to cover debts, or people flee the men-at-arms sent to take them away to prison for failure to pay past debt. Banditry is all too common as heads of households put their families up with relatives and take to the forests in order to earn their keep.

Travelers may encounter various characters on the roads of the Duchy, from acting troupes heading to another city as part of the renaissance enlightenment to hobbled Hungarian refugees that are simply seeking a place to rest.

Mantua

Mantua and the lands surrounding it are struggling to survive the economic difficulties posed by a belligerent Ottoman Empire and the demanding Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand I. A recent outbreak of plague in the surrounding towns and villages do not help internal security much, either. Renaissance related events like poetry readings and insult competitions are popular at this time and these diversions help to distract the populace from the trials they are suffering from. For the past 20 years the merchant caravans that the city of Mantua has depended upon for mercantile dominance over the surrounding counties have had trouble making it past a partial blockade of imports through the eastern passage from China and India. This difficulty facing Mantua trading houses has been offset by trading successes from the New World, but the current war with France has interfered with even that economic bright spot.

House of Este

Historically stalwart as a patron of the arts and a cradle of the Renaissance, the lands of the House of Este serve to occupy the lesser nobility of the Empire. This is great for the legions of minstrels, artisans, and entertainers that find succor from the courts of this land, but the current Lord's involvement with the Italian War and dubious alliances make Este a hot-point for spies, intrigue, and moral quandaries. Ercole d'Este, son of Lucrezia Borgia and her third husband Alfonso, and his wife Renée of France, daughter of King Louis XII of France and sister of the current French Monarch, rule over Este with a velvet glove. Church attendance is perfunctory at best, and the excesses of the Borgias have been perpetuated by Ercole, leading many down the path of Epicureanism and self-indulgence.

Bologna

Ruled by Cardinal Legate after the invasion of 1506, Bologna serves as a Catholic Preserve in the north of Italy. During the invasion, in which hundreds of years of art were looted from the palace of Giovanni II Bentivoglio, by careful maneuvering Bologna kept its independence, in part. Protestantism at that time became outlawed, and many convents and churches are under construction at this time. Freedom of thought and action persisted somewhat, as long as nothing detrimental was said about the church. The universities of Bologna are some of the oldest in Europe, and some of the most respected. Crime is relegated to the average back alley thug, or occasional pickpocket.

Republic of Venice

Known as *The Land of Serenity* to her people, Venice is under siege at home and abroad at this current time. Forces from Suleiman and his Ottoman Mujadin raid as deeply as the outskirts of Venice itself, only turning back when they meet staunch resistance from Venetian Defenders. Venice has undertaken steps to protect its populace. Cities that are closer to the front with the Ottoman Empire are fully protected by walls and with regimented troops. Small population centers are not so lucky. Raids from the Ottoman Empire have carried thousands of Venetian Citizens away to slavery or eventual death. This is not to say that Venice hasn't engaged in slavery before, though. Refugee Serbs by the thousands, indigent after being driven from their homes by the Muslims were sold into slavery for debt and other matters in Venetian slave markets during this time.

Venetian lands on the Black Sea and on many of the Aegean Islands of the Mediterranean are subject to constant harassment by Ottoman Naval Forces. Slave raids, impressment gangs, and outright piracy are a daily part of life in the Aegean. Travelers should be warned that travel through this region, unless part of a protected fleet, is fraught with peril.

Republic of Pisa (under Florentine Control)

Retaining its cultural identity in the face of Florentine oppression, Pisan universities bring a cosmopolitan air to the rigid structure of the Pisan life and countryside. The region is still recovering from the smothering of its major waterway in the 1300's. Areas by the coast are ridden with malaria mosquitoes and smuggling is a fact of life in the more remote areas. Rumor states that the only reason why Florence invaded Pisa was to gain the right to police its deltas and estuaries as they saw fit, as Pisa was commissioning privateers in an attempt to gain a Navy on the quick. Mainly these ships sought out Florentine trade, so the political ramifications were quick and severe. In 1506 Florence took over Pisa, and have governed it through proxy leaders ever since. Incidents involving Florentine troops and the occasional partisan attack still happen, as a number of offenses happened against the populace during the war that have not soon been forgotten.

The Archbishop of Pisa oversees the religious correctness of the region, while still maintaining an even hand. Careful oversight has prevented many of the religious intolerance that has plagued much of Europe during this time period. In the 1530's several conferences were held here to assess possible compromise/re-integration of the myriad protestant movements with the Catholic Church. The Legacy of Galileo also is felt in Pisan centers for learning and in the counsels of its dignitaries.

Republic of Florence

The Medici's rule of Florence is stern and ruthless. In the face of repeated riots involving everything from the price gouging of wool to the rampant sexual irregularities of Florentine men, public discourse has been regulated and limited by order of the state. Machiavelli also has been influencing Florentine politics in a very negative way during the past few decades, as his philosophies regarding leadership and the necessity of action versus any perceived threat has emboldened the Medici's to undertake actions against political opponents that much of the aristocracy of Europe considers abhorrent. Many have come to know the underside of the bright appearance of Florence at the hands of the elite cadre of Enforcers that the Medici employs.

Trade is Florence's strength, and activity between Florence and the New World, along with perilous routes around the horn of Africa to India has bolstered Florentine fortunes. Any seeking work have it in quick measure and with ample supply. Also, most of the major trade routes to the south of Italy pass through Florentine controlled lands, so taxation gives the Medici's great wealth with minimal effort. Travelers should take note, however... Corruption amongst the tax men has increased during Medici rule, and abuses during customs searches are not unheard of. Membership of one of the trading houses of Florence or Venice is enough to dissuade excess, however.

Duchy of Urbino

A peaceful seeming territory in the Northern Marches, Urbino is the seat of a malevolent political ghoul of the name Francesco Maria II. Using the Church for political gain is one of the hallmarks of the Della Rovere family, as several Popes have been birthed from that line. The culture of the ducal lands is more staid and restrained than much of the surrounding territories, as the Renaissance has skipped over the more pastoral Urbino for the more forward leaning metropolitan centers like Milan or Venice.

Urbino is also home to a Cardinal Bishop. This places it in a position to influence Church Policy on many matters, including who will be elected Pope when a successor is needed. By controlling the Duchy, Francesco wants to influence church policy to further his own ends.

Republic of Siena (*under occupation by Imperial Forces*)

One of the most costly victims of the Italian War, Siena allied with France early in the conflict in the hope that they would stand together against Florence. This was a costly mistake, as Charles V (the Holy Roman Emperor at the time) viewed this as a strong enemy threat very close to Rome (which it was). A large force was sent to deal with Siena, led by Gian Giacomo Medici, and after a decisive battle at Marciano in August 1554, the capital city of Siena was isolated from external aid and cut off from any lines of supply. Then, on April 17, 1555, Siena was overrun by a devastating force of Florentines allied with King Philip II of Spain. Much of the cities wealth was looted, and in the burning and chaos that ensued, the ruling families of Siena (some 3000 people, 1700 armed) escaped the city and fled to the walled city of Montalcino. Action has not been initiated against the holdouts as of yet, for the forces in Siena are still digesting their victory. No rule of law exists within the Republic, and the territory will formerly cease to exist in 1559.

Perugia (*under papal occupation and martial law*)

A free state as late as 1540, the Perugians have fought against Papal control for hundreds of years. The cities of the commune have been stripped of valuables and the nobles of the realm have been either beheaded or sold into slavery. The artistic academies that spawned such greats as Raphael and Perugino have been scattered and closed. The people remember what it was like to be free of a taskmaster's yoke, and yearn for it again. The reputation for Perugians as having a great spirit but a short temper hold true, unfortunately. Any act of rebellion or resistance is staunchly put down and rigorously prosecuted. In only 16 short years the general shortage of adult men (many having been slain during the war of 1540 that ended the Perugian Republic) and the presence of many émigrés from the Papal States have diluted the traditional fire of the populace. Crime is slight under the harsh restrictions placed upon the people by the Church, with the noted exception of the occasional Church official that happens to be in the wrong area at the wrong time alone.

Papal States (*Also called the Domain of St. Peter*)

Under the dominion of the Catholic Church and the Holy See, the Papal States are run by Papal Legates who essentially manage the territories according to Papal decree and ensure collection of taxes and crush any resistance. The renaissance has mostly missed these lands, as the feudal systems have been maintained nearly intact over the centuries. The nobility of the Papal States and the priests of the Catholic Church have received the fruits of tithes and inheritances given to the church, but the glory of their lifestyle and existence is like the sun next to the grim and grainy reality of the common people. Taxes have risen somewhat due to the Habsburg – Valois War, which was also called the Italian War. Sickness and malnutrition remains the chief killer of the young or elderly. Men – at – Arms of the Church patrol the countryside, ensuring the safety of the convents and palaces of the Church while keeping the peasantry in check.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church of this time was pursuing Damage Control over what was perceived as the Protestant Threat. Central to the theme of the Reformation have been the excesses of Papal Conduct and Authority that have led people across the breadth of Christendom to believe that the Church was no longer the authority on matters of Faith and Works. The translation of the Scriptures into all practicing languages was a severe blow to the Church, since they could no longer be considered to be the only conduit for the Words of God (Latin no longer being a functional language outside of the Church). The rise of Islam in the East under the Domination of the Ottoman Empire was unduly frustrating in the light of past events, since even an attempt to call a Crusade against the Defilers was met with cynicism and disdain.

The Medici clan has allied itself with Rome, and the combined force of Church wealth and Medici cunning has changed the political spectrum in the lands of the Italian Peninsula. Mercenaries hired by the Church along with Military orders and led by Medici commanders have procured victory after victory for the Church. Since the Medici family allied with the Church, they have prospered also. The consolidation of much of the formerly free states of Italy has come under Papal dominion over the past hundred years.

Recent actions against Venice, however, proved how tenuous the policy of the Church was in its mad land grabs of recent times. Shortly after the Republic of Venice was beset upon by an alliance of nations and the Church, the Ottoman Empire began to physically close in upon Italy with the intent of crushing the heart of Christianity once and for all. Soothsayers and church mystics proclaimed the doom of man inherent as any part of conquest against Venice, so the Church withdrew its confidants and support from the alliance, and Venice survived to stand as a bulwark against the Ottoman Threat.

The Pope is ailing, and this has caused a sort of power vacuum to develop within the ranks of the Church. His tenure has seen the emergence of a vicious Inquisition and the petty involvement of the Church with the Italian War in alliance with Henry II of France. Pope Paul IV culminated an aggressive campaign to be declared Pope from humble beginnings, however. Returning to Rome after suffering symbolic banishment to the Courts of England and Spain during the tenure of Leo X, Giovanni Pietro Caraffa politicked himself into being declared the General of the newly formed Martial Order of the Dominicans, called *The Theatines*. The defeat of the Theatines during the sack of Rome by Imperial forces in 1524 was still worked into a success for the future Pope, as his agents skewed the reports of the campaign to appear as if Giovanni led a heroic defense against the enemy even though he merely sacrificed his men in order to secure the relative safety of his personal guard and himself in a panicked flight to the safety of Venice. After being recalled by Pope Paul III he managed to bribe his way into being appointed Cardinal of San Pancrazio, in 1536. He was shortly afterwards declared the Archbishop of Naples. His arrogance and ill manner alienated the court of the Holy Roman Emperor and was soon reassigned as the head of the Inquisition.

Cardinal Giovanni's arbitrary (and sometimes personal) dispensation of holy justice left a sour taste in many of those opposed to him, as he oftentimes was simply the implacable muscle of Pope Paul III. When he was in his 80's he was declared Pope, and stood in the face of his longtime enemy, the Holy Roman Emperor. After being declared a hero of the people (they even made a statue of him) for his support of Italian Independence, the new Pope proceeded to invoke all the selfishness his lifetime of machinations had developed within him. The Inquisition was used with more frequent malice than his predecessor, giving the Inquisition the appearance of a Secret Police rather than a vehicle for protecting the people of the Church from heretics and abuses of the clergy. The appointment of numerous family members with no church training to positions of importance within the Church (including making his nephew a cardinal and other obvious abuses of Papal authority) caused a massive movement against him. In the fall of 1555, during a series of riots against his vicious treatment of imagined threats to his personage his own statue was torn down and broken into pieces. After a long illness, Pope Paul IV passed on and was buried in Aug of 1556. The election of Pope Pius IV later that year was hoped to usher in a new era of Church reform and enlightenment.

Solvanna (under Papal Legate)

Serving as a buffer between the Papal States and the Northern states of Lombard Italy, Solvanna is allowed more freedom than is customary for a territory under Papal Legate. The presence of Church mercenaries is slightly felt, and travel can be undertaken with minimal harassment from the authorities. It always helps to have a few florins, though...

Principality of Plumbino

Holding out in the face of an aggressive Papacy and a restive Holy Roman Empire, Plumbino has taken the face of a merchant city state and allied itself with Venice, avoiding most of the war of the time. Intrigue haunts Plumbino's courts, as the valets of the Habsburgs and the Valois engage each other in tit-for-tat assassinations and intrigues. The common man is taxed heavily to support the excesses of court, and trade even more so. Only the profits of the merchant houses keep the high-renaissance life of Plumbino intact.

Kingdom of Naples

Used as a staging point for many actions against the Valois – Catholic alliance of the Italian War, Naples is home to some of the most strategically important points in Italy. Although under occasional threat of Ottoman raid, Naples serves as the strong backbone for the Habsburg domination of Europe. The fortified ports of the cities that lie on the Eastern coastline protect the inhabitants from molestation by hostile naval forces, but trade is often vulnerable to attack. As a result a strong naval presence has been maintained along the Italian coast, in cooperation with Venetian Naval forces. The Napalese lands are rich and hold troves of

hidden history, especially in the harder to reach mountain passes and extinct volcanoes. Travelers have little to fear in the more sparsely populated areas, as the populace has taken to peaceful living rather than reclusive banditry.

Republic of Genoa

After centuries of slow winnowing at the hands of Venice and the Ottoman Turks, the Republic of Genoa has been experiencing a revival for the past 30 years under the titular guidance of Andrea Doria, the most prominent military Genoese mind of the generation, and a circle of Genoese bankers who made up the primary ruling council. They have been helping to finance the military exploits of the Holy Roman Empire and the Spanish Habsburgs in exchange for favorable military treatment and generous awards of Imperial largesse. To a great effect this tactic has largely benefited the Genoese, along with Andrea Doria's special tactical genius. The Republic is fiercely patriotic, and any action which might affect its sovereignty is sought out and eradicated with prejudice.

The Marches

A loosely administered area of farmland and estates, the Marches serve as a northern buffer zone for the Papal States and the city of Rome. Repeated assaults from Naples has driven out many Catholic elements from the countryside, and mostly the populace just tries to ignore what is happening around them and focus on their farms and livelihood. Many of the elder farmers were soldiers of some note, and, as many a foolish brigand has discovered, attempting to molest the populace in any way will bring eventual action that will far exceed the severity of the initial offense.

Montserrat (*under occupation by French Forces*)

Currently under French occupation, Montserrat will be returned to the duchy of Savoy by the French at the close of the Italian war this year. The local economy has been ruined by the war, and the crimes committed by the hungry or the malicious vastly affect those that have managed to retain their lands and survive all the military action. An underground resistance has been receiving aid from Genoa for the purpose of thwarting French interests in the region. The unfortunate effect, though, is the French forces have ravaged the countryside in their efforts to exterminate the rebels.

The Kingdom of Bohemia

Ferdinand, Holy Roman Emperor, rules via proxy over the lands of Bohemia. Religious tolerance is practiced, and the evenhandedness of the Bohemian justice was known by tales as far away as England. They have been a great supporter of the Hungarian Resistance versus the Ottomans, and the manner with which Ferdinand has ruled the Kingdom has engendered a great empathy for his causes by the common man. The countryside has rallied behind the cause for freedom and tolerated higher taxes to fund the war effort has brought. Travel through the region is somewhat safe, as the law enforcement of Bohemia is noted for its efficiency.

Eastern Europe and the Steppes of Russia

Grand Principality of Muscovy (also known as Russia)

Ivan the Terrible has wrought a cruel empire from the loose confederation of princedoms and communes that peppered the Russian landscape. Since ascending to the title of Grand Prince of Muscovy in 1533, he has re-organized the functioning of the kingdom in order to enable Moscow to support any length of war in which the Cossacks and Ivan's terror troops would take part. As of 1556 Ivan is leading his forces against the loosely held eastern border of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The threat posed by him to his neighbors is already well known, and diplomatic entreaties with Livonia will result in a formal declaration of War between them in 1558. This will draw the full ire of Lithuania and Poland upon Ivan, who so far has been lucky that the Lithuanian army is mostly concerned with Suleiman and the Ottoman Empire and their mad campaigns in the south.

Life in Russia is difficult at best. The different regions under Ivan's rule are treated differently according to the behavior of the inhabitants. Divisive actions (or even rumors to that effect) are answered with vicious reprisal. The pressures that Ivan is putting upon the populace strain it to their breaking point, and any that disappoint Ivan are put to death (usually by slow torture). Even his own children would face the terrible ire of their father, his own son Ivan dying at his hands in 1581. Burned and blackened houses with the occupants hanging from pikes in their front yards are palpable reminders of the Tsar's displeasure. Fear keeps the populace in line, and the threat of losing one's family to a depraved madman's bloodlust just because of back taxes is a strong incentive to support Ivan's malign schemes.

Land of Pskov (*undergoing Muscovite incorporation*)

Pskov, a small republic that blended the best parts of European thought, architecture, and learning with Russian determination and skill fell to Muscovy in 1510. The area is still undergoing resettlement, as émigrés from Muscovy still stream into the walled cities of Pskov and swell the ranks of partially used labor force of the region. Every member of the governing aristocracy has been taken to Muscovy to disappear. This has caused all manner of administrative difficulty for governing the cities of Pskov

(Pskov the capital and all the other population centers). Life here is better for many than where they came from, and Ivan does not bother the people as long as they do not rebel against them (and pay their taxes).

Principality of Riazan

One of the largest of the forced allies of Muscovy, Riazan has given Ivan some of his best cavalry. In exchange for military support, Ivan is leaving the principality alone. Riazan is home to the regions best farmland, and contains some renowned horse breeders. People here are nervously anticipating the day when Ivan ignores his treaties with Riazan and invades with his Cossacks to ruin the kingdom. To some it is simply an acknowledgement of the obvious future. Many are setting their affairs in order to be able to move away, maybe to Livonia or find some hidden corner of one of the Khanates where the Muslims will just simply leave them alone and let them live in peace.

Knights of Livonia

The Teutonic Knights ravaged the lands near the Baltic Sea for many years following the collapse of the Crusader states in the Holy Land, as they struggled to find an identity and an enemy to fight against to justify their existence. In Livonia, after hundreds of years of hostilities, the Knights took up the causes of the myriad independent communities within the Livonian Confederation. As they finally had a home to protect, and the bloodlust of their fathers had generations with which to fade, the Knights became the military protectors of the Livonian Confederation. Ruled from the city state of Walk, the Landtag (a small parliament of self-appointed rulers, in this case a notable representative was selected from each small state or community) governs the country with a fair and even hand.

In 1558, after repeated envoys from Ivan were bound, stripped, and sent home tied to their horses Ivan invaded Livonia in a rage. An antiquated treaty of mutual protection with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (from the time when Lithuania was smaller and not so connected with the Polish aristocracy) was invoked by the Livonians to call the forces of Lithuania and Poland to their aid. Unfortunately Lithuania demanded that Livonia become a vassal state in 1560 as compensation for their aid, as Ivan declared that he would visit Hell itself before giving up on his conquest of Livonia. This came even after the Danish states also came to the aid of Livonia and her defenders in the vicious war of attrition with Muscovy.

Golden Horde

The land of the Golden Horde is the region most frequented by those nefarious Mongol raiders and their leaders, the Khans. The Crimean Khanate to the south was recently absorbed by the Ottoman Empire, leaving the nomadic Horde to dominate the much poorer region to the east. Trade along the rivers of the region is the primary source of the caravans from which the Khans receive their protection tribute that makes up their livelihood. The recent appearance of heavily armed and protected caravans replacing the earlier groups of merchant wagons that travel through the region are squeezing the Khans ever more each year, as they are forced to engage in riskier endeavors to make a living. This only forces the merchants to hire more guards. In addition, much of the land normally held by the Horde is being consumed by the ravenous forces of Ivan the Terrible to the north. This decline will continue until 1783 when Catherine the Great of Russia will absorb the last Khanate and the lands of the Horde will be a forgotten memory.

The Hegemony of the Ottoman Empire in Macedonia and the Holy Land

The Ottoman Empire

Controlling the trade routes through the Crimean Region, the Ottoman Empire has grown fat and restive off of the extensive profits that the taxation of European trade has engendered. Suleiman the Great rules the body of Islam as the living embodiment of the spirit of Mohammed, demanding the fealty of all Islamic states around the world. Non – Muslims are subjected to the Dhimmi Tax, which is a vicious tax that is applied to non-believers in order to “help them convert”. The slave trade in the Mediterranean and Holy Land has grown flush with the legions of dispossessed citizens thrown from their ancestral homes by this cruel practice. Elsewhere resistance to Ottoman rule has lessened, as the official stance of the Imams of the Muslim world is for all to obey the dictates of Suleiman.

Military action is currently underway against the Christian controlled islands in the Aegean, Cyprus, the Persian Empire (past the White Sheep to the east), Hungary, and the holdings of Venice on the protected isthmuses of Greece. No quarter is given to the enemies of Islam. In certain situations, where Suleiman could end up in more trouble from the execution of a defeated foe, he will give terms for their surrender. This is, of course, if the troops can be restrained enough for terms to be given.

For Muslims, life in the Ottoman Empire is peaceful and rewarding. Worship is joyful – wives are plentiful and children are obedient. There is ample opportunity for enrichment and gain. For all others the law of Mohammed holds true.

Land of the Peace of Ramadan (tributary to the Ottoman Empire)

The ancient cities of Tarsus and Antioch have been relegated to regional centers of trade. Gone are the sense of civic importance and the exhilaration of the merchant ships at the ports. Mostly small craft and regional traders ply the ports of the northern edge of the Holy Land. The tribute is delivered by a special tribute caravan that accompanies the regional lord, and no force dares

come near those caravans, for to do so would interfere with the Caliph's tribute. Fishing and local crafts are the main industries and the people are all Muslim, though not all are ardent practitioners of the religion.

Dulkadir (*tributary to the Ottoman Empire*)

Mostly home to small farmers and cattle herders, Dulkadir serves the Ottomans as a barrier region to the disintegrating Federation of the White sheep, which is being incorporated in to the Persian Empire of the Safavids. Ottoman raiding parties crisscross the territory chasing after bandits and Persians that cross into Dulkadir from across the porous border. Mainly the opposing forces leave the average peasant alone, preferring instead to seek out their respective prey on the battlefield. Trade is caravan based out of the cities and towns, and the land hasn't seen any kind of real change since the crusaders left.

The Sultanate of Egypt (*tributary to the Ottoman Empire*)

After losing the right to direct the world's Islamic population to the Ottoman Turks, Egypt stayed out of the political spectrum for a while. The Mamluks rule Egypt in the administrative absence of the Ottoman forces, only paying them yearly tribute to keep the peace. Trade out of Egypt is directed throughout the Mediterranean. Chief exports include: wheat, spices, incense, mummies, wine, and fine lumber. Since Ottoman privateers do not attack Egyptian trading vessels, they are free to trade with whomever they please. Even though Islamic, they have a somewhat good relationship with their trading partners which include both Christian and Islamic nations.

The Federation of the White Sheep (*leaderless and being absorbed into the Persian Empire*)

Once a strong bulwark against which the Ottomans could not prevail against, the Federation is failing now that the bulk of the White Sheep's forces have been destroyed at the hands of the Safavids. The forced implementation of Shi'a Islam resulted in not a few deaths, and much of the resulting chaos is resulting from infighting between followers of the two forms of Islam, Sunni and Shi'a. The pitiful amount of agriculture that is possible in the parched land of the Federation has been even lessened now that the support of the White Sheep isn't there to fix the infrastructure required to maintain sustainable crop yields. Many of the superstitious elders have blamed the recent passing of a comet through the night sky and the meteor shower that followed for the country's ills. In 1584 the territory will be fully functional again as a viable part of the new Persian Empire, and the country would be finally able to stand up to the Ottoman Turks once again.

Karpathos (*occupied by Ottoman forces, also known as Kerpe*)

The staging point for many a strike against Ottoman interests in the Aegean has been taken at last by the enemy in 1540. The suffering of the island's defenders makes a stink that rises up to heaven. Wanton rape of the female inhabitants of Karpathos has been conducted in an almost systematic method with the goal of overriding all trace of cultural identity in the resulting population. The mothers will survive this insult, and many of the customs of the island will be preserved.

The Refuge of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (Hospitallers)

Rhodes fell to the forces of Suleiman under the auspices of General Reis in 1522. Fleeing the devastating destruction of their military base of operations (and home) the Knights retreated to their mission in Tripoli and bases in Europe while their Grand Master beseeched the Holy Roman Emperor for aid in the cause of God. In 1530 they were awarded the Island of Malta by Emperor Charles V to be their perpetual home and base, to which there was much rejoicing at news of their salvation. The Maltese viewed the Hospitallers with initial suspicion, but were soon won over with the example that the Knights of St. John demonstrated. The high and strong places of the island were fortified, and provisions were set aside for any catastrophe that might befall them.

Shortly after the defeat of the Knights at Tripoli, the Ottoman leadership learns that their prey had rebuilt their chapter house upon Malta, and an invasion force was prepared. A greater portion of the great Mediterranean Fleet of the Ottoman Empire will assault the island in 1565 under the command of their nemesis, General Turgut Reis. The Knights will not only fight off the vastly superior force, but will protect the Maltese residents at the same time. General Reis will not survive this last encounter with the Knights of St. John.

An underground resistance movement on the mainland is supported by the Knights from the island, with the main goal of rescuing Christian slaves from Ottoman oppression and delivering them to new lives in Europe and the New World. Ottoman raids are frequent and sometimes damaging, but none will be successful.

Candia (Crete)

Of all the bastions of Christianity in the Mediterranean, none are as important as the Island of Candia, also known historically as Crete. Containing a mine, defensible positions, protected harbors, and centralized location Candia was a vast enabler of Venetian force in the Mediterranean. If Candia fell to the Ottomans, Italy itself would be at risk due to the benefit that Candia serves as an effective sea port. Ruins in the more inaccessible hills point to the Isle's long history, and numerous are the local legends about hidden things in the hills that just wait for someone to find them in order to come once again unto Man.

Cyprus

Much of the Venetian – Ottoman conflict in the Mediterranean centered on Cyprus. Being so close to major sea ports on the mainland, the island was the destination of choice for Ottoman raiding parties. Venice has been heroic in its defense of the island, with the constant failure of every Ottoman attempt until 1571, when the island is overrun and most of the Christians on the island are beheaded.

Northern Africa

Morocco

Fiercely Independent, Morocco is one of the few nations that stand on the Northern edge of Africa that has not and will not be subjugated by a foreign power. Sultan Mohammed ash – Sheikh was ill for several months as the year of 1555 arrived, and the children of the Sultan all fought for the right to inherit his lands and title. Abdullah, Sultan Mohammed's 40 year old son from his first marriage, spent a great deal of time with his father after returning to Morocco from the Kingdom of Fez. This is disturbing to the Sultan's family as all of Abdullah's siblings died from mysterious causes over a 7 month period from 1550-1551. Mystics were sought by the Sheikh's second wife to protect the Sultan's wracked form from djinni drawn from the deserts and hidden places of the mountains.

In the fall of 1556 the Sultan died, and Abdullah al-Ghalib Billah will seize his primacy in accordance with Islamic law and claimed the title of Sultan for himself ending with his coronation in 1557. His family at this time, when all legal recourse became exhausted, fled the country to the nearby Kingdom of Fez. In 1558 his younger brothers return at the head of an Ottoman invasion force seeking to subjugate Morocco for themselves and the Ottoman Empire. He easily defeated the seasoned troops and then marched on Tlemcen for its role in assisting the traitorous brothers, before being driven back by liberators from Algiers. His opponents and challengers to his rule all flee the country mysteriously this year, as if driven away by some force. In 1568 Abdullah's failed incitement of the Morisco Rebellion in Castille resulted in the termination of all trading contracts between Morocco and Portugal, Castille, Aragon, and France. On the 22 of January, 1574 a mysterious cloud that burns the skin of any that attempt to penetrate its borders will envelop the Sultan's Palace. The cloud leaves after some minutes with no reasonable cause for its appearance or disappearance. Abdullah's fear wracked body is discovered in his bedroom moments afterwards. His was the only death.

The Imamate of Sus (*tributary to the Ottoman Empire*)

Hasan Pasha (pasha is the title of Ottoman governor) rules over the Imamate of Sus through capable subordinates. 2000 Ottoman janissaries are garrisoned here, and the Ottoman role in Sus is that of the Implacable Conqueror. Due to the constant partisan warfare and rebellions that plagued Sus during the Ottoman takeover, Arabs and Berbers (the two racial groups of the area) are prevented from serving in the military or from working for the Government in Sus. Serving as the furthest Ottoman military stronghold, Sus is critical to the Ottoman Hegemony of North Africa. If any rebellion is feared by Istanbul, a disciplinary force is sent to demolish the city that is offending. Jews in the Imamate are killed on sight, along with any French national.

Kingdom of Fez

Bolstered by the Muslims that fled the reconquest of Spain in 1492, Fez is a powerful deterrent to the designs that the Iberian Nations have on the North of Africa. Generations of Hate have turned the malice of the corsairs of Fez into a palpable weapon, one that stays always pointed towards Castille and their chosen home. Repeated massacres of Jews living in the capital city have resulted in the virtual abandonment of the city by the established trading houses of the day (many of them being run by Jewish families). The Timbuktu gold caravan route ends here in Fez.

The Oasis of Figuig

The Bazaar of Figuig is renowned throughout the region as having some of the most obscure and rare items for purchase in the whole of North Africa. The only way to get there through the treacherous wilderness passes is to start from Tlemcen and head south along the trade road. To depart from this passage is death, for if the wilderness does not claim you, bandits surely will.

The Sultanate of Tlemcen (*tributary to the Ottoman Empire*)

A vicious anti-Christian force in North Africa, Tlemcen sits upon a great deal of prime farmland (considered a treasure in the water – poor sub-Sahara). Trade has also vastly enriched Tlemcen, although the recent conflict with Castille has caused the Lords of Tlemcen to seek support from the Ottoman Empire. Much of the collected riches of North Africa managed to accumulate here, as Tlemcen armies have raided cities along the African and Castilian coasts for hundreds of years. Thievery is a problem for the wealthy Arabs with their fine estates and lush gardens. Thievery of a different sort is a problem for the wealthy Jewish traders of Tlemcen. Every major Jewish caravan carrying gold and jewels from central Africa has been attacked for the past 40 years, and every last one of the bandits worked in secret for one of the Arab trading houses. Work is plentiful both for Bodyguards and Assassins (just don't admit to being a Christian, for it is a death sentence here).

Algiers, Seat of Power for Ottoman Interests in North Africa

The Barbary Pirates hunt out of this city, supported from a distance by the Ottoman Turks. Slaves, silks, gold, jewels, antiquities, tomes, and other rarities are to be found in this city on the cheap. Two separate crusades have been called by the Catholic Church against this city, as the predations of the pirates coming from its ports have been a plague upon the God-fearing people of Europe for years.

Predations of Warsenis

The region south of Tlemcen is the hunting ground of the Warsenis nomads. They are fanatical Muslims and will hunt any violators of shariah law to their deaths. Their principle method of survival along the borders of the Sahara is by herding goats and banditry. Merchants entering into their lands are accosted for a hefty fee, sometimes even suffering death if the Warsenis elders feel they have been offensive enough. The countryside is bleak, and only a trained survivalist has any hope of surviving without local help.

City state of Kuko (*tributary to the Ottoman Empire*)

Brought under Ottoman control by the elder Hasan of the Imamate of Sus, the region has nothing really enabling it to stand out from its neighbors. Farming and animal herding are the principle industries after the destruction of the aristocracy of Kuko by Hasan I in 1523.

Sultanate of Bougie (*tributary to the Ottoman Empire*)

Little is left of the once powerful Sultanate, as the Sultan was killed in 1526 by Ottoman forces under Hasan I of Sus. The tolerant even handed reputation of Bougie led many to live within its borders and trade therein. With Ottoman domination these rarities of sense stopped. The ports now have to support the Barbary Pirates of Algiers, and merchant ships would not come within 50 leagues of the place now. With no trade, no tolerance, and little natural resources Bougie is finished. All that remains is residual trade from the occasional Pirate visit.

City State of Labbes (*tributary to the Ottoman Empire*)

Labbes in the Tunisian wilderness is the only remaining control for the remnants of the once great Sultanate of Bougie. Loosely patrolled at this time, the Lords of the city can do little more than defend the walls of their city and allow the surrounding nomads and peasants protection from bandit attacks. The tribute paid to the Ottoman Empire does little more than to ensure no further punishment comes from the garrisons of Sus. Crime is rampant through the territory with the exception of Labbes itself, which prides itself on its code of honor. (Note: Having a code of honor will not stop them from closing the gates 20 feet from the lead of a merchant caravan if bandits are sighted.)

Republic of Constantine

The territory is suffering a period of serious decline after the destruction caused by the Ottoman invasion of 1530 led by Hasan I of Sus. The threat of further reprisal by the Ottoman forces in the region is causing many of the residents to flee as fast as possible. The Republic's reputation as a haven for expatriates has been damaged by Constantine's inability to fully defend itself. A rumor of approaching armies of janissaries is enough to drive a few more hundred citizens from the lands of the Republic. In 1574 the rumors become a reality, and the kingdom undergoes a forced realignment with other territories into a province of the expansive Ottoman Empire.

Bizerta

Bizerta holds some of the richest land in the region. The trade routes flow across Bizerta and the taxation of the numerous trade caravans bring a wealth of money and resources to the territory. France conquered the city in 1535; giving Europe a foothold in the middle of Ottoman controlled North Africa. Using the base as a striking point against Algiers and the Barbary Pirates, French privateers have been wreaking havoc upon the vulnerable nations of North Africa that have been stripped of their own navies by Ottoman edict. In 1573 an Ottoman invasion force will devastate the city and bring it back under Ottoman control. The harbor leaves the bounds of normal trade and becomes yet another corsair base, sending Pirates and slavers after European interests in the Mediterranean.

Hafsid Kingdom (also called Tunisia)

Claiming the heritage of the Mahdi Ibn Tumart, the Hafsids have parlayed the lineage of a past Islamic leader in the attempt to subjugate the surrounding Arabian clans under the mantle of assumed Hafsid authority. The capital city of Tunis benefits from this situation, as the wealth that begins to accumulate for the wealthy of Tunisia along the Saharan trade route gives the Hafsids temporal power as well as the protection from nomad attack that the spiritual authority brings. Immigration into Tunis of the displaced Moriscos (Spanish Moors) of the former Kingdom of Granada also brings a depth of experience and a trained mercenary force to the Kingdom. The legacy of the Hafsids comes to an end when a punitive force from Ottoman controlled Egypt ends the independence of the region and aligns the trading and religious policies with Istanbul.

Tripoli (*occupied by Ottoman Forces*)

In 1510 Tripoli and its surroundings were captured by an armada of Spanish ships and troops. Their inability over the years and the continued threat of Ottoman reprisal caused the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to assign the Knights of St. John to the defense of the city and region. Seeing the dilapidated condition of the Spanish fortifications, the Hospitallers put most of the money gained from the taxation of trade into the infrastructure of the region. The main goal was to deny the Barbary Corsairs yet another base from which they would plague shipping and trade. Eventually the Ottoman forces arrived, and after successive waves of ineffectual advances, a massive force under the Ottoman general Turgut Reis (one of the men responsible for the rout at Rhodes) forced the Hospitallers to resign Tripoli in 1551.

The Corsairs make quick use of the generous harbors of Tripoli, and the assimilation (and “purification”) of the city is conducted with a cold efficiency. The army of janissaries sent to take Tripoli seized an uncomfortable level of power with respect to the Ottoman Pasha (governor). This creates an administrative mess that prevents the region from being a truly effective help to the Ottoman regime for the foreseeable future.

The Trade Route of the Aujila Depression (*Nemenchas, Touggourt, Mzab, Wargla, Ghadames*)

At times cut from the stony wastes of the route itself, the trade route that weaves from oasis to oasis across the most barren parts of North Africa was a lifeline for the nomads that prowled the fringes of the Sahara and brought a wealth of goods from the lands south of the Sahara to Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Curiosities of the route include the stone city of Wargla, the ancient ruins of Ghadames, and the ancient writing carved into the cliffs of Mzab (which no one can read).