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Description: *Sermōnēs* (Latin for ‘ways of speaking’) is an alternate history area influence game for 2–5 players in which you play as a regional dialect of Latin (a *sermō plēbēius*) that is destined to become a standardized Romance language. As you spread across the declining Roman Empire and its evolving medieval remains, you will be challenged and changed by encounters with other dialects, pivotal historical events, and unfamiliar languages and cultures. Your success depends on cultivating linguistic innovations to help you develop into a robust language with its own distinctive history and rich literary tradition. (*Note: some liberties have been taken with the geographic, historical, and linguistic details to facilitate gameplay and to contribute to the sense of constructing an alternate history.*)

The basic motivation for this game grew out of discussions from a “joyless critique” boardgaming session in August 2025 with Bronwyn Bjorkman, Gretchen McCulloch, and Sarah Shulist, where we played and evaluated various kinds of boardgames focused on language or linguistics. A lot of gameplay ideas came from a follow-up lunch with Sarah.

Overview: You earn victory points for completing various goals, such as protecting minority dialects, expanding your linguistic territory, cultivating cultural relationships, and leaving traces of your dialect in other languages. Working towards these goals requires managing your *linguistic vitality* (represented by *vitality cubes* on the map) and the types of linguistic practices in which you have *influence*: everyday conversation (represented by *population influence tokens*), scholarly pursuits (*knowledge*), political speech and law (*authority*), and religious expression (*faith*). Along the way toward standardization, you can combine these different types of influence to guide your dialect along different paths in four cultural *domains* of linguistic significance: *Literacy* (which combines population and knowledge), *Academy* (knowledge and authority), *Doctrine* (authority and faith), and *Piety* (faith and population). You also earn victory points for achieving milestones in your progress towards standardization and for your total influence at the end of the game.

The game is played in rounds, with each player getting one turn per round. On a player’s turn, they have five *action points* to spend on various actions. Each action has two versions: a minor lower-cost version with a small effect and a major higher-cost version with a bigger effect. The seven basic action types are:

Migration (move your own vitality)

Revitalization (increase your own vitality)

Expulsion (remove vitality)

Inspiration (gain a new goal)

Entrenchment (gain influence)

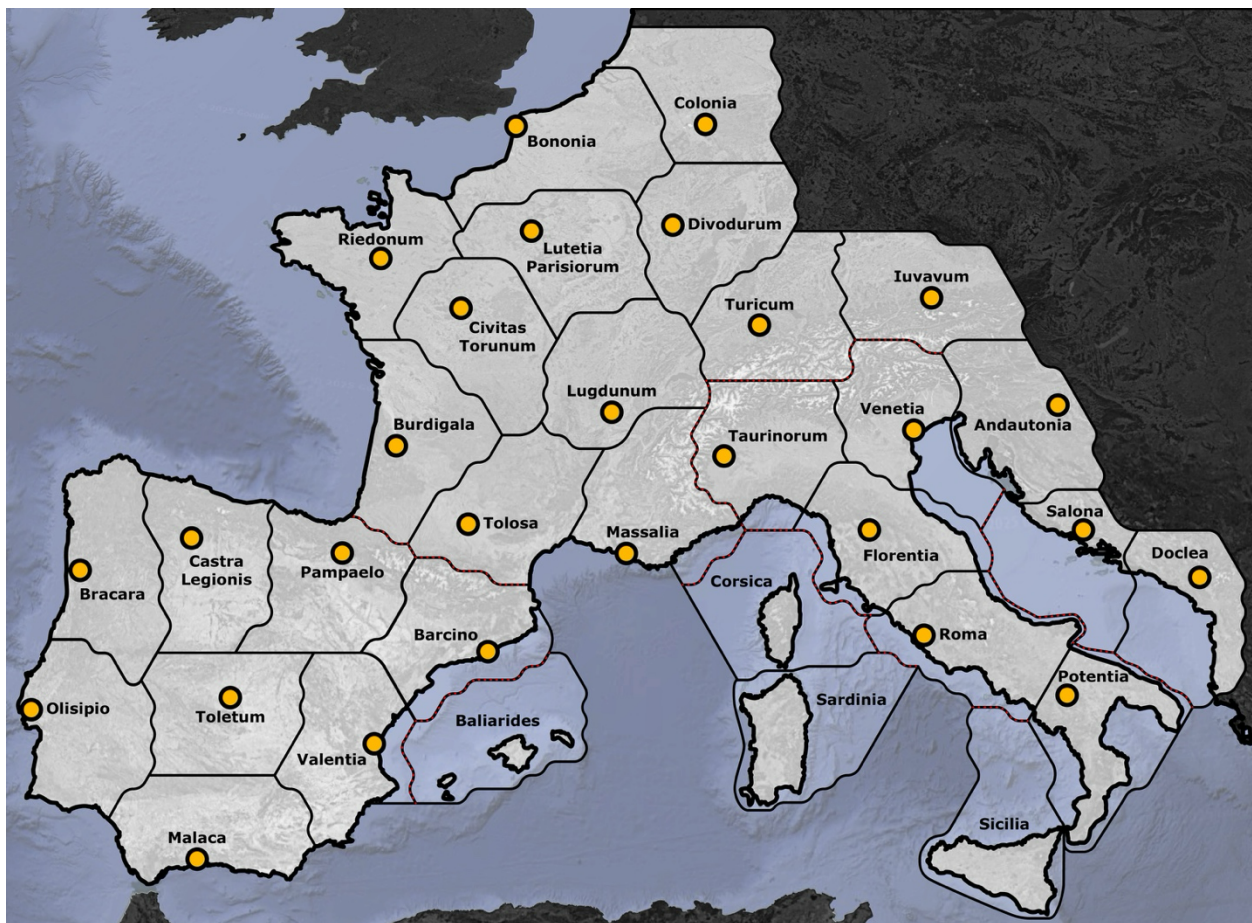
Investment (spend influence to advance towards standardization)

Engagement (make contact with a non-Italic language)

After completing their actions, the player must then advance one space on their primary domain standardization track (the one they are furthest along on), earning any milestone benefit as relevant. In case of ties for the primary track, the player chooses between the tied tracks. This advancement is mandatory and occurs even if the player already advanced that turn on this or any domain standardization track for other reasons. This mandatory movement represents the dialect's inevitable march towards standardization and acts a built-in timer for the game. Note that once a player has achieved the Standardization milestone on any domain track, they no longer undergo this forced movement, but they may optionally advance on any other track. Each player's turn ends with the resolution of an event inspired by history, which can affect the vitality, influence, or standardization progress of the dialects or bring them into contact with other languages. The game ends when every dialect has achieved Standardization, and the winning dialect is the one that has earned the most victory points from their goals, influence, vitality, and milestones.

1. SETUP

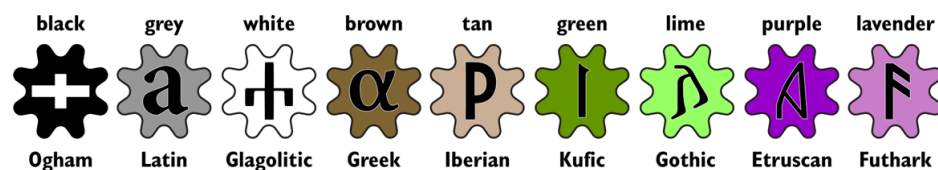
1.1. Gameboard. Gameplay primarily takes place within the Italic area, the lightened portion of Europe on the main gameboard, which corresponds to the approximate extent of the Western Roman Empire before its collapse.



The Italic area is divided into 32 regions, labelled with Latin names for cities and islands that held importance at some point during or after the Roman Empire. City locations are given for identification purposes only and have no effect on gameplay. Region boundaries are designed to create roughly equal-sized regions that touch (or do not touch) for gameplay purposes and do not necessarily correspond to actual historical or modern boundaries.

1.2. Non-Italic languages. Non-Italic languages are languages that played a prominent role in the linguistic history of Europe but are not closely related to Latin (which is from the Romance branch of the Indo-European family). These languages are either from a different branch of the Indo-European family (such as Germanic and Celtic) or from a completely different language family (such as Vasconic and Afro-Asiatic). The Italic dialects and non-Italic languages are collectively called language varieties.

(Fully automated in the online prototype.) Shuffle the non-Italic language deck and reveal nine of the cards. These will be the active non-Italic languages for the game, which are governed by automated game mechanics. The remaining non-Italic language cards will not be used and can be put back in the box. Place each card near the gameboard. Assign a colour to each language by placing the non-Italic vitality disks of the chosen colour on the language's card to form their vitality supply. *[Desired physical design: For ease of identification, each colour is also marked with a distinct glyph from a different writing system (as shown in the image below). When selecting colours to represent the non-Italic languages, you may wish to match writing systems and languages for thematic purposes (Ogham for Brittonic, Glagolitic for Slavonic, etc.), but it is not necessary (and not always possible).]*



Ideally, try to select more distinct colours for languages that end up near each other (for example, do not use lavender for Slavonic if you use purple for Thracian). This will help players be able to better tell the languages apart. Like players' vitality cubes, the non-Italic vitality disks represent the linguistic vitality of the corresponding language. Any reference to vitality pieces includes both player cubes and non-Italic disks. Large vitality pieces are equivalent to 5 small vitality pieces.

There are two kinds of non-Italic languages, internal and external. The internal languages are those which have home regions within the borders of the Italic area at the start of the game: Tartessian in Olisipio, Lusitanian in Bracara, Gaulish in Lutetia Parisiorum, Etruscan in Florentia, Aquitanian in Burdigala, Noric in Iuvavum, and Illyrian in Doclea. Home regions are special fixed regions where certain language varieties, including Italic dialects, begin the game. For each active internal non-Italic language, place 2 vitality from their supply into their home region. These home regions count as occupied regions, which has an impact on certain aspects of gameplay. The external languages are those which come from outside the Italic area and may eventually enter by occupying different border regions later in the game: Brittonic, Frankish, Slavonic, Thracian, Koine, Vandalic, and Maghrebi. The external non-Italic languages do not start with any vitality in the Italic area.

***Possible change:** Internal languages do not start on the board either. This allows players to select any regions as their starting regions. This also simplifies region bonus tile calculation (§1.3).*

1.3. Region bonus tiles. (Fully automated in the online prototype.) Calculate how many total region bonus tiles are needed, which is 32 (the total number of regions) minus the number of active internal non-Italic languages (because their home regions do not get region bonuses). For example, if there are five active internal non-Italic languages, then $32 - 5 = 27$ region bonus tiles will be needed, while if there are three active internal non-Italic languages, then $32 - 3 = 29$ region bonus tiles will be needed.

Take the Emporium, University, Vaticanum, and Caesereum region bonus tiles, plus the two Farms, two Schools, two Boroughs, and two Chapels, plus one City and one Monastery, plus one additional City and Monastery per player. Select enough Ruins tiles to fill out the needed number. For example, for a 4-player game with five active internal non-Italic languages (requiring 27 bonus tiles), take the Emporium, University, Vaticanum, Caesereum, Farms, Schools, Boroughs, and Chapels, plus five Cities, five Monasteries, and five Ruins tiles for a total of 27 tiles. The remaining Ruins region bonus tiles will not be used and can be put back in the box. The number of Ruins tiles needed for each possible combination of number of players and number of internal non-Italic languages are given in the following chart.

		# of players			
		2	3	4	5
# of Ruins tiles needed for each possible # of internal non-Italic languages	2	12	10	8	6
	3	11	9	7	5
	4	10	8	6	4
	5	9	7	5	3
	6	8	6	4	2
	7	7	5	3	1

Mix the region bonus tiles together and put them face down on the board randomly, one per unoccupied region (i.e. every region except where the active internal non-Italic languages are). Then flip all of the region bonus tiles face up. Bonus tiles are collected when the first player occupies the region by placing two or more vitality cubes there, and they immediately receive the corresponding bonus in the form of influence tokens. Note that non-Italic languages do not receive region bonus tiles, and if they occupy a region with a region bonus tile (e.g. by a Language Contact event), the region bonus tile is removed from the game. The bonuses for each type of tile are:

Emporium: 3 population and 3 knowledge (represents a vibrant trade city)

University: 3 knowledge and 3 authority (represents a notable university)

Vaticanum: 3 authority and 3 faith (represents the central seat of religious power)

Caesareum: 3 faith and 3 population (represents a Roman temple that was repurposed as a church in medieval times)

City: 2 population or 2 authority (player's choice) plus 2 influence tokens of any combination of types (e.g. a player could choose 3 population + 1 faith, or they could choose 2 authority + 1 knowledge + 1 population, or 4 authority, etc.)

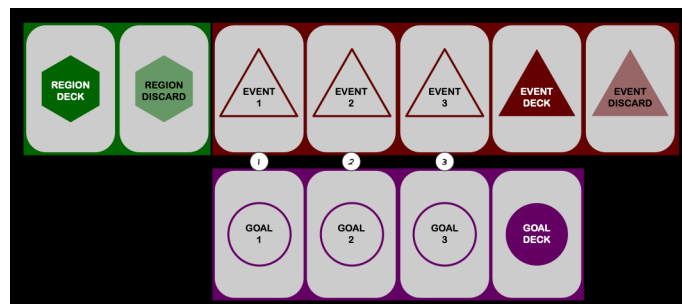
Monastery: 2 knowledge or 2 faith (player's choice) plus 2 influence tokens of any combination of types (similar to City)

Farm: 2 population
School: 2 knowledge
Borough: 2 authority
Chapel: 2 faith
Ruins: no bonus

***Possible advanced variant:** Keep the region bonus tiles face down until a player occupies the region.*

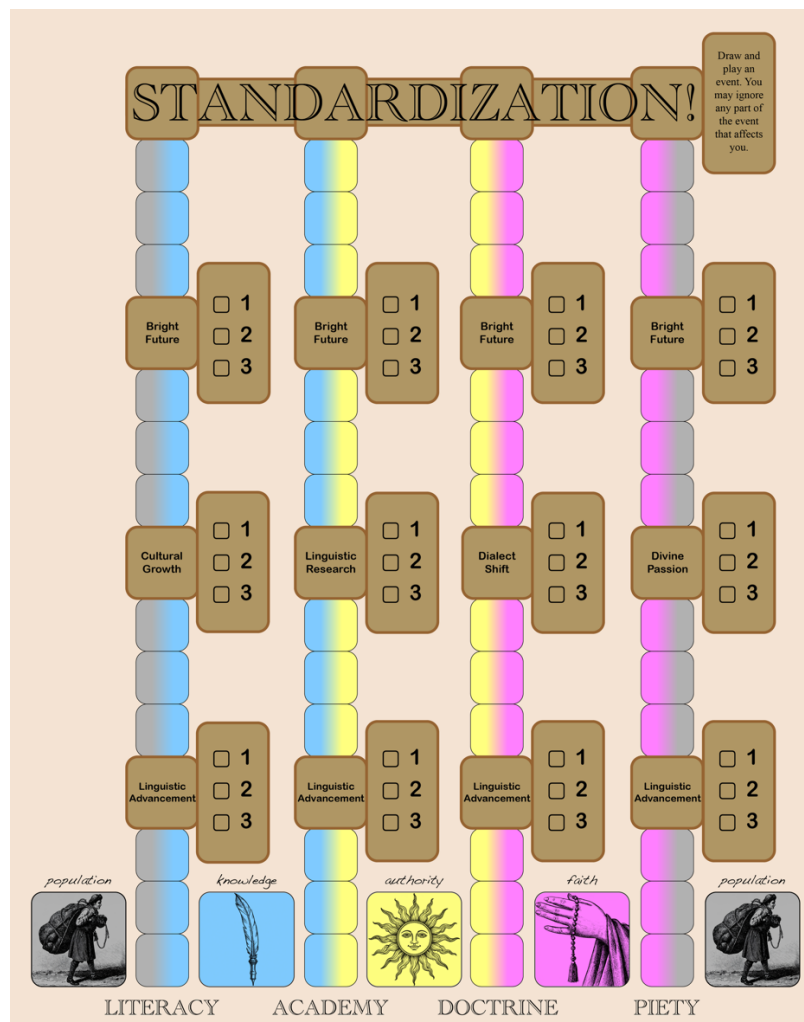
1.4. Events, goals, region deck, and milestones. (Fully automated in the online prototype.) A smaller secondary gameboard has three areas for cards. Shuffle the region deck and put it face-down into the region deck space of the green region area. Shuffle the event deck, put three event cards face-up into the first three event spaces of the red event area, and place the rest of the deck face-down into the event deck space. Shuffle the six identity goals from the goal deck (Adriatic Identity, Gallic Identity, Iberian Identity, Alpine Identity, Pyrenean Identity, and Tyrrhenian Identity) and deal one face-down to each player. Shuffle the remaining non-identity goals and deal two face-down to each player. These are secret goals that should remain hidden from the other players until the end of the game. Shuffle all remaining goals (identity and non-identity), put three goal cards face-up into the first three spaces of the purple goal area, and place the rest of the deck face down into the goal deck space.

***Possible change:** Remove 2 goals from the shuffled deck before the game starts, to give some mystery when there is only one goal left in the deck. Could be a good way to allow adding for many more goals, by adjusting the number of goals that get left out.* (Available as an advanced option in the online prototype.)



Stack the milestone benefit tokens for the first three milestones of each track face down in the spaces next to their corresponding milestones on the standardization track on the other secondary gameboard. For each stack, the token marked 1 should be on top, and the token marked 3 should be on the bottom. Note that each of the four domain standardization tracks (Literacy, Academy, Doctrine, and Faith) have separate milestone benefit tokens for the first three milestones. The Standardization milestone has only a single milestone token shared by all tracks, and it remains face up throughout the game.

Possible change: Domains do not have different milestone benefits. Maybe just a flat 5/3/1 VP structure for each (essentially, Linguistic Advancement for all). (This is the current implementation in the online prototype and seems to work well.)



1.5. Starting dialect regions. Players take on the role of an *Italic dialect*, a local dialect of Latin destined to eventually become a standardized Romance language within the alternate history of the game. The Italic dialects begin the game being spoken in a few regions of the Italic area. Randomly decide starting turn order, then the first player selects a player colour and places their *home region tower* in an unoccupied region, claiming it as their home region. They also place five vitality cubes of the matching colour to occupy the region, and then they remove the region bonus tile from their region and receive the corresponding bonus on the tile. (Available regions are highlighted in the online prototype.)



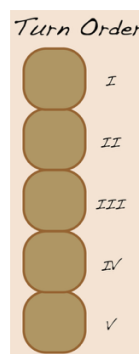
Desired physical design of vitality cubes: These could have animal symbols to help further distinguish them, with animals that correspond roughly to animals identified with countries/areas: bull for Spain, rooster for France, ibex for Switzerland, wolf for Italy, and lynx for the Balkans.



The player then places two vitality cubes in a second unoccupied region that is adjacent to their home region, removes the region bonus tile from that region, and receives the corresponding bonus on the tile. Once region bonus tiles have been collected, they will not be used again and can be put back in the box.

Possible advanced variant: Players keep the region bonus tiles they collect in their player area and do not receive the bonus immediately. Instead, they may cash in any of their bonus tiles as part of their actions at any point in the game to receive the bonus, with a cost of 0 APs. As motivation for holding on to bonus tiles rather than cashing them in immediately, players also earn 1 VP for each milestone they have achieved on their primary domain track at the time they cash in the bonus tile. At the end of the game, players are given one last chance, in turn order, to cash in any remaining bonus tiles for full benefit. Aside from the VP bonus, there may be strategic reasons for waiting to cash in bonus tiles until later in the game, such as collecting influence tokens of a particular type to satisfy a goal or avoiding losing influence tokens to upcoming events.

When their turn is complete, the first player places one of their player disks on the turn order track in the first position and one of their player disks on each of the starting positions for domain standardization tracks.



Then each player, in turn order, completes the same set of actions: select a player colour, select an unoccupied region as their home region, place their home region tower and five vitality cubes in their home region, collect the region bonus, place two vitality cubes in a second unoccupied region adjacent to their home region, collect the region bonus, place a player disk on the turn order track in the next available position, and place player disks in the starting positions of the four domain standardization tracks.

Once all players have selected their two starting regions, a new round starts. Shift the turn order track. Move the current first player's disk into the last position, and shift all other player disks up, in turn order, by one position. This shifting is done after every round in the game, during

both the setup phase and regular gameplay. This means that the first player gets to select their two starting regions first, but then they will select their third region last. Note that in a two-player game, the nature of turn order shifting effectively results in each player taking two turns in a row after the first player has gone: A-B-B-A-A-B-B-A-A, etc. The following is an example of how turn order shifts for four players with each round.

Setup phase (select 2 regions): A-B-C-D
 Setup phase (select 3rd region): B-C-D-A
 Round 1 of regular gameplay: C-D-A-B
 Round 2 of regular gameplay: D-A-B-C
 Round 3 of regular gameplay: A-B-C-D (same order as beginning of setup phase)

Each player, in the new turn order, places two vitality cubes to occupy an additional starting region from any unoccupied region that is adjacent to one of the regions they already occupy. After placing their pieces, the player immediately receives the corresponding bonus on the region bonus tile in the region and puts the tile back in the box.

In the rare scenario where there are no empty unoccupied regions for a player to occupy during setup, they may instead occupy a region already occupied by another player (but they cannot select a region occupied by a non-Italic language). This region must still be adjacent to a region they already occupy. Note that selecting a previously occupied region will result in no region bonus, so players are encouraged to select home regions that are far enough apart from each other that they will have multiple paths for occupying starting regions.

Repeat this turn order shift and dialect expansion as needed so that by the end of the setup phase, every player occupies the number of total regions listed in the table below (for example, with four and five players, there will be only one additional round of dialect expansion after the initial selection of two regions, giving each player three total starting regions). Their remaining vitality cubes stay off the board in their player area to form their vitality supply.

	# of players			
	2	3	4	5
total # of starting regions per player, including home region	6	4	3	3

2. GAMEPLAY DETAILS

Many aspects of gameplay depend on the vitality of a language variety in a region. The overall pattern of vitality in a region determines the region's linguistic landscape, which can be thought of as a combination of both the diversity of the various individual language varieties used by the residents of the region and the linguistic composition of an evolving ambient hybrid variety used collectively across the region. Players have 40 total vitality, and non-Italic languages have a 20 total vitality. There is no way to earn more. If some game action requires placing more vitality than is available, players place as much as they can, making choices in turn order. Non-Italic languages make no choices, so if more vitality is required than is available, place as much as is available only in their home region or the target region but nowhere else. If there are two or more equal non-home region targets, they would get no vitality if there is not enough for all.

If a language variety has one or more vitality pieces in a region, the variety occupies that region (note that the home region tower is not a vitality piece, so if a dialect has no vitality in its home region, it does not occupy the region). There is no limit to how many language varieties can occupy the same region.

If a language variety has exactly one vitality piece in a region, the variety is a remnant in that region, which means that it is no longer actively used there, though it has left traces in the region's linguistic landscape in the form of placenames, loanwords, etc. If a language variety has at least two vitality pieces in a region, the variety is instead robust in that region, which means it actively contributes to the region's linguistic landscape. Language varieties have a limited number of vitality pieces, but otherwise, there is no limit to how many vitality pieces a variety can have in the same region or across regions.

If a language variety is robust in a region and has the greatest vitality in the region, the variety controls that region, which means it is the dominant contributor to the region's linguistic landscape. Note that a remnant cannot control a region. If two or more language varieties are tied for greatest robust vitality, then they share control, and all of them count as controllers. A region can be controlled by any combination of varieties (Italic and/or non-Italic), and there is no limit to the number of controllers a region may have. If a language variety is robust in a region but does not control it, the variety is instead a minority variety.

STEP #1: Shift turn order. Each round begins with a turn order shift (as described for setup in Section 1.4). If players ever need to make independent decisions at the same time (for example, discarding an influence token of their choice due to an event), these decisions are made in the current turn order, beginning with the first player (regardless of which player's turn it is).

STEP #2: Player turns. In the current turn order, each player performs Steps #2a–c before passing the turn to the next player on the turn order track.

STEP #2a: Actions. A player may spend up to 5 action points (APs) to perform any combination of actions before continuing to Step #2b. A player may choose to use fewer than 5 APs, but there is usually no reason to do so. A player may perform both the Minor and Major version of an action (as described below), they may repeat any actions, and they may perform actions in any order. For example, a player could perform Minor Migration (1 AP), Minor Entrenchment (2 APs), Minor Revitalization (1 AP), and then Minor Migration again (1 AP).

Migration allows you to move your own vitality cubes from one region to another.

Minor Migration (1 AP): Move two of your vitality cubes from any single region where you have robust presence to any single adjacent region that is empty or controlled only by you. If there is a region bonus tile in the target region, you gain the bonus and discard the tile. Minor Migration cannot leave a remnant in the source region and cannot eliminate all traces of your dialect from the source region. That is, you are only allowed to use Minor Migration to migrate from a region if you have four or more vitality cubes in that region.

Major Migration (2 APs): Move two of your vitality cubes from any single region where you have robust presence to any single adjacent region that is empty or controlled only by Italic dialects. If even a single non-Italic language controls the region, you must use Major Engagement instead. If there is a region bonus tile in the target

region, you gain the bonus and discard the tile. Major Migration can leave a remnant in the source region and can even eliminate all traces of your dialect from the source region. That is, you are allowed to use Major Migration to migrate from a region even if you only have two or three vitality cubes in that region.

Revitalization allows you to place vitality cubes from your supply into a region on the board. If your vitality supply is empty, you cannot use these actions.

Minor Revitalization (1 AP): Place one vitality cube into any region you occupy.

Major Revitalization (2 APs). Place three vitality cubes into any region you occupy or into your home region, whether you occupy it or not. If you have fewer than three vitality in your supply, you must place as much as you have available.

Expulsion allows you to remove vitality pieces from any language varieties, including your own. Expulsion cannot be used to remove a remnant, but it can be used to create a remnant by reducing vitality from two to one. Expelled vitality is returned to its owner's vitality supply.

Minor Expulsion (2 APs): Remove any one vitality from your home region or from any region adjacent to it, as long as you control the region the vitality is removed from.

Major Expulsion (3 APs): Remove any two vitality from any regions you control. These may be from different language varieties and/or different regions.

Inspiration allows you to take a new goal card from the goal area. Goals are limited, so if there are no goals in the goal deck, Minor Inspiration cannot be performed, and if there are no goals in the goal area at all, Major Inspiration cannot be performed.

Minor Inspiration (2 APs): Draw a face down goal from the goal deck as an additional secret goal in your player area. This goal should remain hidden from the other players until the end of the game.

Major Inspiration (3 APs): Take one face-up goal as an additional visible goal in your player area. Shift any remaining goals to fill the slots of the goal area in order. If the goal deck still has cards, draw a new goal face up from the goal deck to fill the third empty slot. If the goal deck is empty, then leave the lowest goal slot empty.

***Possible change:** When taking a goal with Major Inspiration, also draw a goal from the goal deck. Secretly pick one of these to keep face down in your player area and shuffle the other back into the goal deck. This means that all goals will be kept secret!*

***Possible change to make goals harder to get:** Minor Inspiration allows you to draw a faceup goal or one from the deck, then choose from among the goals you now have and put one on the bottom of the deck. Major Inspiration allows you to draw two total (from faceup and/or from the deck and put one of your total goals on the bottom of the deck). This means goals are always hidden and there will always be at least one unused goal at the end of the game.*

***Possible advanced variant:** Major Inspiration has different costs based on position in the goal area. The first position costs 3 APs, the second costs 4 APs, and the third costs 5 APs. This means that less desirable goals will generally get cheaper as they are passed over and shift up the goal area.*

Entrenchment allows you to gain influence tokens from the game supply. There is no limit to the amount of influence a player can have, so if the game supply of physical influence tokens runs out, use some other method of keeping track of the extra influence (coins, dice, etc.). Return to using physical influence tokens as they get discarded to the game supply later in the game.

Minor Entrenchment (2 APs): Gain two influence tokens of any single type you already have.

Major Entrenchment (3 APs): Gain four influence tokens of any single type, whether you already have that type or not.

Investment allows you to discard influence tokens to progress on a domain standardization track. Discarded influence tokens are returned to the game supply or given to other players as needed if they gained influence when the game supply was empty.

Minor Investment (2 AP): Discard two influence tokens to advance one space on the corresponding domain standardization track. For example, you may discard one population token and one knowledge token to advance one space on the Literacy track. If you achieve a milestone, you receive the appropriate milestone benefit.

Major Investment (3 APs): Discard one influence token to advance one space on either of the two corresponding domain standardization tracks. For example, you may discard one authority to advance on either of the Academy or Doctrine tracks. If you achieve a milestone, you receive the appropriate milestone benefit.

Engagement allows you to make contact with a non-Italic language.

Minor Engagement (2 APs): Create a permanent cultural relationship with any one active non-Italic culture. Place an influence piece from that language into your player area as a reminder of this cultural relationship.

Major Engagement (3 APs): Move two cubes from a region where you have robust presence to an adjacent region controlled by a non-Italic language. In order to make this movement, you must have a cultural relationship with this language (it does not matter which other language varieties control the region). This can be achieved by performing Minor Engagement.

***Possible advanced variant:** Actions that rely on moving cubes from one region to an adjacent region cost an additional 1 AP crossing a dotted red border, which represents a major mountain range or significant sea voyage. The affected actions include Minor Migration, Major Migration, and Major Engagement. Red borders do not affect other aspects of the game that refer to adjacency (event cards, goals, etc.). (Available in the online prototype as an advanced option.)*

STEP #2b: Standardization advancement. After a player has finished performing actions, they then advance their player disk one space on their primary domain standardization track. A player's primary domain standardization track is the track that they are the furthest along on of the four tracks. If they are equally far on two or more tracks, the player chooses which domain track they move on. Until a player achieves Standardization, domain advancement is mandatory and occurs even if the player already advanced on any track this turn for other reasons. Once a player has achieved Standardization, they do not undergo this mandatory advancement, but they may still optionally advance on any track in this step.

If the player's disk lands on a milestone, they receive the appropriate milestone benefit. For the first three milestones on a given domain track, players take the top token from the stack and receive the corresponding benefit. The token can then be discarded back to the box, except for Linguistic Advancement, which should be saved for the end of the game. If there are no benefit tokens left, a player achieving that milestone receives no benefit. That is, the first player to achieve a milestone gets the benefit token marked 1, the next two players to achieve the same milestone get the benefit tokens marked 2 and 3 (in that order), and any other players achieving the same milestone get no benefit. The benefits for each milestone are as follows. (In the online prototype, all milestones have the same benefits as Linguistic Advancement. Something like this may become the standard rule instead of having distinct benefits. Maybe these names could be re-used for some events and/or goals.)

Linguistic Advancement is the first milestone for all four tracks. The first player to achieve this milestone in a domain earns 5 VPs. The second and third players to achieve this milestone in the same domain earn 3 VPs and 1 VP, respectively. Players should keep their Linguistic Advancement benefit tokens in their player areas as a reminder at the end of the game. Note that each domain has its own separate Linguistic Advancement. When a player achieves Linguistic Advancement in the Literacy domain, that has no effect on the benefit tokens for the other three domains. Thus, four players could each be the first to achieve Linguistic Advancement, if they do so in different domains. Alternatively, any player could be the first to achieve Linguistic Advancement in more than one domain if they manage to outrace the other players on multiple tracks.

The **second milestone** has different names and benefits for each domain. **Cultural Growth** is the second milestone in the Literacy domain. When achieved, it allows the player to place vitality cubes from their supply into regions where their dialect is already robust (two or more cubes). The first player to achieve Cultural Growth places six vitality cubes (which can be distributed however they wish across any combination of one to six regions). The second and third players to achieve Cultural Growth place three and one vitality cubes, respectively.

Linguistic Research is the second milestone in the Academy domain. When achieved, it allows the player to move their vitality cubes from any combination of source regions to any combination of target regions. Linguistic Research cannot be used to reduce robust vitality in a source region to a remnant (because it cannot wipe out existing speakers). However, Linguistic Research can be used to remove an existing remnant in a source region and/or create a new remnant in a target region (this represents linguistic scholars discovering or debunking linguistic connections). The first player to achieve this milestone can move five vitality cubes, from the same source region or up to five different source regions. The vitality cubes can be moved to any target regions on the map, regardless of who controls them or where they are. The vitality cubes can be moved to the same target region or up to five different target regions. The second and third players to achieve Linguistic Research similarly move two and one vitality cubes, respectively.

Dialect Shift is the second milestone in the Doctrine domain. When achieved, it allows the player to remove vitality cubes from one target region where their own dialect is robust but they are not in control. The vitality cubes must come from the controller of the region, who must be a player (not a non-Italic language) and cannot reduce the controller's dialect to a remnant. The first player to achieve Dialect Shift may remove up to four vitality cubes. The second and third players to achieve Dialect Shift may remove up to two and one vitality cubes, respectively. The player then adds vitality cubes from their supply to the same region, equal in number to the number of vitality cubes they removed from the controller.

Divine Passion is the second milestone in the Piety domain. When achieved, it gives the player APs to immediately perform additional actions. These APs are separate from the 5 APs the player has and cannot be combined with those APs. The first player to achieve Divine Passion gets 4 APs. The second and third players to achieve Divine Passion get 2 APs and 1 AP, respectively.

Bright Future is the third milestone for all four tracks. The first player to achieve this milestone in a domain draws three cards from the goal deck. From the cards drawn, they choose one card to keep as an additional hidden goal and shuffle any remaining drawn cards back into the goal deck. The second and third players draw two and one cards from the goal deck, respectively, and keep one card from those drawn as a hidden goal. In all cases, if there are not enough cards in the goal deck, the player draws as many as they can. If the goal deck is empty, the player instead takes any one face-up card from the goal area as a visible goal and shifts the remaining goals up on the goal track to fill the spots in order. If there are no goal cards in the goal area at all, the player gets no benefit.

Standardization is a special fourth milestone on each track. It has no benefit tokens. Instead, all players receive the same benefit when they achieve Standardization. When a player achieves Standardization, they draw a card from the event deck and reveal it. If the event deck is empty, shuffle the event discard pile to renew the event deck and then draw from the renewed event deck. If the event requires drawing a region card or rolling the language spread die, the player chooses the result instead. If the event would cause them to lose vitality or influence, they do not lose anything. Otherwise, the event is resolved as normal (as described in Step #2c). The event card is then discarded. Note that the player will still resolve an event from the event area at the end of their turn as normal.

***Possible change:** Obligatory standardization advancement requires discarding one each of the corresponding influence (one population and one knowledge to advance on the Literacy track). Players must advance on a primary track if possible. If this is not possible due to lack of influence, the player must move backward on all four standardization tracks. Or maybe advancing after each milestone requires having, but not discarding, a certain number of influence.*

STEP #2c: Event resolution. Once a player has completed their actions and advanced on their primary domain standardization track, the card in the first slot of the event area is resolved (as described below) and is then put into the event discard pile. The remaining cards in the event area are shifted up by one slot, and a new event card is drawn and placed face up in the third event slot. If the event deck is empty when an event card is needed to fill the third slot, shuffle the event discard pile to renew the event deck and then fill the third slot from the renewed event deck.

***Possible advanced variant:** Events are always hidden and are drawn directly from the event deck. (Available in the online prototype as an advanced option.)*

Some events require drawing one or more cards from the region deck to determine which regions are targeted by the event. In most cases, if the drawn region card is a **Reprieve**, then the event has no effect, and the Reprieve card and the cards in the region discard pile are all shuffled together back into the region deck. Otherwise, the region shown on the region card is a target region of the event and goes into the region discard pile. Some events require players to discard influence tokens. If a player is forced to discard more tokens than they have, they discard as many as they can.

To resolve the **Virulent Plague** event, draw a region card to determine the target region. Each occupant in the target region and in adjacent regions returns one vitality from each of those regions to their supply, if they have robust vitality in the relevant regions. Occupants with only remnants in a region are not affected in that region. Any player that lost any amount of vitality due to the Virulent Plague event also discards one influence token back to the game supply for each vitality lost, in any combination of influence types of their choice (from what they actually have).

To resolve the **Volcanic Eruption** event, draw a region card to determine the target region. Each occupant in the target region returns two vitality from that region to their supply, if they have robust vitality there. Occupants with only remnants in the target region are not affected. A language variety can be reduced to a remnant, but it cannot lose a remnant, so a language variety with exactly two vitality will only lose one vitality to the Volcanic Eruption event. Any player that lost any amount of vitality due to the Volcanic Eruption event also discards two influence tokens back to the game supply, in any combination of types of their choice (from what they actually have).

To resolve the **Cultural Hub**, **Scientific Discovery**, **Grand Treaty**, or **Religious Reform** events, draw a region card to determine the target region of the event. The controller of the target region gains two influence tokens from the supply of the designated type. The controllers of the regions adjacent to the target region each gain one influence token of the designated type from the supply. If a region has multiple controllers, each controller gains the designated influence tokens. If a player controls multiple relevant regions, they gain all stated influence tokens. For example, if Religious Reform is the event and a player controls the target region and two adjacent regions, they will gain a total of four faith: two from the target region and two each from the two adjacent regions. Any player who did not gain any influence tokens from the event must instead discard one influence token of the designated type.

Cultural Hub: population
Scientific Discovery: knowledge
Grand Treaty: authority
Religious Reform: faith

To resolve the **Social Unrest**, **Scholarly Turn**, **Succession Crisis**, or **Church Schism** events, compare how many influence tokens each player has of the designated type. The player with the most influence tokens of the designated type loses two of those tokens. If there is a tie for most influence tokens of the designated type, then all tied players lose two tokens each. All other players each gain one token of the designated type. Note that if all players are tied, they each lose two tokens, and none of them gain one token.

Social Unrest: population
Scholarly Turn: knowledge
Succession Crisis: authority
Church Schism: faith

To resolve the **Literary Giant**, **Capitulary Education**, **Ordination Council**, or **Scriptural Translation** events, compare how far each player is on the designated domain track. The players that are furthest along may advance one additional space. This advancement is optional and is decided in turn order.

Literary Giant: Literacy
Capitulary Education: Academy
Ordination Council: Doctrine
Scriptural Translation: Piety

To resolve the **Censorship Trials**, **Religious Zealotry**, **Notorious Satire**, or **Secular Curriculum** events, draw a region card to determine the target region. The controllers of the target region must move one space backward on the first designated track, unless they are on a milestone or the bottom of the track, in which case, they do not move. Then, any player that did move backward on the first designated domain track due to this event may choose to advance one space on the second designated domain track (these two tracks have opposing influence costs). This advancement is optional and is decided in turn order:

Censorship Trials: regress on Literacy, advance on Doctrine
Religious Zealotry: regress on Academy, advance on Piety
Notorious Satire: regress on Doctrine, advance on Literacy
Secular Curriculum: regress on Piety, advance on Academy

To resolve the **Uneasy Alliance** and **Remote Priory** events, draw two region cards to determine the target regions. The controllers of each target region gain 1 influence of each of the designated types. If one Reprieve card is drawn, the event is not cancelled, but it affects only one region, but after the event is resolved, the region deck is fully re-shuffled as usual. If two Reprieve cards are drawn, the event is cancelled, and the region deck is fully re-shuffled as usual when a Reprieve card is drawn.

Uneasy Alliance: population and authority
Remote Priory: knowledge and faith

To resolve the **Military Campaign** event, draw two region cards to determine the target regions. The robust occupants of the first region each place two vitality in the second region from their supply. If the first region is empty or contains only remnants, the event has no effect. If any Reprieve cards are drawn, the event is cancelled, and the region deck is fully re-shuffled as usual when a Reprieve card is drawn.

To resolve the **Critical Trade Route** event, draw two region cards to determine the target regions. The current controllers of each region each place two vitality in the other region. This applies to both dialects and non-Italic languages. Note that this placement is done simultaneously and is based on control at the time the event is drawn, so any new vitality from this event does not affect who gets to place vitality. If both regions have no controllers (i.e. they are empty or contain only remnants), the event has no effect. If just one region has controllers, the controllers of that region place two vitality in the other region, but nothing happens in the opposite direction. If any Reprieve cards are drawn, the event is cancelled, and the region deck is fully re-shuffled as usual when a Reprieve card is drawn.

To resolve the **Rapid Urbanization**, **Famed Travelogue**, **Dynastic Patronage**, and **Pastoral Outreach** events, draw three region cards. All robust occupants of all of these regions gain one vitality from their supply in each of those regions where they are robust. Any player that gained any vitality from this event also gains one influence of the specified type per

vitality gained. If any Reprieve cards are drawn, the event resolves for as many regions as were drawn, but after the event is resolved, the region deck is fully re-shuffled as usual when a Reprieve card is drawn.

Rapid Urbanization: population
Famed Travelogue: knowledge
Dynastic Patronage: authority
Pastoral Outreach: faith

To resolve a **Language Contact** event, the three non-Italic languages (as indicated by the colours shown) make contact in the Italic area. Each language makes contact in the order they are listed on the card. For an external non-Italic language, roll the language spread die and use the corresponding region on the language's card as its contact region. For an internal non-Italic language, use its home region as its contact region. First, check the vitality of the language in its contact region. If its vitality is five or less (including zero), add two vitality pieces to the contact region, and the event is complete. Otherwise, if its vitality is greater than five, add one vitality piece to the contact region and two vitality pieces in each region adjacent to the contact region. If a Language Contact event results in the non-Italic language occupying a region containing a region bonus tile, the tile is removed from the game. A region bonus tile can only be earned by a player and only when the player is the first language variety to occupy the region.

STEP #3: Check for Standardization. Once the last player of the round has resolved their event, if all players have achieved Standardization, the game ends and scoring is completed in Step #4. Otherwise, a new round begins with gameplay returning to Step #1.

STEP #4: Game end scoring. Once all players have achieved Standardization and have completed their turns for the final round, each player reveals all of their hidden goals and calculates their final VP totals as the sum of:

- VPs earned from goals
- VPs earned from milestones
- 1 VP for each region they have robust presence in (whether as a minority or controller)
- 1 VP for every ten total influence tokens they have of any combination of types, rounded down (for example, a player would earn 2 VPs for having 27 total influence tokens, regardless of their types)

The player with the most total VPs is the winner, having achieved the most impressive standardization! In the case of VP ties, the tied player with the fewest personal goal cards wins. If the players are still tied, then the tied players share the victory.

***Possible change:** Remove/change Dialectal Expansion and/or Cultural Heritage goals?*

***Possible advanced variant:** Any remaining face up cards in the goal area are global goals, and all players score for them in addition to their personal goals. This adds a further strategic aspect as players have to consider whether to take a goal that they may not personally score well on but which benefits multiple players if left as a global goal.*

Possible advanced variant: If there is still a tie after counting VPs and personal goal cards, ties can be further broken based on total vitality on the board, then total influence tokens, then total regions occupied, then total milestones achieved, and finally, if necessary, current turn order as of the final round.

3. GOAL CARD CLARIFICATIONS

[Maybe add drawbacks to every goal, to punish goal-hoarding?]

Adriatic Identity is worth 1 VP for each region you control from among the following seven regions along the coast of the Adriatic Sea: Potentia, Roma, Florentia, Venetia, Andautonia, Salona, and Doclea.

Gallic Identity is worth 1 VP for each region you control from among the following seven regions in historical Gaul: Colonia, Bononia, Divodurum Mediomatricum, Lutetia Parisiorum, Riedonum, Civitas Turonum, and Lugundum.

Iberian Identity is worth 1 VP for each region you control from among the following seven regions on the Iberian peninsula: Valentia, Toletum, Malaca, Olisipio, Bracara, Castra Legionis, and Balarides.

Alpine Identity is worth 2 VPs for each region you control from among the following four along the Alps: Massalia, Taurinorum, Turicum, and Iuvavum.

Pyrenean Identity is worth 2 VPs for each region you control from among the following four regions along the Pyrenees: Barcino, Pampaelo, Burdigala, and Tolosa.

Tyrrhenian Identity is worth 3 VPs for each region you control from among the following three island regions in the Tyrrhenian Sea: Sicilia, Sardinia, and Corsica.

Masterful Diplomacy is worth 1 VP for each cultural relationship you have with non-Italic languages. These may be any combination of internal and external non-Italic languages.

Enduring Multilingualism is worth 2 VPs for every region you control that has robust presence by three or more total language varieties, including your own. You score for a region regardless of how many total language varieties occupy or control it, as long as there are at least three language varieties with robust presence and you are one of them.

Cultural Heritage is worth 1 VP for every five of your vitality cubes in your home region, rounded down. You score for this goal whether or not you control your home region and regardless of which other language varieties occupy it.

Substrate Influence is worth 1 VP for every region in which your dialect is a robust minority. You score for a region regardless of which other language varieties occupy it, as long as you have robust vitality and do not control it.

Lingering Memories is worth 2 VPs for every region in which your dialect is a remnant. You score for a region regardless of which other language varieties occupy it, as long as you have a remnant.

Dialectal Expansion is worth 10 VPs if you have the largest territory, as measured by number of controlled regions that form a contiguous set. Regions outside the territory do not count toward your total. You score for this goal even if your territory size ties with another territory, as long as that tied size is the largest on the board. Territory size should be calculated for all dialects and languages. Though unlikely, it is possible for a non-Italic language to have the largest territory, in which case, no player can score for this goal!

Focused Canon is worth 5 VPs if you advanced on only one domain standardization track. You must be in the starting position for all three of the other tracks. If you had previously made progress on one track but were forced to move backward due to events, you can still score for this goal as long as you are at the starting position when the game ends.

Boundless Ambition is worth 1 VP for each personal goal card you have. Boundless Ambition only counts personal goals, which are those that are in your player area (whether visible or hidden). This would normally include itself, but if you are playing the advanced variant with global goals, and Boundless Ambition is a global goal, it would not count as one of your personal goals.

Balanced Society is worth 1 VP for each complete set of four different influence tokens you have at the end of the game. This score is in addition to any other VPs earned for influence tokens in other ways, such as the Healthy Citizenry goal and the basic 1 VP per ten influence tokens that every player gets.

Thriving Diaspora is worth 1 VP for each region in which you have robust vitality, except for your home region and regions adjacent to your home region.

Healthy Citizenry, **Intellectual Elite**, **Stable Government**, and **Pilgrimage Site** all score similarly for different influence types, as specified below. They are each worth 5 VPs if you have the most influence tokens of that type among all players (a tie for most still counts as most). This score is in addition to any other VPs earned for influence tokens in other ways, such as the Balanced Society goal and the basic 1 VP per ten influence tokens that every player gets.

Healthy Citizenry: population

Intellectual Elite: knowledge

Stable Government: authority

Pilgrimage Site: faith

Extensive Library, **Renowned University**, **Holy City**, and **Massive Cathedral** all score similarly for different combinations of influence tokens, as specified below. They are each worth 5 VPs for having the specified combination of influence tokens at the end of game. This score is in addition to any other VPs earned for influence tokens in other ways, such as the Balanced Society goal and the basic 1 VP per four influence tokens that every player gets.

Extensive Library: 10+ population and 10+ knowledge
Renowned University: 10+ knowledge and 10+ authority
Holy City: 10+ authority and 10+ faith
Massive Cathedral: 10+ faith and 10+ population

Sponsored Translators and **Prolific Scriptorium** are worth 2 VPs for each milestone you have achieved across the two specified domain tracks.

Sponsored Translators: Literacy and Doctrine
Prolific Scriptorium: Academy and Piety

4. COMPONENT CHECKLIST

- 100 influence tokens (50 x 4 types: grey population, blue knowledge, yellow authority, and magenta faith)
- 100 dialect vitality cubes (15 small + 5 large per colour: blue, teal, amber, red, and pink)
- 25 player disks for marking turn order and standardization progress (5 per colour: blue, teal, amber, red, and pink)
- 5 playmats (blue, teal, amber, red, and pink)
- 5 home region towers (blue, teal, amber, red, and pink)
- 5 action reminder sheets
- 32 region bonus tiles
- 100 victory point tokens (50 x 10 VPs, 20 x 5 VPs, 30 x 1 VP)
- 36 milestone benefit tokens (9 x 4 domains: Literacy, Academy, Doctrine, and Piety)
- 26 goal cards (6 identity + 20 non-identity)
- 35 event cards
- 34 region cards (32 regions + 2 Reprieve)
- 14 non-Italic language cards (7 internal + 7 external)
- 108 non-Italic language vitality disks (10 small + 2 large in 9 colours: black, grey, white, brown, tan, green, mint, purple, and lavender)
- 1 black six-sided language spread die (numbered I, II, III, IV, V, and VI)
- 1 or more gameboards (some might be separate boards):
 - map of Italic area
 - turn order track
 - card area (goal, event, region)
 - domain standardization tracks
- 1 rulebook (this document)

ACTION REMINDER SHEET

Spend 5 APs

Migration (move your own vitality cubes). You must have robust presence in the source region you move from.

Minor (1 AP) Move two of your vitality cubes from the source region to any adjacent region that is unoccupied or controlled only by you. You cannot leave a remnant or completely vacate the source region, so you must start with at least four vitality in the source region.	Major (2 APs) Move two of your vitality cubes from the source region to any adjacent region as long as it unoccupied or controlled only by Italic dialects. If even a single non-Italic language controls the region, you must use Major Engagement instead. You can leave a remnant or even eliminate all of your vitality in the source region.
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Revitalization (add new vitality cubes)

Minor (1 AP) Place one vitality cube into any region you occupy.	Major (2 APs) Place three vitality cubes into any region you occupy or into your home region, whether you control it or not, even if you have no vitality cubes there.
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Expulsion (remove vitality pieces from the board). You cannot remove a remnant, but you can create a remnant. Removed vitality returns to its owner's vitality supply. You may remove your own vitality this way.

Minor (2 APs) Remove any one vitality piece from your home region or from any region adjacent to it, as long as you control the region the piece is moved from.	Major (3 APs) Remove two vitality pieces from any regions you control. These may be from different varieties and/or different regions.
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Inspiration (take a new goal card). Shift and refresh the goal area as needed.

Minor (2 APs) Draw a goal from the goal deck as a secret goal.	Major (3 APs) Take one face-up goal as a visible goal.
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Entrenchment (gain influence)

Minor (2 APs) Gain two influence tokens of any single type you already have.	Major (3 APs) Gain four influence tokens of any single type, whether you already have any or not.
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Investment (spend influence)

Minor (2 APs) Discard two influence tokens to advance one space on the corresponding domain standardization track.	Major (3 APs) Discard one influence token to advance one space on either of the two corresponding domain standardization tracks.
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Engagement (make contact with a non-Italic language)

Minor (2 APs) Create a permanent cultural relationship with any one active non-Italic culture. Place one of their vitality pieces in your player area as a reminder.	Major (3 APs) Move two cubes from a region you occupy into an adjacent region controlled by a non-Italic language. Requires a cultural relationship with the language, as previously created by prior Minor Engagement.
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REAL WORLD INSPIRATIONS FOR VARIOUS GAME ELEMENTS

to be expanded with explanations/examples

The timeline of the game is approximately AD 400–1500 that is, from just after the split of the Roman Empire (395) to the beginning of the Renaissance, though events outside that range also inspire some game elements.

eruptions of Mount Vesuvius (472, 1139), Mount Etna (812, 1169, 1329, 1381, 1408, 1444), and Ischia (1302)
Odoacer's revolt against Romulus Augustus (476), ending the Western Roman Empire
Clovis I founding of Frankish kingdom (500)
Plague of Justinian (540s), Great Famine (1315–1317), Black Death (mid-1300s)
reforms of Pope Gregory I (590–604)
Battle of Tours (732),
Abbey Library of St. Gall (747), Cluny Abbey library (910), etc.
Carolingian schools, cathedral schools, monastic schools (800+)
Third Council of Tours (813)
Strasbourg Oaths (842)
Treaty of Verdun (843)
Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte (911)
East–West Schism (1054), Great Western Schism (1378–1417)
Universities of Bologna (1st in Europe, c. 1088), Paris, Palencia, Salamanca, etc.
Le Chanson de Roland (11th c.)
Chartres Cathedral (1126), Basilica of Saint-Denis (1135), Notre-Dame de Paris (1163), etc.
Peter Waldo's (1175–1185) translation of the Old Testament and parts of the New Testament into Arpitan (Franco-Provençal, Lyon)
Cantar de mio Cid (12th c.)
Acre Bible (1250–1254)
Toledo School of Translators (12th–13th c.), Castilian texts from the scriptorium of King Alfonso X of Castille (1252–1284)
Guyart des Moulins's *Bible Historiale* (1291–1295)
Rustichello da Pisa's Franco-Venetian travelogue about Marco Polo (c. 1300)
Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* (1321)
peasant/worker revolts (revolt of Cola di Rienzo 1347, Ciompi Revolt 1378, Tuchin revolt 1378–1384, Harelle 1382, Irmandiño revolts 1431–1435 and 1467–1469, Hvar rebellion 1510–1514)
Armagnac–Burgundian Civil War (1407–1435)
Antonio de Nebrija's *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (1492)
Medici family (15th c.)
Garcia de Resende's *Cancioneiro Geral* (1516)
Edict of Villers-Cotterêts (1539)
Emporium: trade cities like Cologne, Quentovic, Bruges, Venice, etc.
Vaticanum: Vatican in Rome
Caesareum: Maison carrée, Temple of Portunus, Temple of Jupiter (Split), etc.
psalter (local translations of psalms)

PLAYTEST NOTES

Typical final scores are 40–80 VPs, which seems fine, so not much tweaking is needed overall. It's nice to have 100 VP as a rare, but theoretically possible, high score.

Early events can be very game-changing, so maybe delay events until after the first milestone has been reached? Events overall add a hefty random element, so reducing that somehow would be nice, though the unpredictability is sort of the point of the chaos of the Middle Ages!

Maybe a few additional functional region cards, like Reprieve. Perhaps *Upheaval: Draw two more region cards until two regions have been drawn*. Apply the event to both regions in order, beginning with the region drawn first. But this makes events even more chaotic, reducing strategy.

Game feels just a bit long, but not oppressively so, about 2–4 hours. Lots of choices but not too complex. Seems like a typical medium-weight Eurogame, somewhere between *El Grande* and *Viticulture*? Not sure how immersive/engaging it is (hard to tell from prototype: online, few graphics, etc.). Strategies seems to settle by midgame.

The current number of goals is about right (they run out after about the 3rd milestone), so need to be cautious about how many new goals there are, but some new goals would be fine.

Maybe add some negative consequences to goals, to avoid goal-hoarding? But this is possible too complex to implement or too unfair for certain goals.

Advancement on other domain tracks is maybe not really rewarded enough, so add more incentive? There is not much motivation if you do not have relevant goals.

There is no real engine-building, because there is not really a predictable production component (mostly just random wins/losses from events). Maybe this is fine? Not all games need engines. But the game feels a bit too linear. Maybe add some cyclicity to it, for example, spending one full set of four different influence to buy an action point? Moving backward on a domain track to buy an action point? But maybe this complicates it too much? Maybe introducing different milestone effects would help?