

# Musings on the priesthoods of Bretonnia, part 4: The Unified Church of Bretonnia

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 Monday, 10 February 2014  
 Last Updated Tuesday, 11 February 2014

So far I've speculated on the religious customs and beliefs of the Bretonni before and during the Unification of Bretonnia, and how the various cults reacted to Unification. Now it's time to consider how the cults function after Unification, both in their role as holy figures and advisors to the people of Bretonnia.

## Marriage without a minister

First of all, I want to expand on the second-to-last chapter in my previous article; about how the various priests agree that the Lady of the Lake is the superior deity. In turn their cults are sanctioned by the state and they may form a council of priests to advise the King of Bretonnia. While I believe I put forward some good arguments for that development, there was another reason behind it. The WFRP book *Knights of the Grail* has a few words about marriage and funerals, on how people get hitched and buried in the land of chivalry[1].

When I read it I had the niggling feeling that something was missing. It took me a while, but eventually I realized that there was no mention of ministers; of (religious) officials who recognize the wedding, funeral or other ceremony and imbue it with holy meaning. It can't be the Damsels of the Lady of the Lake who administer the ceremony. They're aloof in

nature, have strange magical powers and are both feared and revered by peasants, nobles and everyone in between. "Damsels never apologise and never explain. They never seem surprised by the outcome of events, and they often know things it seems that that they could not have learned by mundane means. Player characters should feel respect tinged with fear for these figures." [2]

I think neither the Grail Damsels nor the populace would find these devoted ladies conducting the ceremonies a good idea. There are a few sources, such as the description of the Damsels in the sixth edition Bretonnia army book[3], that say otherwise, but that would imply that there are enough Damsels to administer all the nuptial or final rites for every single person in Bretonnia. The Grail Knights are also unfit to be ministers, both because they're too few in number and because I imagine at least some of these living saints would have issues with sanctifying the weddings and funerals of lowly mud-encrusted peasants. There's a mention of Grail Knights and Grail Pilgrims giving sermons in Grail Chapels. "At an attended Chapel, the Grail Knight gives a short sermon every Ladyday (the name for Holiday in Bretonnia), and those who live nearby are expected to attend. Grail Knights are not selected for their oratorical abilities, but many feel that they ought to make an effort, and thus long, rambling, pointless sermons are extremely common. (...) Some Chapels are attended by [Grail Pilgrims], often venerating the reliquary of the Grail Knight who founded the Chapel. These operate much the same way as those attended by Grail Knights, except that the sermons tend to be better; the leaders of Grail Pilgrims are chosen on the basis of oratorical ability." [4]

However, there's a huge difference between giving a sermon - as in a written or spoken address on a religious or moral matter - and being authorized by state and God(s) to lead two people into holy wedlock.

This leaves us with the only holy figures remaining in Bretonnia: the clergy of the traditional Old World deities. But I imagine the ruling class, or at least King Gilles le Breton and his Grail Companions, would have qualms over being married or buried in the name of a deity they don't worship. This means that the ruling class would want their ceremonies - at least partially - dedicated to the Lady of the Lake. This in turn means that the cults, Damsels and the nobility come to some kind of arrangement. Having the priesthoods claim that the Lady is stronger than their particular God(s) and devoting ceremonies to her, in turn of their cults being sanctioned by the state seems like a plausible solution. So let's say that the Old World faiths in Bretonnia proclaim the Lady as the Queen of Heaven, the ruler of the Gods in the Old World pantheon.

We can see a possible precedent of this supposed arrangement between religions in the novel *Savage City*. In this story there's a wedding that is administered by a priest of unknown denomination. Not only does he dedicate the ceremony to the Goddess of Chivalry, in the same breath he mentions the Lady and Shallya. "...and even as the Lady herself looks down upon us here today, so we ask Shallya to also look down, and to gift these two young people with the life and fecundity with which she..."[5]

This to me reinforces the idea that the Cult of the Lady and the priesthoods of the Old World pantheon work together in some manner. Another example is the cooperation between the cults in the Empire. "While each cult operates independently from the others, and has its own goals, agendas and methods, there is a great deal of unity between cults. A priest that understands this may politely and gently guide a wayward worshipper to the priest of another cult if the advice sought falls outside the realm of the priest's experience or sphere of influence. In theory, all priests must follow the festivals, rites and practices of the other cults, and it's considered bad form to criticise the rites of other cults, although it's done on a daily basis."[6]

It stands to reason that the various faiths in Bretonnia come to a similar, if not more binding agreement. It is after all a feudal society, where quite literally nobles rule and peasant drool.

## Unification of the cults

Now I've both solidified an earlier concept and thought of how the ceremonies of the Bretonnians are administered, let's continue with how the cults of the Old World pantheon would get there and change with the passage of time. At first glance one could imagine that they would have much power in Bretonnia. In the beginning, right after Unification, their cults had been sanctioned by the newly formed and secure state. The leading figure of each (Bretonnian chapter of the) cult would receive a place in a council that advised the King of Bretonnia on the will of

the Gods. Some orders or chapters of the cults would most likely be displeased by this development. For example: Ar-Ulric, the spiritual leader of the Cult of Ulric. Not only would he lose control over the (Imperial) Ulrican clergy in Bretonnia, those same men of the cloth would now claim that a mystic water deity was superior to Ulric. But with King Gilles le Breton, his Grail Companions and the Lady of the Lake watching over the now united country, Ar-Ulric and also the leading figures of the other cults would have to console themselves with the knowledge that they each had one of their own at the King's side, singing the praises of their particular deity.

But then the Fay Enchantress came along with the Damsels of the Lady, and suddenly there was competition in the religion racket. A competition the women of the Lady were assured to win thanks to their immense magical powers. It's hard to amaze the people with miracles and prophecies from your deity when another can do the same thing with a flick of her fingers. That's to say nothing of the rise of the Grail Knights. Keep in mind that aside from their skill at arms and the divine aura's that surround them, only a Grail Knight can become the King of Bretonnia. For the ruling class, devotion to the Lady of the Lake would not be acceptable; it would be unavoidable. "While the Knights do not ignore these older Gods (that would be asking for trouble), their lives are dedicated to the protection and veneration of the Lady of the Lake who founded the nation." [7]

It's therefore inevitable that the Grail Damsels seize the reins of religious power in the country. Particularly because the priests of the Old World Gods proclaim that the Lady of the Lake is the Queen of Heaven, the Goddess who rules not only the people of Bretonnia but also the deities of Bretonnia. Gradually the cults would lose power, influence and followers. Some more than others, but I'll talk about that later. Suffice to say that around 2500 I.C., the faiths of the Old World pantheon in Bretonnia would be a sad remnant of their former glory. I think the ruling class, or perhaps the cults themselves, would slowly but surely institute the clergy into a single Unified Church of Bretonnia. Both because it's a sign of another victory of Unification in uniting these separate faiths, and because of the convenience to the nobility who want to show respect to the Old World Gods but don't want to waste much time on it. The cultists would go along with it, if only because of their increasing lack of relevance and decrease in followers and funds. In reality there would be conflicts and competition between the cults, but this way they can put their priests, laymen and other assets there where they are the most useful, and thusly survive in the land of chivalry.

## Structure(s) of the Church

First of all we have to consider where the beggarly priests would be practicing their trade. With the nobility neglecting the cults and the peasantry being too poor and overworked to donate or pray much, I don't see many temples surviving in modern-day Bretonnia. Especially not when only the nobility is allowed to build with stone [8], which means that the clergy would either have to gain the permission and support of a noble lord or else use other materials. The temples in the cities

would likely survive more or less intact to the 25th century, since if the omnibus *The Adventures of Florin & Lorenzo*[9] is to be believed, the urban Bretonnians are more cosmopolitan and prosperous than their counterparts in the countryside. These places of worship could count on the generosity of merchants and the rest of the middle class, most of them being peasants and thusly more inclined to the Old World Gods than the Lady of the Lake. But in the end the bourgeois have little power nationwide, and the clergy in the countryside would have few funds and followers to work with. "Bretonnia has not developed a middle class as powerful as that of the Empire. There is thus no moderating force to keep the nobility in check." [10]

This means that after fifteen thousand years of decline relatively few new temples would have been built and many existing ones would have fallen apart. The same does not go for monasteries; in fact I think that most of the holy structures of the Church of Bretonnia would be or become monasteries. The reason for that is that monasteries, as religious communities, are more self-sufficient (either by agriculture or providing products or services) because they've monks and/or nuns walking around whom besides praying have little else to do. In the real world not all monasteries are self-sufficient, but we're not talking about the real world here. "In most cases, the monastery is self-sufficient, with gardens, fields, orchards, and possibly some additional method of generating income, such as a winery or scribing services." [11]

This would make them attractive for all classes. The nobles don't have to worry about fanatics of faiths they don't fully understand, and can give the occasional contribution to signify their respect for the Old World Gods without hampering their devotion to the Lady of the Lake. The peasants in turn get a community of monks that can provide useful services (aside from the usual religious needs of the peasantry) and a place where they can dump offspring they can't or won't feed, safe in the knowledge that the monks are looking out for them. The merchants, scholars, artists and other people of the middle class would appropriately be in the middle and reap the benefits of both classes.

Now I've determined that monasteries would make up a large chunk of the cults' real estate, we know that monks would make up a large chunk of the cults' ranks. But the monks, by their very definition of cloistered ascetics, are not in a position to fulfil the religious needs of everyone in Bretonnia. Considering the decrease of power and followers (and thus new initiates), there would be many villages that don't have a temple or monastery close by. Of course Knights of the Grail established that Bretonnians like to go on a pilgrimage to a holy site for their weddings, but what about their funerals, festivals and other local customs and ceremonies? They would need a nearby priest to guide the proceedings. I think friars and other travelling priests are a good answer to this problem. (To clarify, a friar is a monk that commits himself to a particular geographical area, travelling from community to community and has taken a vow of poverty, only relying on the charity of others.) The reason for that is that peasants, who make the majority of the followers of the Old World Gods, are property of the nobility and need permission of their master(s) to leave their lands. Again, according to the stories of *The Adventures of Florin & Lorenzo* those common-born who live in cities are better off than their counterparts in the countryside, but the land of chivalry isn't blessed with many great cities. But peasants who go on a pilgrimage can easily leave the domain of their rightful lords. "Even the meanest lord, however, can hardly refuse permission for a wedding pilgrimage. (...) A Grail Pilgrim, as long as he follows his Grail Knight, accepting the hardships of life on the road, is deemed to be on pilgrimage and thus cannot be

seized by his lord." [12]

I don't think anyone of the ruling class would mind that friars, being wandering priests who have taken a vow of poverty, are deemed as harmless pilgrims. And certainly not when the alternative is having no priest of any denomination nearby, which could result into the peasants revolting. So if there are no priests close on hand and a pilgrimage to a temple or shrine is out of the question, the village can simply wait for a friar to come along to administer their ceremonies.

## The pecking order

Above the friars and monastery orders would be the urban clergy - the priests and cultists that live and work in a normal temple, and are situated in or nearby a town or city. They would probably look down on the monks and friars, if only because life in the city temples gives more opportunity for advancement and is, for lack of a better word, more glamorous than life in a monastery or on the road. Of course as these urban clergy are more involved in high society, they have to more often contend with high society. The devotion of the nobility is lacklustre at best, the Grail Chapels are considered to be holier than the cathedrals and temples of the Church, even the lowest Grail Knight has more power and influence than the most high-ranked archbishop and the miraculous capabilities of the Grail Damsels far exceed those of any priest of the Old World pantheon. The bishops and the other city-dwelling followers of the Old World Gods would have to face these uncomfortable truths, which could easily push them into a state of cynicism, egotism and self-serving manipulation. Since these priests are better situated to advance into positions of leadership, this in turn would have an effect on the Unified Church as a whole and the heads of the religious institution in particular.

On a side note, I believe there would be a fierce rivalry between the urban and the rural priests. The city clergy are sinister schemers who try to compete with the neglectful nobility and parvenu merchants. The rural priests on the other hand are mostly comprised of monks and friars, who because of their seclusion have their own unique view on how the Gods should be worshipped. This would result in them butting heads on more than one occasion, with little hope of a resolution. The priests in the city are few but the most powerful men of the Church, while the monks and friars are all constrained to a particular area and far poorer.

At the top we have the cardinals, the seven leaders of the cults and the people who form the Council of Couronne. They would of course be clad in red. Out-of-universe there's the well-known historical figure of Cardinal Richelieu or 'The Red Eminence', made famous in the Three Musketeers and also the fact that scarlet vestments are traditional for cardinals of the Catholic Church. In-universe, red is one of the three colours limited to the nobility of Bretonnia[13] and the only colour which isn't associated with one of the cults or their Gods. (The Cult of Shallya is sometimes associated with symbols such as a bleeding heart or drops of blood, and priestesses of Shallya are occasionally depicted as wearing white robes with red lining in imitation of the White Mages of the Final Fantasy video game franchise, but the clergy typically wear white vestments[14].) Giving the cardinals red robes is a sign of respect by the King and his court to the Unified Church of Bretonnia, without indirectly insulting or benefitting any single cult or God. Of course there's more to the cardinals than the shade of their vestments. While in theory everyone in the Council of Couronne should be equal, the reality would be different. They would be the spiritual leaders of seven different national chapters of worldwide cults, forced to work together because of the indifference of the ruling class and the impotence of the working class. In theory they have tremendous power, but in reality they are sidelined and outdone at every turn by the followers of the Lady. That's enough to turn even the most sincere Samaritan into a sinister minister who would make Richelieu proud. In response to Bretonnian high society, the cardinals would constantly be conspiring and feuding with what resources they have to further the cause of their particular faith. This scheming would be both against the other cults and all the other classes and social groups Bretonnia; anything which increases their influence, funds and followers justifies their efforts in their eyes and those of their deity.

#### Congregations, laity and templar knights

As I've said, the congregations of the Old World cults would also change with the times. The peasantry would still worship the Gods when required, but the influence of the oppressive nobility, the impressive Grail Knights and the authoritative Damsels would result into the serfs accepting the Lady of the Lake as the supreme Goddess of the Old World pantheon. As such the priests would be pressured to call upon the Lady as well during mass prayers and ceremonies. The nobility would devote most of their prayers to the Goddess of Chivalry, and thusly not spend much time in a temple of the Unified Church unless there's no Grail Chapel in or near their domain. Even then they would most likely still compel the local priests to pray to the Lady. The daily rituals in a typical temple might have more to do with the Lady of the Lake than the God(s) it's devoted to, which is sure to have an effect on the priesthood.

#### The laity[15]

- the people who do the cleaning, cooking and all the other important duties involved in the everyday running of temples - would also be affected by the

formation of the Unified Church. While I imagine many peasants would gladly forsake back-breaking labour for a life in the Church, the low coffers of the cults means that not many could afford enough laymen for every temple. It also seems likely that many lords frown upon too many of their serfs leaving their lands. Becoming a priest or monk is one thing, but a layman does much of the same work he would perform on the farms or pastures of his lord, while paying fewer or no taxes. As such there's probably some royal decree which states that peasants must first get their lord's permission before they can join the laity. This would result into the priests of the less illustrious or influential temples being pressured into doing lowly chores beneath their station, or risking that their house of worship collapses in on itself from lack of maintenance. Which further emphasizes the importance of monasteries, for these are small communities who can easily use their resident monks, while temples would have to manage with only their own priests and perhaps some initiates and a few or no laity.

Lest I forgot, the lack of support from the nobility would also mean that many of the various militant branches of the cults would disappear. Not just because of the coffers of the clergy growing ever slimmer, but because they would have less aspirants from the aristocracy. First of all we have the templar orders, those brotherhoods of devoted knights and warrior-monks. Bretonnia views knighthood differently than the Empire does, with nobility being a birthright rather than a title which can be bestowed on worthy individuals. This means that knightly orders in Bretonnia can only get recruits from the nobility, who devote most of their life to the Lady of the Lake. The various templar orders in the land of chivalry would sooner or later die out from a lack of new blood. Of course not every defender of the faith is a knight; peasants can be just as willing if not more to die for their God. These range from the Longshanks, an order of rangers devoted to Taal and Rhya[16], to the simple warriors and guards employed to protect temples and their congregations. But with much of the peasantry being the literal property of the nobility and the aforementioned restrictions on joining the laity, I imagine that common-born crusaders would not be a frequent occurrence in Bretonnia. I do see some faiths maintaining their own armies, especially the Cult of Manann which as I already established can still count a good number of nobles among its followers. The Unified Church as a whole however, would have to do with a token force of ordinary guards to protect their principal holdings. They simply don't have the means for anything more elaborate.

## Monks of the Grail

So far I've talked about four different kinds of people who worship and obey the Lady of the Lake. These are the Fay Enchantress, the Damsels of the Lady, the Grail Knights and the Grail Pilgrims. (The Lady doesn't give orders or blessings to the Grail Pilgrims, but these wanderers do follow Grail Knights, and do everything in their power to make the life of their living saint easier.) But there's a fifth kind of follower, namely the Daimoiselles du Grail, as found in the old fifth edition army book of Bretonnia. "[Daimoiselles du Grail] will often be the

daughters and sisters of Knights who because they are not Knights, are not able to express their devotion by going on the Grail Quest. Instead they become nuns of the Grail." [17]

At first you'd think that these nuns have by now been replaced by the Grail Damsels, since their name is literally French for 'damsels of the grail'. However, they are still mentioned in the WFRP book *Barony of the Damned* [18], although not by name. The more I think about it, the more these nuns of the Grail fit into the society of Bretonnia. Someone needs to maintain the Grail Chapels that are scattered around the kingdom. The Fay Enchantress is a powerful sorceress but also only one woman and I don't see the Grail Knights or Damsels scrubbing floors. It is mentioned that some Grail Pilgrims stay put in a Grail Chapel, but then they're no longer on a pilgrimage and they can better be described as monks than pilgrims. But while the concept of the Daimoiselles du Grail as the laity of the Cult of the Lady makes sense, I'm not quite sure how I think about the all-female aspect of it. Yes, women are barred from becoming Grail Knights or Grail Pilgrims, what with it being against the laws of chivalry. "On the other hand, women are not allowed to own property, to travel without a male escort, or to undertake most trades and professions. Despite the trappings of courtesy, men are firmly in charge. The Grail Damsels are the most obvious exception to this. (...) The women, of course, get no say in this treatment: they will eat first and be honoured, whether they like it or not, and they most certainly will not be allowed to put themselves into danger." [19] As such, it's easy to see how women who want to devote themselves to the Goddess of Chivalry would flock to the Daimoiselles du Grail. But I can't imagine every man who worships the Lady to go on the perilous Quest for the Grail or to follow a Grail Knight around for the rest of his life. At least a few men would want a more safe and secure way to dedicate their lives to the Lady, and I did find a throwaway comment about Grail monks in *Guardians of the Forest* [20]. I'll rename the Daimoiselles du Grail into the monastic orders of the Grail for sake of convenience.

Another aspect to the monastic orders of the Grail which I like is that they would be juxtaposed with the Church of Bretonnia in terms of indirect and direct power. While the ruling class would most likely sooner follow the advice of another devotee to the Lady than someone from the Church, the monastic orders have no true holy authority. It's the Grail Damsels who are the priestesses of the Lady, and the Grail Knights who are her anointed warriors. The Lady of the Lake has little to no reason to bless the monks, no matter how faithful they are. In fact, she and her Damsels have every reason to ignore the monks who worship her, and beat down on any who shows even a smidgeon of divine power. After all, every 'normal' priest of the Lady that appears to have her blessing would infringe on the religious dominance of the Damsels. In comparison the priests of the Unified Church are less popular with the ruling class, but can at least call upon the power of their deity. Followers of the Old World Gods know that they can be blessed, and that their deity takes an active interest of them regardless of whether they belong to the peasantry or nobility. So on one side we have the Unified Church, who have less popularity and fewer followers, but do have more direct power from the heavens. On the other side we have the monastic orders of the Grail, who can count on the benign support of the nobility but little else. I find this a very compelling juxtaposition.



## The Unified Church of Bretonnia to...peasants

Let's talk about how the people of Bretonnia would interact with the Church. The people of the Church would probably be somewhere in between merchants and nobles on the social ladder. While not everyone would respect the same deities, Bretonnia is still a feudal society, and being a servant of the Gods is sure to bring some respect. Especially when the Damsels and the Grail Knights are relatively rare, leaving the Church as the more visibly prominent religious organisation despite its lack of direct power and influence.

To the peasantry, especially those in the countryside, the priests of the Old World Gods would be very important. The ruling class care little for the common-born who serve them, leaving them to their own devices as long as the taxes, levies and desserts come on time. "A noble has a legal duty to protect, guide and judge the peasants under his rule, but quite a lot is permitted under the guise of 'instilling proper respect of the nobility', and very few nobles bother to investigate reports of abuses." [21]

This in turn has led to the peasants hiding most of their problems from their masters. "As a result, peasants try to avoid involving the nobility in disputes as much as possible. This might seem difficult, but problems for peasants are only rarely caused by the lord personally coming to the village and beating people up. Most often, the problems result from conflicts with other villages, abuses by bailiffs, or excessive taxes being demanded on a poor harvest. (...) Bretonnian nobles are responsible for bringing justice to the peasants. If they hear of a crime, they make sure that someone is punished. As long as it's a peasant, they do not worry about which peasant. In some cases, the lord has hanged the victim. Most peasants would prefer to avoid such 'justice'." [22] But the priests do care and have divine powers, or at least claim that they do. This would mean that when in trouble peasants would quickly ask for the help of a local priest, nearby monk or visiting friar if the opportunity arose. Their knowledge and skills would elevate the followers of the Church as not only holy figures, but figures of authority to the peasantry.

The Unified Church would in turn be very protective of the peasantry, since many of them are true believers. While attitudes would once again differ between urban and rural communities, in the end the priesthoods have too little influence to be dismissive of their flock, especially when their flock is being passive-aggressively oppressed by the Lady-worshipping nobility. Protecting their common-born followers would be an instinctive reaction for the Church. Furthermore, many of the priests and laymen would be lowborn themselves, who would naturally feel more inclined to help their peasant brethren than the nobles who rule them in decadent luxury.

I don't think there's much point in talking much about the merchants, city-dwellers, artists and the rest of the middle class. Or perhaps more to the point, I have trouble getting a fix on them and their beliefs. Not really surprising, since they're almost exclusively mentioned in a handful of pages in the principal WFRP sourcebook on Bretonnia, *Knights of the Grail*. There is a mention of a merchant worshipping the Lady of the Lake in Kislev[23], but that's it. On the one hand they're still peasants, no matter their fortunes or how frequent they marry into noble families. On the other hand these urbanites would be in a position to meet more noble lords, Grail Knights and Damsels than the ordinary farmer. On the third, mutated hand they would also encounter more of the leadership of the Church, who as I've established would be a scheming and self-serving lot. This could possibly colour the opinion of the middle class about the Church and the Old World pantheon. That's to say nothing of the possibility that the merchants might ignore both the Church and the Cult of the Lady of the Lake, and instead worship Ranald. After all, as the God of Luck he has far more to offer to them than the other deities. "The first, and easily the largest [sect of the followers of Ranald], is composed of merchants, hagglers, and those that make their living dealing with money. Known simply as 'The Brotherhood', this sect forms something akin to a guild of businessmen, who meet together to sort out their differences, seek mutual opportunities, and plot to increase their wealth. Most are honest merchants who call upon Ranald for bounty and improved commerce, although there is a seedier lesser order that exists. The Brotherhood teaches the tenets of cooperation and competition - help your brother when he needs it - but through competition, the best elements rise to the top." [24] So let's compromise and say that the middle class would have conflicting views on the Church, the Old World Gods and the Lady of the Lake. Or at least that there would be enough discord that their beliefs are not a factor in Bretonnia.

## The Unified Church of Bretonnia to...nobles

The nobility would be conflicted about the priests of Bretonnia. On the one hand they can give spiritual advice and help out when there are no Grail Knights or Damsels around. Divine power from a deity you don't worship is still divine power. On the other hand, the priests often talk about Gods that the nobility don't really care about, to say nothing about crises among the peasantry that as far as they know don't exist. As previously mentioned, the peasants hide their troubles from their masters. "One result of these practices, and of the existence of village courts, is that many lords believe there are no problems among their peasants, and that they truly live idyllic lives, without the sorts of troubles that afflict the nobility. Thus, even those nobles who are inclined to help the peasants rarely feel that there is any need." [25] Compared to the peasants, priests will have less reluctance talking to nobles on an equal footing about controversial subjects. Partly because they (believe they) interact with the Gods and interpret their holy will on a daily basis, but also because in one way or another they wouldn't deal personally with the oppression that commoners encounter from the ruling class. Whether they're city

priests or country monks, they're still followers of the Gods, which makes them at least partly exempt from most of the back-breaking labour or harsh punishments that the peasants have to endure. A noble might still hang a preacher who offends him, but he will not do so because of frivolous reasons, unlike with their serfs. "Carlomax was just another peasant until the day he saw his brother hanged for smiling at the lord's daughter and his mother beaten until she was crippled for crying at the execution." [26]

Still, priests will have to compromise between following their principles and religious beliefs, and unduly angering the nobility with talks of their Gods and showing what life is like in the real world.

The priesthoods would be envious of the nobility, both in its meaning as resenting the despotic ruling class as in coveting their patronage and power. Part of this would come from the social structure of Bretonnia. "The notion that all people are basically equal seems laughable to most Bretonnians." [27]

But it would also come from the realization that the priests of Bretonnia have far less power than their colleagues in the rest of the Old World. Whereas the Imperial cults have numerous sects, congregations and templar orders dedicated to them, the Unified Church by comparison has to do with a few handouts. While the traditional creeds of the Empire complain about the influence of the Cult of Sigmar, the people of the Church have to put up with a mysterious Goddess with supreme power that is in fact restricted to the nobility. Worse, every priest has to dedicate prayers to this Lady at times, with requests from the highest lord to the lowest farmer, completely disregarding the faith of the preacher in question. It's no wonder that the clergy would resent the nobility for what is has done to this country, and seek every possible advantage to at least maintain their current status, and hope for better times.

The Grail Knights and Damsels would treat the Church with respect, but also with the easy confidence of their own absolute authority. They would consider themselves above the followers of the Old World Gods, and considering their martial and magical prowess it can be argued they are correct in this belief. The champions of the Lady would most likely help out the Church if they can, if only for the fact that the priesthoods deal with the peasantry so the champions don't have to. As long as the clergy don't get airs above their station, they are happy to help out.

The Unified Church of Bretonnia to...women

While that just about covers

all the social classes in Bretonnia, there's one more demographic for us to consider here. Namely the very important divide of genders in the land of chivalry. To women in the land of chivalry the Church would be a literal godsend. For the loyal wife or mother, the institution provides healing for both the spirit and the body when necessary, and also nursemaids and tutors for the education and attendance of her family. For the God-fearing woman, the Church is there to fulfil their religious needs, to answer their questions about the trials and tribulations of life. It also provides a chance for women to devote themselves fully to their God(s), either as nuns or fully ordained priestesses. Ambitious women on the other hand can use the Church to attain ranks of some importance, rather than the role of housewife or mother. They can use their position in the Church, and their divine authority, to pull away from the male chauvinism prevalent in the kingdom. Even if they don't attain a leadership position, they can still (proclaim to) call upon the power of their deity, which is sure to impress some men. Now that I think about it, ambitious women in the Church might be more common than you would think in Bretonnia. The popularity and power of the Damsels of the Lady could easily cause feelings of resentment and envy among the fairer sex, especially when you think of all the laws and courtesies the Damsels can ignore. "An old and unenforced law within Bretonnia stated that ladies must ride side-saddle on the occasion that they ride at all, and, even had it not been the law, no noble woman would dream of riding like a man, for one who did so would be deemed a harlot. However, the Damsels of the Lady existed outside traditional laws and values, and there was not a man in all of Bretonnia, not even the King, who would dare to invoke their ire by reproaching one of them." [28]

By devoting themselves to the Gods, a career woman can at least gain a small measure of respect and influence in the patriarchal society of Bretonnia.

The Church would handle their female worshippers with care. This is partly because Bretonnian men feel the need to "be polite to women at all times" [29], but also because the Church can't afford to be picky with their followers. Besides, the noble ladies are in no position to ask the Lady of the Lake for personal favours; it's the men who can fight in the Lady's name and become one of the Grail Knights. By involving themselves with the Church the female nobility can at least pretend they have some control over their lives and that of their family and friends. They could always turn to the monastic orders of the Grail, but monks and nuns cannot intercede on their behalf. The Lady only listens to her Damsels and the prayers of the knights of Bretonnia. This leaves the Unified Church as the only recourse to the women of Bretonnia, perhaps most notably the wives and daughters of the rulers of the kingdom. The churchmen would be stupid to ignore or offend such an opportunity to gain followers of influence. Women who wish to join the Church would also find the clergy welcoming them, and not only to fill their ranks. The gender divide runs deep in Bretonnia, and the priesthoods would find women ideal for the cooking and cleaning tasks. Career women would have to work harder than men to move up the ranks in the Church, but they would still manage through. At the risk of beating a dead horse, the Church could use all the help they can get. Keeping that and the Bretonnian attitudes to treating women in mind, I believe that nuns and priestesses would have more luck collecting alms and appealing to the better nature of nobility and peasantry alike than their male counterparts.

Most, if not all Bretonnians would treat priestesses with respect, both because of the aforementioned courtesies to the fairer sex and their status as a devotee of the Gods. If there is a priest present as well they would defer to him, Bretonnia being a near absolute patriarchy and all. Otherwise however a priestess can be in charge of religious matters, which for most women would be a novel opportunity, and reason enough for taking the cloth.

Nearing the finish line

I think I'm done here with mapping out a potential history and culture for the priesthoods of the Old World Gods in Bretonnia. Nevertheless there's a fifth part to this series, for while I like to think I've created a interesting background backed up with compelling reasoning and logical conclusions, I do want to make sure that it is comprehensible and give a few examples of what can be done with this grand speculation of mine. The next part is a Gazetteer of the Unified Church of Bretonnia, where I'll flesh out the institution as well as the individual cults.

[1] Knights of the Grail (Black Industries, 2006), page 38

[2] Knights of the Grail, page 39

[3] Warhammer Armies: Bretonnia (Games Workshop, 2003), page 47

[4] Knights of the Grail, page 38

[5] The Adventures of Florin & Lorenzo (Black Library, Robert Earl, 2009), page 619

[6] Tome of Salvation (Black Industries, 2007), page 28

[7] Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay (Black Industries, 2005), page 224

[8] Knights of the Grail, page 13

[9] The Adventures of Florin & Lorenzo

[10] Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay (2005), page 224

[11] Tome of Salvation, page 160

[12] Knights of the Grail, page 38 & 40

[13] Knights of the Grail, page 33

[14] Tome of Salvation , page 52

[15] Tome of Salvation, page 192 & 193

[16] Tome of Salvation, page 205-207

[17] Warhammer Armies: Bretonnia (Games Workshop, 1996), page 51

[18] Barony of the Damned (Black Industries, 2006), page 42

[19] Knights of the Grail, page 11 & 103

[20] Guardians of the Forest  
(Black Library, Graham McNeill, 2005), page 24

[21] Knights of the Grail, page 30

[22] Knights of the Grail, page 27 & 100

[23] Realm of the Ice Queen  
(Black Industries, 2007), page 65

[24] Tome of Salvation, page 49

[25] Knights of the Grail, page 28

[26] Knights of the Grail, page 50

[27] Knights of the Grail, page 11

[28] Knights of Bretonnia (Black  
Library, Anthony Reynolds, 2011), page 164 & 165

[29] Knights of the Grail, page  
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