

Book IV



Religion

Religion in Bretonnia

By Mark Saunders

"The priests of Morr charge you an arm and a leg for a simple funeral rite, and sit on their piles of gold like carrion crows on corpses, the priests of Verena know a thousand ways to deceive a man without ever telling a lie, the priests of Myrmidia are more interested in fighting battles in the court than on the field, and the priests of Shallya are neither humble nor merciful. The only honest priests in the whole kingdom must be those of Ranald, because they'll tell you to your face they're going to rob you blind, spin you a pack of lies, and walk away with their heads held high. No, take my word for it, you'll never find a more pestilent stench of corruption than in the temples of Bretonnia. I love it. It reminds me of home."

Paul von Halstadt, attache to the Imperial Ambassador



A History of Religion in Bretonnia

"The priestess of Shallya pours a cup of water over the head of a newborn child saying 'You enter this world alone, bloody, and crying, receive now your first gift of mercy from the Lady of All Mercies, water to cleanse you, and arms to hold you.' The blessing is millennia old, and the Lady it speaks of is not Shallya, though the chances are neither the priestess nor the parents know it. Oh yes, you have but to scratch the surface of the religious life of the peasantry and you find yourself face to face with the

same superstitious savages who stumbled into the lands of Bretonni at the dawn of time."

Quentin Resousse, Verenan scholar-priest

The Ancient Bretonni

Much of the culture of the ancient Bretonni is lost, most historians call anything earlier than Le Breton "pre-history", and even the Elven records are scanty. Of their religion some things can be said with certainty, however. As with most of the early human tribes, the earliest religious practices seem to be druidic, the cult now known as the Old Faith. As is detailed in the section on Saints, the Bretonni form of the Old Faith seems to have had a particular emphasis on the place of holy people as intermediaries between the people and the goddess. Apart from this peculiarity, however, the Old Faith took much the same form as it did in the Empire. As was the case in the Empire, however, as the Bretonni developed culturally their beliefs became more sophisticated. For some unknown reason lost in the mists of time the early human tribes throughout the Old World underwent a transformation in their religious belief. A religious movement swept across the Old World; in place of a vague notion of a mother goddess more personal deities became popular. Amongst the Bretonni the gods of the natural world : Taal, Manaan, Ulric and Rhya, already popular in the neighbouring Empire, came to the fore. The Old Faith began its long decline, eventually reaching the point where only the more isolated and backward tribes continued to follow it. The cult of Ulric never really took as central a hold amongst the Bretonni as it did in the Empire, perhaps because their milder climate made winter less of a devouring force than in the northern parts of the Old World (but also perhaps because the Lady acted as a patron to warriors). It was only to rise to real prominence in the area much later, brought by the Norse settlers of Armorique.

The Lady of the Lake

Although the tendency towards personal deities led many of the Bretonni to embrace the cults of the northern pantheon, already worshipped by their neighbours to the East, there was another peculiarly Bretonni expression of this religious movement: the cult of the Lady of the Lake. Although it seems never to have had an extensive cultic structure or many clergy, the cult's rituals were passed on in families and soon became a significant part of the religious life of peasant families. It is easy to see how the cult developed from a rather "patriotic" understanding of the mother goddess. The Lady was understood as in some sense a personification of the land of the Bretonni. It was by her leave that the Bretonni dwelt in the land and enjoyed its bounty. In return for their devotion and allegiance, the Lady gave her strength to their warriors, her comfort to their sick, her wisdom to their leaders. As part of her worship tokens of devotion to the Lady were thrown into sacred lakes or pools. The dearer the item thrown in was to the offerer the more acceptable it would be to the Lady. Some scholars suggest that early tribal leaders threw their own first-born children into sacred lakes to secure the Lady's blessing. It also seems to be the case that tribal chiefs and early "kings" were recognised

as such because they slept with the Lady. Most scholars believe this to be a reference to ritual intercourse with the cult's high priestess. In any event the cult seemed to develop a strong political power base, having the authority to bestow or withdraw the goddess' favour (effectively the power to "crown" kings). It is almost certainly this tradition that lies behind some of the later legends concerning Gilles le Breton and the Lady, in which she is presented as a seductive sorceress whose charms he resists before being crowned by clerics of the new deities of the south : Shallya, Verena, and Myrmidia (followers of the Lady claim that such tales are fabrications by the cults of the southern deities, a claim acknowledged privately by some clerics of Verena). It is also, of course, the basis for the more complete political settlement that the new cults would develop.

The Gods of the South

Sometime before the rise of Gilles le Breton, as the great cities became a more significant part of Bretonni culture, and links to the southern Old World became stronger, worship of a new pantheon of Gods began to spread amongst them. The cults of Morr, Verena, Shallya, Myrmidia (and along with them the less publicly acceptable cults of Khaine and Ranald) seem to have first come to prominence in the city states of the south, but these sophisticated new deities, whose worship was intimately bound up with new technological and cultural developments, soon spread along trade routes to the Bretonni. These new cults were aggressively championed by well-organised missionaries, who often found ways to absorb and incorporate existing religious practice into worship of the new pantheon. The cult of Shallya became very swiftly established in Couronne, following a series of miraculous healings at its sacred springs (once sacred to the Lady of the Lake) which were claimed as acts of Shallya by charismatic missionaries. The new pantheon were very much urban deities, and a slow but inexorable process of religious change began whereby the other cults were pushed to the rural margins of society, though Manann remained important in the great ports. The cult of Taal (and to a lesser extent the cult of Rhya) regrouped and retained its strength in the farming communities. The cult of Ulric remained the most important cult amongst the Norse of Armorique, who strongly resisted the incursions of these soft southern deities. The cult hardest hit by the success of the new pantheon was the Old Faith, whose followers were reduced to a small number of villages in the most isolated areas of the land.

The greatest challenge to the dominance of the new gods was to come from the cult of the Lady of the Lake. By the time the southern pantheon was beginning its advance, the cult of the Lady had risen to pre-eminence amongst the Bretonni, in particular, the cult had become closely associated both with the authority of kings, and the conduct of war. The Lady was the patron of the developing knightly class, and the source of a developing code of chivalry. In addition, the cult had successfully "modernised" its conception of the Lady, who was now portrayed as upholding both virtue and chastity. The scene was set for a direct confrontation with the cults of Verena, Myrmidia, and Shallya, all of whom claimed

authority over the areas of life the cult of the Lady had previously claimed for its own. In the long term, the southern deities clearly had the resources to ensure their ascendancy: they were better organised and brought with them access to learning and technology that was manifestly superior to that of the Bretonni. The battle for supremacy was, however, set to be a slow one of gradual change, and in many places all the cults coexisted peacefully. One man was to change this however, and make the ascendancy of the southern cults swift and inevitable: Gilles le Breton.

Gilles le Breton and the politicisation of the cults

Gilles le Breton was the ruler of a petty kingdom centered on the city of Guisoreux. An extraordinarily capable military leader, he dreamed of establishing himself as king of all the Bretonni. To claim such authority, however, he realised he would need some means of legitimising himself. He needed divine approval. All kings were traditionally declared beloved by the Lady of the Lake, (indeed, despite his ultimately catastrophic role in the history of the cult, it seems Gilles himself had participated in such a ritual), but Gilles would need greater authority than this. He would need to be decisively declared King of all Bretonni by divine right. The cult of the Lady of the Lake had no single recognised high priest who could make such a declaration and make it stick, but the new cults of the south did. Political necessity drove him to a drastic choice. Gilles conquered his kingdom, but then turned to the gods of the south to legitimise his claim to kingship. The high priests of the cults of Morr, Verena, and Myrmidia, seizing the opportunity, declared him the chosen of the gods. The high priest of Shallya, Leyeur, was harder to convince. The cult effectively ruled Couronne and its environs as a kingdom of their own, and were loath to swear fealty to Gilles. It was only after Gilles had conquered most of his kingdom and stood with his army before the gates of Couronne that Leyeur bowed to the inevitable. The new King of Bretonnia was declared ruler by divine right. The unholy alliance of king and priests that was to dominate the entire history of the kingdom began with Chlotharius, high priest of Verena placing the crown on Gilles' head. Gilles' line was assured of the support of the cults in asserting their claim to absolute rule of Bretonnia. The cults, favoured by the new king, would spread unhindered throughout the entire kingdom, achieving complete pre-eminence over their rivals.

The coronation of Gilles was to have a disastrous effect on the fortunes of the cult of the Lady of the Lake. There is considerable evidence (though often suppressed by the southern cults) that Gilles had been a devoted follower of the Lady for most of his life, and probably never meant to repudiate the cult by claiming the support of the southern deities. The "Chanson de Gilles" in particular shows Gilles to be a champion of the Lady, accomplishing mighty deeds in her name (it should be noted, however, that the "Chanson", and the troubadour tradition that produced it, are associated with those noble families who have remained devoted to the Lady). However, even if unintended, Gilles' actions essentially

cut the cult's link to kingship, ensuring the decline of its political influence. The cult that once secured the authority of all the kings of the Bretonni no longer secured the authority of the sole remaining king. The cult was never officially abandoned, but most of the knights of the realm swiftly changed their allegiance to the cult of Myrmidia, leaving only a handful of stubborn traditionalists remaining as the Lady's followers. Many of the Lady's aspects, holy sites, and rituals were taken over by the cults of Shallya, Verena, and Myrmidia. Within a couple of generations, the cult of the Lady of the Lake had all but disappeared, and the cults of Shallya, Verena, and Myrmidia were the most important cults in Bretonnia, as they remain to this day. The relationship between the cults and the monarch was regularised with the formation of the Holy Council by Guillaume Barbenoire, Gilles' grandson. The council was to advise the King and had authority over all religious matters in the kingdom. By Guillaume's time the cults of Taal, Ulric, and Manann had developed an organisational structure similar to that of the southern pantheon, and there was an uneasy peace between these major cults. Therefore the council had seven members, the high priests of each of the cults of Shallya, Verena, Myrmidia, Morr, Taal, Ulric, and Manann. They were each given the title Cardinal, as a recognition of their importance to the kingdom. The Council has ensured that a king of le Breton's line has ruled Bretonnia for 1500 years, bringing the kingdom unparalleled peace and stability. The cost to the independence (and some say the very souls) of the cults has, however, been high. Many aspects of the doctrine and practice of the Bretonnian cults have been affected by the centuries-long link to the monarchy. In the Empire it is often said that all Bretonnian nobles are vain, and all Bretonnian priests are corrupt...

The Religious Establishment

"Get this straight in your head or you'll never last ten seconds at court. In this place the King's word is law. He can have you killed or made a Duke, even both together, whenever the whim takes him. But step outside whatever ballroom that pampered child is holding his court in and you're in the Cardinal's hands. Charles Blois may rule Oisillon, but Cardinal Demourieux rules Bretonnia. So whatever you may think about the cult of Shallya at home, in this place treat every priest as a spy and every nun as an assassin. You tell them nothing, you believe nothing they tell you, and you never ever accept a drink from one of them."

Paul von Halstadt, Imperial spy master

As outlined above, the monarchy and the cults have been intertwined for centuries. The two have, in fact, become thoroughly interdependent. Without the support

of the cults, the Bretonnian absolute monarchy would collapse, but likewise without their privileged position as part of the establishment the cults would lose much of their current power. (In addition of course, if the cults were ever to suggest that they weren't sure that the monarchy really was established by the will of the gods they would be admitting to centuries of complicity in perpetuating a tyrannical system of government at massive human cost). The cults therefore have a lot invested in maintaining the status quo. All the cults have sought to theologically underpin the Bretonnian social system, justifying the social divides, absolute power of the monarchy, and the often excessive force used by kings to secure their thrones. The relationship between the cults and the monarch is expressed best in two great institutions: the coronation ceremony, and the holy council.

The coronation ceremony

The coronation ceremony is at its most basic level a re-enactment of the coronation of Gilles le Breton. It functions symbolically to identify all subsequent Kings with their legendary ancestor, and to bind both King and Cardinals to the settlement between monarchy and cults that he established. Naturally over the centuries the ceremony itself has become embellished with extra roles for courtiers and prominent nobles, (and at a fairly early stage by the inclusion of roles for all the Cardinals) and every step taken must now follow exact rules of etiquette. The ceremony takes place in the Shallyan cathedral in Couronne, site of the coronation of Gilles le Breton. The Lord Marshal of Bretonnia knocks on the gates asking that the one chosen of the gods be admitted. The Cardinals invite him in, and the Cardinal of Shallya leads him to a central throne. The king-to-be kneels and

acknowledges all the gods, thanking them for choosing him to rule. The Cardinal of Shallya then raises him up and seats him on the throne. The Cardinal of Morr presents him with the signet ring, telling him to accept authority over all the inhabitants of the realm, until they

travel from his kingdom to the kingdom of Morr. The Cardinal of Myrmidia presents him with the sword, telling him to accept the power of the armies of the kingdom. The Cardinal of Verena presents him with a book of the law, telling him to accept the power of judgement over the kingdom. The Cardinal of Shallya anoints him and tells him to rule with mercy and care for all his subjects. The Cardinals of Taal, Manann, and Ulric then bring the crown forward. Together they tell him to accept into his care the land of Bretonnia and its waters. Then the Cardinal of Verena places the crown on his head and proclaims him King of Bretonnia with these words (first used at the coronation of Guillaume Barbenoire) *"Name*



is of Le Breton's noblest blood. Therefore he is the rightful ruler of this land and he shall rule by the power of the gods themselves. Be it known to all that whoever opposes the king, opposes the gods." This statement neatly encapsulates the doctrine of the divine right of kings. The Kings of Bretonnia are sacred, given divine (absolute) power to rule. Any act of treason is also an act of apostasy against all the gods. Any action the King takes is justified because he rules by divine right. The sacred nature of Bretonnian kingship resides in the direct bloodline of Gilles le Breton, no-one but a direct descendant can be King. The Holy Council alone has the authority to proclaim someone King. Naturally the coronation ceremony is so loaded with symbolism that any proposed changes have massive theological and political significance. It is for this reason that Cardinal Demorieux is re-opening the debate as to whether it should be the Cardinal of Shallya or of Verena who crowns the King. Symbolically, the action suggests that the Cardinal of Verena is the pre-eminent Cardinal. Although the debate will be conducted on academic historical and theological grounds the real debate is about current political power in a court where the perception of power is often more important than actual power.

The Holy Council

The Holy Council is the most obvious expression of the political power of the major Bretonnian cults. The seven members are the high priests of the most significant cults within Bretonnia (with the exception of Ranald). They use the title Cardinal and traditionally dress in red robes. The wearing of red robes started after a dispute that took place over 700 years ago. During a meeting of the Holy Council the third ranking priest of Ulric didn't recognise the newly nominated Myrmidian Cardinal, being unfamiliar with Myrmidian robes of office, and as a result he didn't show proper respect to him. Such matters are taken very seriously in Bretonnia, and it would have been a duelling matter if the dignity of the Cardinal's office hadn't precluded it. The faux pas and resulting tensions (the Cardinals of Myrmidia and Ulric refused to speak to each other) rumbled on for years, and it was decided that to prevent future such incidents all Cardinals would wear robes of a distinctive colour to stop any further confusion. All the Cardinals agreed to this, but not to the colour. Red was proposed, but the Cardinals of Shallya, Verena and Morr violently opposed this, arguing it was plainly not proper for them to wear red. The discussion continued but no agreement could be found until several months later at the coronation of Robert le Féroce. The Cardinals were presented with sets of red robes for the ceremony, and Le Féroce made it very clear he wasn't going to put up with any kind of nonsense. The Cardinals reluctantly put on the red robes and went on with the ceremony. The red robes stayed, and are now accepted (if not coveted) by all, providing the Cardinals with a powerful symbol of status.

The Council meets at least once a year, and often more frequently. It always meets when a new king must be crowned, as it is the Council who must examine genealogies to determine who has the right of succession. The Council has a number of powers, most obviously the

power to crown Kings. However, the Council also has the power to make ecclesiastical law (binding on all cults within the Kingdom), to distribute funds between cults, and technically has power over every cleric and temple within the Kingdom. It maintains a small force of guards, known as The Blackcloaks, to enforce its will. (In most cases, the Council relies on the local watch or troops to put down heretical groups or bring in erring clerics for trial, employing the Blackcloaks only in cases where a degree of subtlety is required). The cult of Verena, for obvious reasons, exercises a large degree of control over this aspect of the Council's activities, drafting most laws, and trying the cases. The Cardinal of Verena has the supreme authority to bring any cleric to trial, and any cleric sentenced by a lesser court can appeal to him. The Council was originally charged with advising the King, and this is a function it still occasionally performs. Most of the time the Council is too pre-occupied by its internal affairs, or too riven by political disagreement to give any advice on matters of policy, but on those rare occasions when all the Cardinals can agree its recommendations carry significant weight. One of the Council's lesser known powers is the power to declare that the gods have withdrawn their favour from a reigning monarch, and chosen another of le Breton's line. This requires the unanimous agreement of all seven Cardinals, and has only happened once, and never in modern times. Such a pronouncement would almost inevitably start a civil war, and would never be used except in the most dire of circumstances. However, the mere fact that the Council has this power is enough to ensure at least a respectful hearing for all the Council's recommendations.

The Holy Council long ago ceased to be an effective body (if indeed it ever was). It has long been dominated by the powerful cults of Shallya, Verena, and Myrmidia, with minor Cardinals like the Cardinal of Taal barely getting a look in. Since the rise of Cardinal Dumourieux to political power it has become the scene of vicious power struggles between the three most powerful Cardinals, each trying to outwit the other. Tactical alliances between the other Cardinals against Dumourieux are not uncommon, and often make for unlikely partnerships. The Council now spends most of its time locked in endless deliberations about finance or politics. Because the Council has ceased to be a viable means of exercising power within the kingdom, most of the Cardinals have found alternative avenues to influence the court and the country at large.

Priests and society

Priests by and large are respected in Bretonnian society, though the cult a priest belongs to obviously affects the way people react to them. The most positive reaction from common people is likely to be to priests of Shallya, and the most positive from nobles to priests of Myrmidia or Verena. Most priests adopt the title "Father" or "Mother" for priestesses, though priests of the cult of Shallya tend to adopt the humbler "Brother" or "Sister". Precise titles vary from cult to cult, but by tradition the high priest of any temple is referred to as "Archpriest", and those Archpriests with additional oversight over priests in the surrounding area (often including a number

of lesser temples) as "Bishop" or "Archbishop", depending on the seniority of the temple. In theory a priest leaves the normal social order behind, and with it any rank or privilege they may have been born into. In practice this is palpably untrue. Most senior clergy are of noble birth, and although it is possible for those of humble origins to better themselves in a cult few rise to high office. Becoming a priest is a respected career for a second or third son of a noble family, and one of the few openings for noble daughters wishing to have a degree of independence (this perhaps explains the preponderance of female clergy in the cult of Shallya). According to the rules of Bretonnian etiquette, a priest is approximately equivalent to a member of the minor nobility, an archpriest to a baron or lesser noble, a bishop or archbishop to a duke or greater noble, and a Cardinal is equal to the highest ministers of the kingdom. However, such neat distinctions do not hold universally true, and a priest who is the son of a Duke is likely to be treated with more respect than his superior whose father was a merchant. All priests are expected to be celibate, though in practice this simply means that they are not allowed to marry. The nobility have long feared the possibility of



priestly dynasties rivalling their own in power.

Becoming a cleric in Bretonnia is in part a matter of education, which largely restricts the profession to nobility and the middle classes: merchant and guild families. The cults of Shallya and especially Morr, who require many clergy to minister in rural areas occasionally relax these requirements for their "country priests", many of whom are barely literate. The cult of Taal is notorious for its low educational standards. There are two basic models of initiation into the clergy. The first, and more traditional route, is to study and minister for many years in a temple, learning from the clergy there. This is the route adopted by those cults who train "country priests". The second route, which all cults follow to a certain degree, and the cult of Verena follows exclusively, is that would-be clergy first study theology at a college or university, after which time they may become an initiate, then study at a seminary to become a cleric. This is the route followed by all those aspiring to high office in a cult, and almost all nobles seeking to become priests go to

university first (the only real exception being those who buy their way in, which is not unknown, but usually occurs only when some scandal has attached to the noble in question and their family wants to remove them from the public eye).

Religious orders

Although priests and priestesses are the most public face of a cult, they are not its only servants. All of the cults have a variety of associated orders. These vary in character from cult to cult, but tend to fall into three main groups. First there are the "lay orders", made up of those who take a vow to serve the deity in a specific way (and occasionally for a specific length of time) but also continue with their own daily work. Sometimes lay orders are entered as a form of penance, but mostly as a sign of devotion. The most famous of these is perhaps the lay healers of Shallya, who assist the cult's priests and priestesses in their work. Such lay orders are usually genuine in their commitment, but occasionally they become private clubs made up of those who do nominal service to the cult in exchange for considerable fringe benefits (several lay orders of Manann effectively offer free passage to members for example). Second are the "martial orders", or Templars. Although some of these have become relatively independent of their associated cult, and function as little more than knightly orders under the sole command of a Grand Master (like the Myrmidian Order of the Hawk), some are still closely associated with their cult, taking orders from the cult's hierarchy and working to support their goals. Genuinely committed templar orders are often disturbingly fanatical. Finally there are the true "monastic orders", made up of those who have devoted their lives to the service of the deity. There is a clear distinction between the role of priests, who lead worship and minister to the faithful, and the role of monks and nuns, who devote themselves to living out a life of ideal service to and worship of the deity. Many monastic orders are enclosed, with their members living their entire lives in worship of the deity, with no contact with the outside world. Others seek to serve the deity in the world. In either situation the monks and nuns live and work as a community, under strict vows of obedience to their superiors. Because they have no concern for ministering to the faithful it is not unknown for monastic communities to come into conflict with the local priests, and in such situations their conviction that they are living as the deity intends often makes difficulties hard to resolve. The best monastic communities can be hopelessly idealistic, and largely indifferent to the realities of life. Monastic orders of Taal occupying woods the local Comte has ordered felled, for example, is not uncommon, and such situations tend to end with the local noble sending in the troops. However, for every genuine monastic community there are half a dozen that have become corrupt. This is particularly the case with enclosed orders, which are often little more than gentleman's or ladies' clubs, preserves of the younger children of noble families who live lives of comfort and luxury in what amount to country retreat houses. Monasteries are often incredibly wealthy, owning vast swathes of land, and their Abbots act like the nobles they

are, entertaining guests, going hunting, and, it is rumoured, maintaining harems of "servant girls".

The Major Cults



The Cult of Shallya

Of all the Bretonnian cults, it is the cult of Shallya that has become the most corrupt. Paradoxically, it is also the cult of Shallya that is best loved by the common people, and perhaps is best able on occasion to rise above its corruption and genuinely communicate something of its true ideals. The cult has become thoroughly accepted by Bretonnians, both in urban and rural areas, and dove pendants are very common talismans, even amongst those who do not count themselves as especially devout. Shallya tends to appeal to the downtrodden of Bretonnia. Due to years of oppression, they turn to her to heal their pain - so the Cult of Shallya, in contrast to the Cult of Myrmidia, is seen as lower class. It is in the poorest areas of the cities that the Shallyans are most active, running soup kitchens, and ministering to the sick. The appeal of Shallya is not entirely restricted to the lower classes however, disillusioned or penitent aristocrats, nobles hating the decadent lifestyle they were born into, those driven from power or shamed may also find refuge in the Cult of Shallya. In addition, the cult runs convents for noble women of ill repute or those who do not wish to marry or do not have the dowry (perhaps because their families will not provide it) - and this is yet another noble connection. Finally, of course, there are those from all walks of life whose natural temperament and sympathies draw them to the worship of the goddess (this includes some physicians). So the membership of the cult is an awkward mixture between the poor and down-trodden, who often lack the education and subtlety required for high office, and the idealistic and (supposedly) repentant nobility, who are well-educated but have never really known what life on the streets is actually like. Unsurprisingly, most of the cult's leadership is drawn from this latter body. This creates an inherent tension within the cult, between its grassroots members and the majority of the leadership who have very different perspectives. In addition, as noted above, the leadership of the cult tends to be made up of either idealists, blind to the evils of the world, or the disillusioned, cynical, and

repentant, who are often then placed in positions where temptation is all around them. Naturally, this is a recipe for disaster. There are a large number of corrupt clergy within the cult, surrounded and overseen by good people who would rather believe the best of those around them. Abuse of power, sex scandals, embezzling of funds, orgies and drunkenness abound.

The cult has further doctrinal and political tensions. On the one hand, Shallyans are sometimes seen as providing for and caring for the neglected poor oppressed by their nobility - Shallyans have at times been seen as guardians and protectors of the poor and impoverished, and there is a long history of wandering Shallyan monks and priests martyred for their defence of the poor. This is one aspect of the cult and its doctrine which is very attractive to many of its members, but which sometimes places the cult in a position that is adversarial to the nobility, and the cults of Myrmidia and Verena. There have always been demagogical elements, prophets, and often genuinely holy individuals within the cult standing in this theological tradition and advocating this role of protest and non-violent resistance for the cult. On the other hand, there is a strong element of the cult's teaching and practice that advocates non-resistance to injustice. Much of the teaching of Shallya is not about revolting against the oppressor, but perseverance and turning the other cheek, and it is this aspect of the cult that some of its noble members and outside nobility support. The cult is there to alleviate suffering, not to destroy the system that causes it. In this aspect of its teaching, the cult of Shallya helps to keep the people under control by discouraging violence and revolt and making them more submissive and controllable. It is this tradition that the king and nobility seek to support, and the court actively seek to ensure that the leaders of the cult follow this doctrine rather than the cult's more radical tradition. It is in fact largely due to this role of the cult in pacifying the population that the monarchy has endured for so long, and for this reason the cult is perceived by the nobility to be perhaps the most important religious institution in the kingdom, even if they don't go along with its limp-wristed teachings themselves. Nobles often give very generously to the cult, partly to assuage guilty consciences, but partly because such charitable giving is seen as a good insurance policy in this world as well as the next: peasants who have been receiving hand-outs from a soup kitchen established with their Duke's money are less likely to revolt. Nobles are genuinely aggrieved at priests of Shallya who criticise the social order, not so much because they take it as a personal attack, but more because they feel the priest is "letting the side down". The people are not entirely oblivious to this doctrinal schism within the cult and the poor do not favour those priests who preach only endurance of your lot in life. The cult is far from unified, and there is frequent conflict between the populist preachers and the corrupt and conservative leadership. Doctrinal schisms within the church are common, as is antagonism on class lines. In many ways the cult reflects the divisions in Bretonnian society as a whole, and is a microcosm of Bretonnian dysfunction.

The cult is centred on the great temple of Shallya in Couronne, with its sacred springs, believed to have healing properties. The cult's councils occur here, and its seminary is attached to the temple. However, the cult owns much land and property throughout the kingdom. Many cities have Shallyan orphanages and hospitals, and the countryside boasts many convents and monasteries. The cult has many associated orders. The lay healers are an order of lay people attached to temples throughout the kingdom. They assist the priests in ministering to the sick. Some have medical knowledge, others simply run errands. Many temples have lay charitable orders, groups of nobles and merchants who commit themselves to giving money to support the work of the cult. These groups are often highly exclusive clubs, with membership dependent on a high level of giving, but those who can gain entry make contacts with the highest levels of Bretonnian society. For obvious reasons the cult has no military orders, but there are many monastic orders. The most well known of these are the sisters of mercy, who have convents throughout the kingdom. Their plain white robes and veils are a well-known sight. The sisters are bound by vows of poverty, chastity, silence (greater or lesser, the distinction being between never speaking and speaking only at certain times), and unconditional charity. They often distribute food to the needy in the local area and sometimes have attached orphanages or hospitals. They are obliged by their vows to accept all women who come to them without asking questions, and to offer hospitality to any who need it. Many nobles disapprove of the convents and suspect (as is sometimes the case) that they provide havens for outlaws and agitators. The sisters of mercy are not the only monastic order associated with the cult, however, and some are far less strict. There are also a number of orders of mendicant priests, not attached to temples but free to travel ministering to people as the goddess directs them. Such priests are bound by three vows: obedience, poverty, and chastity. The first vow is said to be the best observed, the second not strictly observed, and the last not observed at all!

Of course, in recent times the cult has come to even greater prominence with the rise of Cardinal Dumourieux. A scion of a noble family, the Cardinal is very much a career cleric, who read theology at Cardinal college, Guisonne University, then studied at the seminary in Couronne. He excelled in his studies, displaying a sharp intellect and brilliant rhetoric. His ability to manipulate both ecclesiastical and court politics is phenomenal, and in becoming Prime Minister as well as Cardinal he has become the most powerful individual in the kingdom, some say even more powerful than the king himself. What is more, he has managed to do all this whilst maintaining an air of complete humility, and retaining the goodwill of senior members of the cult, who naively assure themselves that he is a good and sincere servant of the goddess. So Sister Blanche du Mirail, high priestess of the great cathedral of Couronne is convinced that Dumourieux is a genuine and holy man, who through his devotion to the people is forced to make very difficult decisions. The Cardinal can no doubt reassure himself that in the event of his meeting an untimely end his elevation to sainthood is almost assured. In his wake, Dumourieux has attracted a number of clergy in his own

likeness, ambitious churchmen with a taste for politics, and a gift for dissimulation. Increasingly, then, the senior clerics of Shallya are becoming smooth and sophisticated political animals, far more akin to priests of Verena.



The Cult of Myrmidia

The cult of Myrmidia lacks the broad appeal of the Cult of Shallya, and yet has remained one of the most significant cults throughout the history of the kingdom, largely because of its successful appeal to the nobility. The Cult of Myrmidia has in some ways been the most important cult for the monarchy, as the cult and its doctrines and customs have formed the basis for the feudal system that has maintained the monarchy's power. It is part of the cult's teaching that nobles, seen primarily as warriors, must show proper allegiance to the king, their commander. The cult's doctrines both justified an overarching social structure, and provided a code of life and conduct for individual nobles to follow. The cult taught that nobles should live lives of honour, aspiring to a knightly chivalric ideal. The cult of Myrmidia has, however, shown itself to have a remarkable capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. Over time, the technology of warfare and the role of nobles have gone through massive change. Nobles are now unlikely to live in isolated castles as custodians of swathes of farmland, but rather congregate together at court, where their lifestyle is an urban one. The feudal system has evolved into an absolute monarchy, in which nobles are not primarily warriors, and the archetypal warrior is no longer a heavily armoured knight, but a cavalier, skilled with both sword and the new black powder weapons. Therefore the high chivalric knightly ideal has been transformed into a cavalier code, in which allegiance, honour, and living lives of beauty and elegance are all important. For a follower of Myrmidia, nothing is as important as personal honour and dignity. This is located

in a pride in self and respect of others. To live as a gentleman, a man of honour and dignity, requires proficiency both in the arts of fencing, shooting, hunting, and riding, and in the more gentle arts of dance, conversation, and appreciation of the fine arts. Clumsiness, or committing a social faux pas may in some circumstances bring as much disgrace as proven cowardice in battle. Keeping your word is important, though only when given to an equal or superior, as a gentleman cannot be seen to be obligated to an inferior. The cult's teachings are centred around a strictly hierarchical view of the world, in which distinctions in rank and position are all important. The key teaching, however, is that although certain aspects of status are determined by birth or commission, the bulk of a person's status is determined by their honour. An honourable baron has higher status than a dishonourable duke. All social interaction is understood as basically combative, an attempt to maintain or enhance your own reputation whilst injuring that of your enemies. Naturally the cult also sees politics as a form of warfare, often referring to the court as the "other" or "higher" battlefield. Historically the cult has had a major role also in formulating the rules of duelling and has helped create the whole duelling culture. In recent years, however, Cardinal Dumourieux has succeeded in having duelling declared illegal, forcing the cult to distance itself from the practice.

The close relationship between the Cult and the aristocracy does not always make things easy for the cult. Its influence amongst the nobility and strong links to the military forces of the kingdom make control of the cult a great political prize. The royal family strives to control the leadership of the cult in order to secure its own supremacy. Appointments to high office in the cult are often highly political, with the king having an obscure family member ordained as a priest of Myrmidia in order to be appointed to a key post. The king has considerable say in appointments within the cult because most senior posts are also chaplainries to army regiments. Other powerful families seek to build their own power base within the cult to increase their influence. The De Semblancy have for many years been establishing a close relationship with the cult, and now have more of their appointees in post than the royal family, binding senior clerics to themselves with strong ties of obligation and patronage. The cult has on occasion used this to its own advantage, allying itself more strongly with the De Semblancy in order to retain its independence from royal control. However, the cult as a whole wishes to remain free of control by any faction, and will often resist the will of any political appointee. Claude de Vendome, the current Cardinal, is a strong supporter of the De Semblancy due to his family ties, but not actually an appointee, having risen to his current position due to his own machinations within the cult. This gives him a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the cult, though many feel his unquestioning allegiance to the De Semblancy must damage the cult's independence.

The cult's transformation from being a cult of knightly virtues to a more sophisticated faith for courtiers has naturally taken it a long way from its origins. There is now little need for priests, especially senior clerics, to personally engage an opponent on the field of battle. As

long as a priest is shrewd enough he has little need for any great military ability. Many senior clergy, like the Cardinal, are notoriously unfit, and live highly luxurious lifestyles far removed from the hard beds and soldiers rations that traditionally characterised the life of a priest. It is still the case that priests are expected to have graduated from the Royal Military Academy before they go to seminary in Quenelles, but very few now see active duty, with most simply holding a commission in a fashionable guards regiment for a few years, and some skipping actual military service altogether. It is far more common now for would-be priests to have studied at a fencing school than it is for them to have seen active service. Priests are no longer expected to take command of military forces in time of war, but to act as advisors and confessors to nobles in command positions. This general flabbiness (both literal and metaphorical) that characterises the cult is what gives a lot of heat to the antagonism between the cult and its traditional rival, the cult of Ulric. Followers of Ulric view followers of Myrmidia as little more than dandies and rakes, with no real warrior spirit, and in return the followers of Myrmidia see followers of Ulric as unsophisticated savages.



The organised cult is, as has been made clear, very much a preserve of the nobility. Its services and rituals are conducted in castle chapels, and tend to concern noble rites of passage (the entry into manhood, for example, is highly significant in the cult's practice, marked by a night-long vigil and a service derived from the knighting ceremony). They are therefore little known to the general populace. Warriors from the lower orders of society may attend services in the great temples of the cult (especially the commissioning ceremonies before forces are sent out to war), but that is their only real contact with the

organised cult. Followers of Myrmidia from amongst the common people have their own rituals and religious practice. Mercenaries and soldiers who follow the goddess memorise prayers and learn ritual acts that are passed from soldier to soldier – often every regiment has its own rituals. They are ministered to by part-time priests within their own units, who nominate and train their successors from amongst the members of the regiment. These common priests proselytise, give speeches to boost morale, give blessings (and hear confessions if necessary), and enable those dying on the field of battle to go to Morr's realm with the blessing of the goddess. There is no real contact between these unofficial priests of Myrmidia and the trained priests of the cult, though they acknowledge their existence, and occasionally use them as means of communicating to the common men (and, it is rumoured, as ways of gauging the morale of the troops). The majority of devout soldiers follow Myrmidia, but some see the cult as encouraging an unhealthy subservience to the noble officer class, and choose to worship Ulric (or less commonly the Lady of the Lake) as a statement of defiance against the authority of the nobility, who are often incompetent military leaders.

The cult has no lay orders to speak of, though the unofficial "common priests" could be seen as a lay order of a sort. As might be expected, it has a plethora of associated military orders, some with a long and glorious history, others of more recent origin. The older orders are generally those with most independence from the cult. The most famous of these orders is the Order of the Hawk, whose members swear vows of obedience to their superiors, chastity, and abstinence from alcohol. The Order has become fantastically wealthy, as well as acquiring a history of glorious battles and brave deeds, and many nobles aspire to join it. The Order are fierce warriors, and there are surprisingly few public cases of members breaking their vows. However, it is rumoured that although they may abstain from alcohol, there are various other substances they use freely, and that the reason few knights are found in bed with servant girls is that they prefer to share each other's beds. One of the more recently-formed orders is the Order of the Scarlet Band, a company of dragoons, noble led, but with the ranks comprised of members of the merchant classes seeking to better themselves, who fight as mercenaries in the Border Princes and the Empire. The Order swear allegiance to the Cardinal of Myrmidia before all things, and should he command they have standing orders to pay their way out of any contract they are currently engaged in and return to Bretonnia. In the meantime, they continue to fight their way across the Old World, and are feted in story and song throughout Bretonnia. To have served in the Order is a recognised means of social advancement, as a member of any rank may style themselves "Sir", effectively entering the ranks of the gentry. The Order are not sworn to chastity, and many of its members who are not noble-born are married, with families in Bretonnia. Monastic orders may seem far removed from the ideals of the cult, but several exist. These are usually found in fortresses or strongholds in remote areas, and are comprised of retired warriors. They commit themselves to defending a frontier area, and often also function as training centres for local militia troops. A final important

institution within the cult is the Cathedral-Academy of St Epiclesius in Guisoreux. The Academy is an institution of international repute that trains experienced followers of Myrmidia in the skills of tactics and strategy. It usually only trains nobles, but exceptions can be made for gifted or highly experienced commoners, especially those who are devout and sponsored by a noble. Only the elite, of all the nations of the Old World, pass through its doors, and its graduates, including the current Duc de Semblancy, form a very exclusive international old boy's club.

The Cult of Verena

The cult of Verena has not enjoyed the widespread popular support of the cult of Shallya, nor been as key to the interests of the nobility as the cult of Myrmidia, yet somehow throughout its history has always managed to make itself indispensable, retaining its position as one of the three most powerful cults in Bretonnia. It is generally perceived as being more of a cult for the rich than for the poor, and strongly aligned with the powers that be, though occasionally the cult spawns heretical demagogues. Followers of Verena, unsurprisingly, tend to be academics. This limits the cult's following to a fairly small section of society, as not even all nobles are particularly academic. However, those who do follow the goddess tend to occupy influential posts. Bureaucrats, university staff, judges and lawyers, all worship Verena. Strangely enough, within the cult distinctions of birth are less significant than education. Almost unique within the religious establishment, the cult of Verena stands for equality of noble and commoner, on the basis that it is the quality of someone's mind (represented by their academic qualifications) that determines their worth. Unsurprisingly, this makes the cult incredibly appealing to the middle classes, who welcome its teaching that a university-educated commoner should be accorded more esteem than an ignorant noble. However, although this is tacitly accepted within the cult as being simple common sense, the cult is wise enough not to preach such things openly. The most obvious public manifestation of this rather radical Verenan doctrine is the intellectual snobbishness shown by all Verenans. This sort of contrast between inner teachings and outer appearances is a feature of the cult, which has a reputation for secrecy and knowing far more than they ever reveal. Priests of Verena are seen by the common people (and often by the nobility too) as arrogant, manipulative, and deceptive, all under a mask of sincerity. Verenan clergy are bound by strong vows to never tell a lie, and in consequence they are renowned for their evasiveness and ability to tell half-truths. It is notoriously difficult to get a straight answer from a Verenan priest, though they are capable of using truth as a weapon too when it will serve.

Over the centuries, the cult's structures and clergy have become thoroughly intertwined with the administration and judicial system of the kingdom. A high proportion of Bretonnian judges are Verenan clergy, and a large number of those who aren't worship the goddess as lay people. The cult is in fact indispensable to the smooth running of the kingdom. Most universities and colleges are either Verenan or began life as Verenan foundations, and all those educated within Bretonnia will have been

taught according to Verenan principles. The Administratorum is full of Verenan clergy, and it is Verenan legislators who draft the country's laws. Rumours that they slip in loopholes to benefit the cult in the legal small print are not entirely untrue (though generally the cult is far more subtle than this). Anything that requires education will have some Verenan influence. Even the medical profession is influenced as much by Verena as it is by Shallya. Most notoriously, the cult is believed to have great influence over the *Chambre Noire*, and the cult's intelligence-gathering capabilities are second to none. Not much that happens in the kingdom escapes the eyes of the cult, and if they can find a way to turn it to their advantage they will. The cult are master manipulators with an uncanny knack for finding any information they need.



By and large the cult has used its influence for two main ends : to further secure its own position, and (as a consequence) to maintain the monarchy and the social system it is dependant on. Publicly it stands for a basic conservatism, for regulation and order in society. The social system, with its strict hierarchy, is taught to be the natural order of things, a right and proper state of affairs. Any rebellion against it is therefore condemned from Verenan pulpits as evil and perverse. Over time the cult has focused less on abstract concepts of justice and more on the law. The kingdom's law and legal system are largely the product of the cult, a concrete expression of its concern for justice, that the cult regards far more highly than hazy notions of "fairness". The law is seen as an absolute good. Lawbreakers are given little sympathy, no matter how "unjust" their plight, and the cult of Ranald,

with its disdain for the law, is often seen as truly evil. The cult of Verena spearheads the oppression of the cult of Ranald in some areas. A degree of harshness is seen as justifiable in preserving the social order and enforcing the law. The cult does not condone tyranny, but gives its support to the not infrequent armed suppressions of the peasantry as a necessary measure. Even overly harsh rulings of the judicial system are unlikely to be condemned by the cult, which will support the system out of principle.

However, there is another tradition within the cult, which is at variance with the teaching publicly presented. The belief in equality has already been mentioned, but some within the cult extend this equality also to women, believing that women are just as capable of learning as men, after all, the goddess is female. Along with a belief in equality (however limited) the radical Verenan tradition calls for tolerance of others, and acceptance of different views and opinions. Followers of the more liberal Verenan tradition also, in private, call for complete freedom of thought, to speculate and research in any field, irrespective of legal or moral constraints. This radical tradition is a closely guarded secret, carefully nursed by the senior members of the cult, but denied and actively preached against in public. The cult has too much to lose to ever preach such doctrines openly. The tension between the cult's inner beliefs and its public face enforces a sort of double life on all Verenan clergy, and on the cult as a whole. Verenans deliberately, as an act of policy, act and speak in ways that they believe are fundamentally wrong. The survival of the cult is so bound up in the monarchy that the cult cannot afford to undermine it, but the spiritual and mental stress of living such deceitful lives (especially for a cult that is supposed to uphold truth as a cardinal virtue) is great. Many Verenans indulge in sex, drugs, and alcohol in an attempt to release the mental and emotional anguish they feel, increasing the cult's reputation for corruption. Others begin to believe the lie they preach, abandoning their high ideals for a cynical political realism. Still others find the tension between belief and action too impossible to bear, and speak out, condemning the social system the cult perpetuates. Such individuals are swiftly disowned, declared heretics and handed over to the secular authorities for execution. The cult's complicity in the deaths of its own priests, who were standing up for beliefs they know to be true, adds to the inner spiritual torment at the centre of the cult. And there are even more extreme rumours, that the hierarchy of the cult does all it can to suppress, rumours that some Verenans go completely insane, becoming thoroughly evil and corrupt, engaging in unspeakable acts.

Verenan clergy are often incredibly complex and multi-layered personalities. A single cleric can appear at times to be a hopeless idealist, a cynically amoral politician, and a broken wreck of an alcoholic, all hidden behind the polished clerical exterior created by a consummate actor. You are never quite sure where you stand with a Verenan, never certain if you are being told all the truth, or indeed any of it, and never sure exactly what their objectives are. The cult hold many secrets, truths they entrust to no-one but themselves, and always know far more about what is going on than anyone else.

The cult has a number of associated lay orders. The Sacred order of Verena the Teacher (usually simply known as the "Sacred Order") is a large and widespread group that run the cult's many schools. Membership of the Sacred Order is seen as giving any scholar a certain status, and makes it much easier to find teaching posts. In addition, nobles tend to hire members of the Sacred Order as tutors for their children. The Sacred Order demands a genuinely high quality of teaching from its members, but by and large the teaching they give is in accordance with the cult's public doctrines. Especially gifted students are, however, initiated into some of the cult's hidden doctrine, and encouraged to think freely. Members of the Sacred Order are bound by oath to pass on any information of interest they should discover to their superiors in the cult, and act as a wing of the cult's spy network. The Order of Secular Legalists is a less well-known order, comprised of lawyers and judges who follow Verena. Membership of the order is secret, and the order is effectively used as one arm of the cult's activities. It is suspected that some of the judicial system's more arbitrary decisions are due to the influence of this order. Members are sworn to obedience, and in return often receive preferment from more senior lawyers who are also members of the order. The cult has no associated military orders (though some were founded during the crusades they have since been disbanded). There are a number of monastic orders, the most significant of which being the Order of the Quill. The Order has monasteries all over Bretonnia, Estalia and Tilea and a couple in the south of the Empire. The monks are scholars, spending their time researching, copying, and learning all that is knowable. Many universities evolved from monasteries of this order, and the order resents the fact that the universities are now regarded as the premier centres of learning in the Old World. The monasteries have impressive libraries and scriptoriums, and monks are frequently sent out to investigate some area of knowledge. Scholars occasionally seek out monasteries of the order in search of obscure texts, and are allowed access to the library for a small fee. Monks take vows very similar to the clerical ones, and some monks are also Priests. However, Monks are also bound by vows of Obedience, and Silence. The latter is lifted only when speech is necessary to their work, or to prevent conflict. Monks wear plain grey robes and have a tonsure. A final religious order associated with the cult should be mentioned: The Order of St Antoine. This highly secretive order work as witch hunters throughout the kingdom. The order in a sense manages to offer a synthesis of the cult's divided identity: they are agents of oppression with consciences, determined to act justly, and to uncover the truth. Members of the order are, unsurprisingly, among the more well balanced of the cult's priests.

The Cardinal of the cult, Gibaud De Rennes, is based in Guisoreux, near the centre of power. He has close links to the University (as Chancellor he effectively has authority over it), the Law Courts, and the Administratorum (though here he is engaged in a subtle contest for power with Cardinal Dumourieux). The cult's Seminary is attached to the University, forming its own college: Lady College (it is dedicated to Verena, Lady of Justice and Learning), and the Cardinal has a role in the

formation of new priests and priestesses. The Cardinal resolves the contradictions of the cult in his own fashion, by choosing to wholeheartedly align himself with the more conservative elements of the cult's doctrine. He retains enough Verenan ideals not to force his conservatism on the cult as a whole, but privately considers the cult's agonised wranglings over matters of conscience unnecessary. As far as he is concerned, the cult must simply accept the wisdom of the doctrines they have been proclaiming for generations. The cult's teaching is objectively good for itself and good for the stability of the kingdom. Its high-minded ideals are best forgotten. In effect, De Rennes is a heretic: he no longer truly worships Verena, but rather the gods of law. However, the cult's capacity for self deceit has blinded them to the reality of this situation, and he is remarkably popular within the cult. In any event, De Rennes is one of the more capable Cardinals the cult has ever had, and under his leadership the cult's position seems secure.

The Minor Cults

The Cult of Morr

Although the other cults of the southern pantheon have obvious appeal, and have built significant places for themselves within the political establishment, the cult of Morr has never been able to. The cult's practices and rituals are probably the most widespread and best accepted of all the Bretonnian cults. Even followers of Taal, Ulric, or the Lady of the Lake turn to the Cult of Morr to provide funeral rites (though in some isolated areas the cult of Taal continues to do this, and burials at sea are traditionally undertaken by clerics of Manann). Only followers of the Old Faith refuse to accept the cult's offices, burying their dead in the traditional fashion. The cult has more clergy than any other cult, indeed more than several of them put together. The majority of these are poorly educated, often illiterate, "country priests", who travel isolated villages performing funeral rites. There is a priest of Morr within a few days journey of any inhabited part of the kingdom. However, it is only at the moment of death that most people have anything to do with the cult, and so its influence is less than might be expected. The cult's main responsibilities in the settlement with the monarchy are to make sure the dead stay dead, and for this reason the Cardinal of Morr has the title "watchman of the kingdom's dead".

The corruption that lies at the heart of all the Bretonnian cults has taken an unusual (but perhaps foreseeable) turn in the cult of Morr. The only hold the cult has over the populace, its only means of gaining influence, is its funeral rite. The common people believe that unless a priest of Morr conducts a funeral service for a dead person, they cannot travel to Morr's realm. Their spirit may remain restless, haunting their relatives, their body may rise from the grave to walk once again, or, even more chillingly, their soul may find its way into the kingdom of Khaine, whose doors are always open, there to be tormented for all eternity. This superstitious dread (which the cult has always done its best to encourage, having no desire for people to start burying their own

dead without adequate safeguards against necromancy) means that all people, peasant and noble alike, are willing to pay whatever the cult asks in exchange for a funeral. Sooner or later, everyone comes to the cult and has to pay its extortionate fees. As a result, the cult has become fantastically wealthy. However, they have a long tradition against ostentation, and so none of this wealth is spent on rich robes or ornate temples. A small proportion is spent on the priest's personal upkeep (and the "country priests" are generally the wealthiest men in the local area), but the majority of the money goes to the cult's central funds. The cult has become a major banking and mercantile power in the kingdom, lending money to merchants and nobles, even financing expeditions and merchant ventures of its own. This financial side of the cult's activities has in the past been managed by the Cardinal, but the current Cardinal, Cicere Marsallas, came to power as a reformer, determined to refocus the cult's energies on its obligations to guard the kingdom's dead. He has delegated the cult's financial management to Alain de Jolouse, Archdeacon of Guisoreux, a previously minor functionary now very much in the limelight. Alain is a capable man, but out of his depth negotiating with merchant princes. There is a good deal of internal political manoeuvring occurring within the cult at present, as senior clerics vie with each other to control the cult's considerable assets by acting as patrons to Alain.

The cult's main lay order is the Mourner's Guild, which assists priests in the arrangement and execution of funerals. The cult also has a little-known military order, the Raven Knights, who hunt out and destroy necromancers and undead, and a number of monastic orders. The monastic orders tend to live in very remote areas where they worship Morr isolated from society. Many are sworn to silence, but some have been known to offer interpretations of dreams and omens to those who come to seek their help.

The Cult of Ulric

The cult of Ulric has a long history in Bretonnia. As outlined previously, it was the original warrior cult of the Bretonni, alongside that of the Lady of the Lake. Both cults lost ground to the powerful cult of Myrmidia at around the time of Gilles le Breton. The cult of Ulric, however, managed to retain a strong following, especially in the north of Bretonnia, with its stronghold in Armorique, amongst descendants of Norse settlers. Part of the cult's appeal has always been its focus on individual martial prowess and the honour of the warrior. The cult has never had much interest in the wider societal codes of honour and obligation that the cult of Myrmidia developed, and it has retained a suspicion and hostility towards change and innovation in society and technology. For this reason, many of those who still aspire to be "true knights" find themselves drawn to the worship of Ulric. The cult abhors the new black powder weapons and the changes in tactics occasioned by developments in technology, harking back to the days when all battles were won by a charge of heavy cavalry. The cult considers itself to be the guardian of the chivalric ideals of Bretonnia, implacably opposed to the foreign influences of the cult of Myrmidia (which the cult regards

as a Navarrese rather than truly Bretonnian). As this suggests, the cult also tends to attract the naturally conservative and the northern patriots. Followers of Ulric tend to be far less political than followers of Myrmidia, some seeing the court as a decadent place, not fit for true knights. The politicisation of the cult of Myrmidia is yet another sign of its weakness in the eyes of the cult of Ulric.

Priests of Ulric must always have served as soldiers of some description, and after studying at the cult's seminary in L'Anguille they are expected to resume their military service. Most priests serve as chaplains in military units in much the same way as priests of Myrmidia. Priests who act as chaplains to devout noble families usually also serve in their household retinue. The cult has a number of associated military orders, most very ancient, with long and proud histories. It has no monastic orders. Retired warriors generally take up senior positions in the cult, whose senior clergy are therefore often older than their opposite numbers in other cults. It is reasonably common for senior clergy of the cult of Ulric to have some degree of disability due to injury. The current Cardinal, Alf-André de Negrepelisse, is no exception, lacking one eye, and bearing an impressive scar across the side of his face. However, many believe that his head injury lost him more than his eye. The Cardinal seems at times to be somewhat unhinged, highly unpredictable, but with undeniable religious fervour. He can at times provide truly inspirational leadership, throwing himself into politics, where he favours either the de Cabourg or the Knights of the Holy Blood (though he switches allegiance between the two frequently, without apparent reason) but at times he withdraws completely from public life, travelling the countryside leading evangelistic missions to isolated villages.



The Cult of Manann

The Cult of Manann has in many ways managed to see through the centuries relatively unchallenged and unchanged. Its main worshippers are drawn from sailors, boatmen, and fishermen, and those others whose livelihood and safety are dependent on rivers and the sea. The worship of Manann is as strong as ever in coastal towns and villages, farmers with lands susceptible to flooding frequently give offerings to Manann as well as Taal, and merchants whose wealth is tied up in ventures overseas customarily give large donations to the cult's temples before their ships embark. Although Affairiche commands more respect from merchants as a whole, few would dare abandon their devotion to the master of the oceans when a ship sunk could ruin them overnight. Changes in shipbuilding and advances in navigation and cartography have not done much to diminish the

vulnerability of those spending months on board a ship, and sailors use the cult's rituals and prayers superstitiously. Indeed, much of the cult's liturgy is out of its hands, having become ingrained in the way of life of seamen over the centuries, and it couldn't change the rituals used on board ship even if it wished to. Priests serve in two distinct ways, either onshore, running the cult's Temples, and blessing new vessels, or at sea, where they act as ship's chaplains. All ships of any size have chaplains, and most sailors will not set sail without one. Customarily all priests must serve as chaplains for at least one sea voyage after completing their training in seminary at L'Anguille, though many spend all their ministry as chaplains. Senior clergy are drawn from the Temples. The cult's two largest temples are in L'Anguille and Bordeleaux, the kingdom's two biggest ports, and the high priests of these Temples are significant figures in the life of those cities. Most coastal villages have simple shrines to Manann, that the villagers tend themselves in the absence of a priest. The cult has traditionally had little vested interest in politics, and its Cardinals have tended to simply follow their own political interests. Indeed, especially for noble families in coastal areas, a career in the cult often appeared a good move, as the cult's lack of baggage in politics meant that a noble family with a connection to the current Cardinal would reap significant benefits. The Cardinal has traditionally been the archpriest of either Bordeleaux or L'Anguille, with the two alternating. The current Cardinal of Manann, Toine Rohan-Rochefort, is from Bordeleaux, and from a family traditionally allied with the Amboise.

The Cult tends to coexist harmoniously with the cult of Affairiche in its patronage of the commercial aspects of seafaring, but there has long been rivalry with the cult of Myrmidia, as both seek to be patrons to the kingdom's navy. In most cases the more powerful and cut-throat cult of Myrmidia (which also has the considerable advantages of being well connected to many noble families) wins any conflicts between the two, though occasionally the cult of Manann gets its way. The cult of Myrmidia has long sought to professionalise the Navy, and by so doing increase its control over the Admiralty (a significant political force). It is now normal for most Naval Officers to have attended the Military Academy in Guisoreux, which is heavily influenced by Myrmidian teachings (indeed some within the cults of Manann and Ulric jokingly refer to it as "The Seminary"). However, not all graduates of the Academy are devotees of Myrmidia, and it is still possible for nobles to buy their way into a commission in the Navy, avoiding the Academy altogether. Some noble families with a long seafaring tradition make a point of avoiding the Academy in fact, regarding it with a great deal of suspicion. These families, often traditionally worshippers of Manann, have some of the greatest sea captains and admirals in the history of Bretonnia as their ancestors, and ensure that the cult is never entirely without influence. In the main, though, the cult and its teachings are likely to have far greater influence over the crew and minor officers of a ship than over the ship's commanders, who are probably Academy trained and devotees of Myrmidia. These religious differences can lead to conflict (and even occasionally mutiny) at sea.

The Cult has several associated orders. There are lay orders of shipwrights and boatbuilders, as well as navigators and sea captains. All function partly as a means of expressing special devotion (and hopefully securing more of Manann's blessings) and as social clubs. Several merchant adventurers guilds are effectively lay orders of the cult, functioning as places where overseas ventures can be planned. There are also a number of societies amongst naval officers that are dedicated to Manann. The cult has a number of military orders, mostly being orders of Marines devoted to Manann, though the Order of the Trident should be mentioned. This is an investigative and punitive order, legally recognised, though resented by the judiciary, that exists to find and execute wreckers, pirates, and followers of Stromfels. Finally, the cult has a small number of monastic orders. Most of these are contemplative, living in monasteries or hermitages on remote islands or headlands, but some also function as light-house keepers.

The Cults of Taal & Rhya

The Cults of Taal and Rhya (which are essentially one and the same) are seen by the majority of urban Bretonnians as little more than superstitious nonsense mouthed by the backward peasants of the countryside. The cult of Taal has, for historical reasons (tradition is a powerful force in Bretonnia), retained a seat on the Holy Council, but few regard the Cardinal of Taal as a serious political figure. The cult are the butt of countless jokes about fertility rituals involving lusty farmers and livestock, and are seen as rustic, foolish, and very much part of the kingdom's past rather than its future. Unsurprisingly, such treatment of the cult breeds resentment. The decline of the cult's fortunes is in part due to the dominance of the southern pantheon, but in fact this is a fairly minor factor. The cults of Manann and Ulric have retained far more influence. The main reason for the cult's decline is the inexorable movement of power, resources, and people from the countryside and into the towns. The rural hinterlands of Bretonnia are simply not as important as they once were. Most nobles now live in the cities (if not at court in Oisillon), only visiting their country estates occasionally. It is very much the third or fourth rank of the aristocracy who live in the country, barring the odd eccentric who dislikes life at court. In geographical terms (and even in sheer numbers of worshippers) the cult should be one of the most powerful in the land, worship of Taal is more widespread than worship of any other deity, save perhaps Morr. However, almost all of Taal's worshippers are peasants. Taal is primarily a god of farmers and countryfolk, whose worship is intimately bound up with the cycle of the seasons, sowing and reaping of crops, and the care of animals. Such people may in theory wield considerable economic power, as they feed the kingdom, but in practice they are at the bottom of the social order. Hunters, trappers and woodsmen also follow Taal, and large hunting expeditions often begin with a ritual invocation of the god. The cult does have some noble followers, drawn from the country gentry, and it is these individuals who tend to form the hierarchy of the cult. Thus the current Cardinal of Taal, Quentin Eurtre, is from

a family of minor nobility in Armorique. These noble-born priests are well-educated diplomats, who attend the cult's small seminary attached to its high temple in Parravon. They handle the cult's political affairs and its relations with other cults. The majority of the cult's priests are "country priests", peasants, often illiterate, who lead rural communities in the worship of Taal. They conduct marriage services, and in more remote areas they sometimes conduct funerals (something resented by the cult of Morr). The cult has temples in towns, but these are not its real holy sites. Its high temple in Parravon exists more for the convenience of other cults than because the site is of real significance. The true holy sites of the cult are found in wilderness areas, away from human settlement. This devaluing of the urban and valuing of the rural is such a central part of the cult's identity that some suspect that the cult's Cardinals are mere figureheads, and that the cult's real spiritual leaders are to be found somewhere away from the cities.

Few take the cult of Taal seriously, but this is a mistake, because it relies on a purely urban perspective. The cult is often the most powerful force in rural areas, with a deeper hold on people's lives than the nobility, and country gentry often have to reach an understanding with the cult if their authority is to be respected. The cult is in some places linked to outlaw groups, and more than one royal tax collector killed by wild animals on the road may have fallen foul of the cult. The cult has in some areas made common cause with more minor nobles who feel excluded from the corridors of power, and these alliances are a real potential danger to the powers that be, though they are by and large deemed insignificant by urban observers. There is a genuine bitterness and resentment within the cult over the way others in the establishment look down on them, and in some clerics this has become a festering hatred of those in authority.

The cult has a number of associated orders. Its lay orders are primarily semi-guilds dedicated to the god. Orders of huntsmen, ostlers, and woodsmen are the most common. The cult has no known military orders, but it is not unknown for outlaws to dedicate themselves to Taal. There is a strong monastic tradition in the cult, but most monks are hermits, living in remote areas. Those communities that do exist are entirely self-supporting villages, with the monks tending the land themselves. The most famous monastery dedicated to Taal and Rhya is La Maisontaal, in the Grey Mountains.

The Lesser Cults

The lesser cults are those whose worship is confined to a small area of Bretonnia.

The Cult of Affairiche

Affairiche is the Bretonnian name for Handrich, the god of trade, and the cult is followed by merchants and financiers throughout the kingdom. Unlike the other lesser cults, worship of Affairiche is not restricted to a particular geographical area, though it is unquestionably strongest in the great port cities, but it is restricted to a very limited section of the population. Merchants are not always the most devout of people, and the cult does not have the

same following in any Bretonnian city as it does in Marienburg. However, in L'Anguille, where the cult has its high temple, the cult has considerable influence. Worship of Affairiche has long been a recognised part of city life in that great port, and the high priest is a significant political figure.

The Cult of Emilion

The cult of Emilion, god of wine, is a peculiarly Bretonnian institution. Essentially Emilion is a human version of the Elven Liadriel, though this would certainly not be admitted by Bretonnians. The origins of the cult are uncertain, but worship of Emilion is fairly localised, being found primarily in the areas of Bordeleaux and Gascogne, though in other wine producing regions of Bretonnia Emilion is also acknowledged. Emilion is the spirit of the vine, and his worship is concerned with all aspects of viniculture, from growing the grapes to making and selling the wine, and finally to drinking it. There are innumerable cultic rituals passed down in families that are followed superstitiously in the vineyards, and which are said to guarantee the wine is of a consistently good quality. The cult's major celebrations occur around the grape harvest in mid summer, and tend to involve much drinking, often leading to decadent parties. The cult's only real stricture is the drinking of wine with each meal, though the god encourages a general bonhomie and appreciation of the finer things in life in his worshippers. In areas where the cult is strong it tends to replace the worship of Taal (and to a certain extent Affairiche, though the god of trade is not as significant in the vineyards in any case), and the few clerics of Emilion are often counted as "really" being clerics of Taal. They certainly treat the Cardinal of Taal as "their Cardinal", and tend to share many of the larger cult's concerns. The cult wields considerable power in the Bordeleaux region and at the Gascogne regional parliament.

The Cult of The Lady of the Lake

The cult has declined greatly since its glory days when it was the most widespread of all Bretonnian cults. As described in the history, the Lady is essentially an embodiment of the Bretonni people (and for this reason has never been popular amongst the Norse of Armorique or the Navarrese), and despite the decline in the cult's influence worship of the Lady has always remained strong in some areas. For some, the Lady is still the single most important deity, the guardian and patron of the kingdom as a whole. The Lady is worshipped across a fairly wide social spectrum, and her worship still has a certain degree of respect, even though the cult has little political power. Most people treat her as a sort of patron saint, and she is invoked in countless half-forgotten rituals and phrases that are part of everyday life, used as good luck charms. Thus soldiers calling on "Our Lady of Battles" to aid them before they fight are not invoking Myrmidia, but actually using an ancient prayer to the Lady. The Lady's influence can still be traced in language and superstition, but few know much about her actual worship. Most see her as an amalgamation of Myrmidia, Verena and Shallya, beautiful, merciful, bringing justice and giving strength in battle. The darker side of her

worship, the connections with fertility and sacrifice, that link her cult in some ways far more closely with that of Rhya, are forgotten by most people. The cult has no real hierarchy, and only a few clerics. The most significant group of her worshippers is a small circle of traditionalist nobles, who believe that the Lady can restore the past glories of the kingdom if her worship was to be revived on a large scale. This highly conservative group, comprised mainly of knights, is active in the court, and headed by Leoncoeur, who has become the king's personal champion.



The Cult of Sigmar

For obvious reasons, Sigmar is not a popular or significant deity in Bretonnia. Bretonnian scholars have often argued that Sigmar was not a genuine god but rather a saint of Ulric (an opinion repudiated by both the cult of Sigmar and that of Ulric). The cult is found only in a few villages near the border with strong populations of Imperial emigrants, and in Guisoreux, which has the only temple of note in the kingdom. Imperial mercenaries and emigrants are the main worshippers within Bretonnia, forming a very unstable body of worshippers. At various points the cult has been proscribed, its followers declared spies and traitors, hunted down and executed. However, at present the cult is officially tolerated, though worshippers are still regarded as potential Imperial spies by the common people.

The Proscribed Cults

The cults of Khaine, Stromfels, and those of all chaos powers are proscribed by an ancient royal edict. Worship is punishable by death. However, as Chaos is not seen as a direct threat by most Bretonnian rulers the repression is extremely relaxed. The cult most actively persecuted by the authorities is that of Ranald.

The Cult of Ranald

It is perhaps ironic, a jest that the Prince of Thieves himself would find amusing, that in a kingdom riddled with corrupt priests it is the clerics of Ranald who are perhaps the least corrupt. The Cult of Ranald is a proscribed cult, whose followers are hunted throughout the kingdom, but it is also one of the most widespread of all cults, with followers in every settlement worthy of notice. Proven followers of Ranald are held to be thieves or worse and prosecuted as such when caught. In areas where the cult is more rigorously hunted, like Quenelles, the cult is believed to be seditious and followers of Ranald are hung as traitors. Only in Brionne is Ranald worshipped freely. The city has a semi-clandestine Temple and no attempt is made to prosecute worshippers. Partly by its very nature as a cult that dislikes confining rules and structures, and partly due to its present circumstances as a persecuted cult, the cult has no overarching structure. Worshippers of Ranald in a particular town will have a recognised priest (or priests) and temple, known to the god's followers in that place, but there are no wider structures. There is no equivalent to the "Cardinals" of other cults. The cult in one town may know some members of the cult in neighbouring towns (especially if members are involved in smuggling), and can arrange an introduction for those needing to travel there, but they will know little in detail about the other cult's make-up, meeting places, or the identity of its priest. This limiting of knowledge about the cult's activities helps prevent disaster striking if a follower of Ranald is captured. No one, not even a senior cleric of the cult, can identify cultists in more than two or three cities. The cult uses Thieves Tongue and Thieves Signs extensively as means of identification and communication, and also in worship. The form of Thieves Tongue used by common rogues is in fact a bastardised and pidgin version of the language as it is used liturgically by the cult. Many good luck gestures in common Thieves Tongue are derived from their use in the ritual of the cult.

The cult has always venerated Ranald in a number of different aspects, as trickster, master thief, gambler, illusionist, and many others. The precise nature of the worship of Ranald in any area will depend in part on the makeup of the cult in that town. It is perfectly possible for there to be a cult of Ranald the gambler and a cult of Ranald the night prowler existing in the same town, with a very different social circle of worshippers. The two cults would have little to do with each other, and in some cases might not even be aware of each other's existence. Indeed, this is relatively common, and gives the cult an unexpected social diversity in its makeup. The core of the cult's membership is obviously made up of the poor, and particularly of criminals. For such people the fact that worship of Ranald is illegal is irrelevant, as most of their way of life is illegal, and it makes little difference if they are arrested as pickpockets or cultists. However, the cult also has a following among the more well-to-do, for whom the cult's illegality makes the worship of Ranald a thrilling risk. Cults of Ranald the Illusionist flourish amongst the more devout wizards, especially those with a disliking of authority. Cults of Ranald the Gambler and

Trickster appeal to the wealthy and dissolute. Groups of students determined to make fools of the University authorities may well take Ranald as a patron, as do some Agitators, especially those who prefer to take direct action aimed at embarrassing the powers that be. Secretive gambling clubs with wealthy merchants and nobles as members exist in the upper echelons of society, fleecing gullible aristocrats for the sheer fun of it. All of these cults, however, are influenced by one aspect of Ranald that has become central to his worship throughout Bretonnia: Ranald the Protector of the Poor. Even the exclusive gambling clubs find they are drawn by their worship of the god to have a concern for the victims of society. The injustice of the Bretonnian social system, the corruption of its courts and religion, the crushing poverty of those at the bottom of the pile, all of this has had a profound effect on the cult's theology. The cult has always had a concern for the underdog, and a desire to frustrate the authorities, but in Bretonnia this aspect of the cult's teaching has assumed a central role. The cult does all it can to alleviate the suffering of the poor and defenceless, to shelter them from the excesses of the nobility, and to remove particularly vicious officials. This often results in strange alliances for the cult. Its teaching on this subject is almost identical to radical Verenan teaching, and the cult often shelters rogue Verenan clerics branded as heretics by their superiors. It often finds its work to ease the suffering of the poor gives it common cause with the cult of Shallya, and this combined with the role of Shallya in the cult's mythology often means that on a grassroots level the two cults often work very closely together. Shallyans have frequently offered sanctuary to followers of Ranald, and in return the cult has often offered protection and finance to the Shallyans (generally the Shallyans decide it's best not to know where the money comes from). This aspect of the cult's activities means that it often has the support of the urban poor (in rural areas the cult is still viewed with considerable suspicion), who often have a romantic "Robin Hood" ideal of the cult. This is, of course, naïve. The cult is perfectly capable of robbing from both the rich and the poor (and tends to deceive everyone as a matter of course), and does not always give what it robs to the poor (though it should be noted that few genuine devotees of Ranald are actually greedy, the money is simply a means of keeping score).

The cult's major stricture is the prohibition of violence, except as a last resort in self defence or the defence of others. This stricture is one that by and large the cult adheres to, differentiating it from other pseudo-revolutionary movements. One of the major exceptions to this stricture is followers of Khaine and other particularly bloodthirsty rogues. The cult is implacably opposed to cut-throats and assassins, and when it is aware of such killers at work on its patch it often takes drastic action against them. In some areas, however, the cult has become corrupt, and permits killing. In places this is in reaction to the oppression inflicted on the cult by the authorities (who certainly have no qualms about using violence), but in some places it seems to reflect a deeper corruption of the spirit of the cult, as its members are drawn into the worship of Khaine.

The cult has an enormous variety in its makeup and associated orders. Priests and other devotees recruit and train their own successors, teaching them the lore of the cult as it was handed down to them. In one sense all the cult's orders are lay ones, as every follower of Ranald must practice their craft, and many also have legitimate "cover" careers. However, there are more formal orders (in as much as anything about the cult is either formal or ordered). Many thieves guilds have close relationships with the cult, and some, like the Halegrin of Guisoreux, are comprised in the main of worshippers of Ranald. It is rumoured that an order of illusionists dedicated to Ranald exists, though it is also possible that this is a rumour deliberately spread as misinformation. In some areas groups specifically dedicated to Ranald in his guise as protector have formed. These are the closest the cult gets to military orders, though in accordance with the cult's strictures they only use violence as a last resort. Such groups (the indigents of Guisoreux are a good example) use a multitude of means to frustrate the authorities and protect those who live in their patch. Using street skills and deception to make policing an area almost completely impossible is a normal tactic, but actively setting up a sting operation to remove a particular official from office has also been attempted. Their concerns occasionally bring them into conflict not only with the authorities but also with more violent criminal groups. If active confrontation is unavoidable, these cultists acquit themselves well as skilled knife-fighters, but usually prefer to make a smooth escape without combat.



The Cult of Khaine

The assassin's god is worshipped primarily by (perverse and generally unsettling) individuals, and there are no known temples in Bretonnia, though a few more well-organised cults exist. Rumours of assassin cults surface from time to time, but although some assassin guilds exist, with Khaine as a notional patron, more widespread cults with a regional or kingdom-wide organisation are believed to be no more than an urban myth (this comforting dismissal of unpleasant realities is, however, a common Bretonnian response to the activities of proscribed cults). Some of the less scrupulous fencing schools are believed to have devotees to Khaine amongst them, and heretics of both Myrmydia and Ranald occasionally turn to the worship of the lord of murder. To the establishment, there is little difference between a

follower of Khaine and Ranald, as both are seen as dangerous criminals. The cults of Morr and Ranald are most active in hunting down followers of Khaine, though due to their activities a cult of Khaine is just as likely to be discovered and hunted down by the watch. If assassin's guilds dedicated to Khaine exist it is possible that the powerful individuals that employ them (which in Bretonnia could include senior clerics as well as nobles or merchants) might actively work to conceal their existence. (Rumours that Cardinal Dumourieux employs such assassins must surely be groundless, however...)

The Cult of Stromfels

The storm god is worshipped primarily by pirates and wreckers. It is believed that some pirates are actually devout followers of the god, carrying priests of Stromfels as chaplains on board much as other ships carry priests of Manann. The most significant cults of Stromfels are however found in remote coastal villages where wrecking is common. Often entire communities follow the god, wrecking ships as an act of worship and living off of the goods recovered as salvage. Shrines to Stromfels in such villages are often made to resemble shrines to Manann, with only a trained observer being able to pick out the symbology distinctive to the darker deity. Such cults are actively hunted by the Order of the Trident of the Cult of Manann. There are persistent rumours of a temple to Stromfels somewhere near Brionne, and another in Moussillon.

The Chaos Cults

Chaos Cultists are far less numerous in Bretonnia than they are in the Empire. Adventurers expecting to find chaos cultists at the bottom of every plot and intrigue will often find themselves searching in vain. Bretonnian culture has been profoundly affected by the taint of chaos, but this does not express itself primarily in direct worship of the chaos gods. Many Bretonnian nobles are in fact profoundly perverse, displaying extremes of cruelty, immorality, greed, pride, and a general willingness to indulge in the darker desires of the human heart, that makes them notorious throughout the Old World. As we have seen, the Bretonnian cults have in many ways turned away from the ideals they should be upholding and their worship is often an empty meaningless thing that exists only to justify the political power wielded by the cults themselves. It is just as satisfying to the gods of chaos to see a group of people who think they are devout Shallyans exploiting the sick and poor, living lives of obscene luxury, and indulging in the occasional orgy, as it would be if these people actually established themselves as a cult of Slaanesh. Bretonnian society as a whole turns a blind eye to the excesses of the rich and powerful, and such things are never openly discussed at court except by the most jaded and perverted aristocrats, who simply don't care about appearances. However, it is common knowledge that some nobles have rather eccentric tastes. Open worship of the chaos gods occurs nowhere except in Moussillon.

The most popular of the chaos powers in Bretonnia is indisputably Slaanesh. Most circles of nobility have some connection to secret orgiastic societies, whether or not

they are full cults of Slaanesh. The main Slaaneshi cult in the kingdom is the "Purple hour", and many influential nobles have taken part in orgies organised by the cult. Slaaneshi cults tend to be organised by the aristocracy, but often include members of the merchant classes, and often numerous pretty peasants. For the lower classes joining the cult of Slaanesh can occasionally appeal to their desire for social advancement as well as their more earthly desires, as an attractive or well-endowed peasant can find themselves plucked from obscurity to be given a place of influence in a noble's service because of certain other services they render in the activities of the cult. In Couronne the prevailing cult of pleasure is largely inspired by Slaanesh. Shrines to Slaanesh can be found hidden away on many estates, and it is rumoured that there is a temple hidden somewhere in the Oisillon palace and grounds.

Nurgle is, unsurprisingly, very popular amongst the urban poor. A cult which teaches that disease and squalor are power, that these very tools of oppression can be employed as a weapon against the powers that be, has obvious appeal. In times of plague many will offer prayers to both Shallya and Nurgle. The cult of Shallya, although convinced of the need to oppose Nurgle, does not see the cult as a real threat and is in any event too corrupt itself to do much to resist its influence. It is, however, largely due to the activities of the grass-roots members of the cult of Shallya (often branded heretical by their superiors) that the cult of Nurgle has not completely captured the souls of the poor. Worship of Nurgle is still seen by the majority of the population as wrong (rather than simply being illegal), and as something that displeases Shallya (indeed those invoking Nurgle will often carefully conceal any symbol of Shallya before doing so, in the superstitious belief that if they cannot see the goddess then she cannot see them). Temples to Nurgle exist in the sewers of several Bretonnian cities.

Tzeentch has some adepts amongst the nobility, though many powerful nobles are perfectly capable of Machiavellian scheming without any need of inspiration by the Lord of Change. The most significant followers of Tzeentch are probably found in academia, where wizards and sages occasionally find themselves drawn into his worship through their desire for esoteric knowledge forbidden by the authorities. Khorne has never had much appeal, except to some members of the military. However, in an environment in which clerics of Myrmdia argue that making a bloody example of a village or two is the most expedient way of crushing a peasant revolt, identifying followers of the blood god is not always easy.

The Law Cults

Though not actually proscribed, worship of the gods of Law remains far from commonplace in Bretonnia. It is very much limited to a small number of secretive groups typically dedicated to only one of the powers of Law. Most of these cults started a long time ago, introduced by early settlers coming from the southern Old World. One Bretonnian singularity is that cult of Solkan the god of Vengeance is not pre-eminent. This is probably linked to the fact that Bretonnians don't feel very concerned about the threat of Chaos. Small sects of worshippers of Alluminas and even Arianka exist.