

The Religious Rituals of the Dúnedain of Gondor

By MICHAEL
R. HICKMAN



en were the *Atani*, the 'Second People, who followed the Elves in Middle-earth. There were many races of Men but the group that is the subject of this article is the Dúnedain of Gondor [the records of Arnor are too few to be able to comment properly but it can be assumed that they were similar]. The Dúnedain were descended from those races who lived with the Elves in Beleriand and to whom the Valar had given a home, free from the cares of Middle-earth, in the island of Elenna at the end of the First Age as reward for their help and sufferings in the struggle against Morgoth.

On Elenna they learnt much from visitors from the West and developed the Númenórean civilisation, which was the highest attained by any race of Men. The records of, and comments on, this civilisation contain the most specific and explicit account of religious ritual and practice of any of the Free Peoples and it is worth summarising them as they form the basis for beliefs and rituals of the Dúnedain of Gondor.¹

There seems to be no or very little Dúnadan ritual at the time of the War of the Ring for Tolkien comments² that Eru Ilúvatar

had at the time of the War of the Ring no worship and no hallowed place. ... the refusal to worship any 'creature', and above all no 'dark lord' or satanic demon, Sauron, or any other, was almost as far as they [the Dúnedain] got. They had (I imagine) no petitionary prayers to God; but preserved the vestige of thanksgiving.

In the same letter he goes on to write that

with the reemergence (sic) of the lineal priest kings (of whom Lúthien the Blessed Elf-Maiden was a foremother) the worship of God would be renewed, and His Name (or title) be again more often heard.

The purpose of this article is to try to work out the kind of rituals that the Dúnedain performed and those that would have been re-established by Aragorn Elessar.³

The method that I shall adopt is that under each section I shall give a summary of Númenórean practice during the first two millenia of the Second Age; relate it to Dúnadan practice during the Third Age explaining the changes, if any, that the Dúnedain made; and then try to reconstruct the ritual re-established by Aragorn-Elessar. It can be assumed safely that the Dúnedain followed Númenórean practice wherever possible. They were an extremely traditional society who looked back naturally to a golden age of high Númenórean culture. In such a society where ideas and forms changed very slowly and where such value was placed upon sheer antiquity, Dúnadan ritual (ritual by its very nature, is conservative), would have followed its Númenórean form as closely as possible.

The role of the Númenórean Monarch⁴ was crucial and I shall deal with the beliefs surrounding them and the rituals they performed in some detail in order to understand the corresponding role of Dúnedain Monarchs and Aragorn-Elessar in particular.



BASIC BELIEF

The Númenóreans were pure monotheists. They worshipped Eru Ilúvatar and rejected any kind of physical representation of their deity. The Dúnedain retained the pure monotheism of their ancestors.

The MONARCH

The Númenóreans were ruled by a line of priest-monarchs (both men and women could become ruler) whose ancestors not only included Men from the Three Houses of the Edain but also Elves from all Three Kindreds and the Maia, Melian. These priest-monarchs were therefore also a sacred line whose ancestry marked them apart from their fellow Númenóreans. In addition their ancestor Elros Tar-Minyatur had been appointed as Monarch by the Valar and so was Monarch by 'Divine Right'. Consequently, the status of the Monarchs of Númenor was as priest-monarch, sacred-monarch, and divine-right ruler. As such they regarded all other rulers outside Valinor, except certain Eldar such as Gil-galad, as their inferiors. Gil-galad seems to have been treated as an equal.⁵

The Dúnedain continued this concept of the status of the Monarch. No one who was not of the line of Elendil, himself of the line of Elros, could be accepted as King. Faramir explained this situation to Frodo when he pointed out that Boromir had asked their father, Denethor, Steward of Gondor,

"How many hundreds of years needs it to make a steward a king, if the king returns not?"

only to receive the reply,

"Few years in other places of less royalty
In Gondor ten thousand years would not suffice."

The only difference, which did not affect the ritual role of the Monarch, was that in Arnor and Gondor only Men could succeed, although Arnor claimed that descent through the female line was permissible to make a King.⁷

The RITUAL FUNCTIONS of the PRIEST-MONARCHS of NÚMENOR

In his or her role as priest-monarch the Númenórean ruler had a number of functions. This priestly role is best understood in five ways:

- (i) as representative of the people to Eru Ilúvatar,
- (ii) as mediator between the people and Eru Ilúvatar,
- (iii) as enabler for Númenor to work in harmony,
- (iv) as repository of lore and wisdom and, as such,
- (v) as teacher of the people.

As the representative of the people to Eru Ilúvatar, the Númenórean Monarch would offer prayers of supplication, praise and thanksgiving to Eru Ilúvatar at the three great festivals.

As mediator between the people and Eru Ilúvatar, the Monarch could call Eru Ilúvatar to act as witness and only he/she could utter the sacred name of Eru Ilúvatar.

As enabler, the Númenórean Monarch may have had a role analogous to that of the Inca or Pharaoh, that by their prayers the fertility of the land and the good harvest of the people would be ensured⁴. After the reign of Tar-Ancaimon (died S.A. 2386),

the offering of the first fruits to Eru was neglected ..."³

but it was not until the rebellion of Ar-Pharazôn that the weather in Númenor grew far worse and events and seasons became disharmonious. It would seem therefore that Númenor was unaffected physically by the cessation of the regular prayer but that a better understanding of the enabling role is seen in giving the Númenóreans quality of life and peace of mind. Although material prosperity continued and increased, the ending of the Royal offering of prayer meant that

the bliss of Westernesse became diminished.¹⁰

As repository of lore several of the early Númenórean Monarchs were held in high esteem and regard. Vardamir, the second King (in theory), was called Nólimon⁴ for this very reason. The fourth King, Tar-Elendil, collected and committed to writing the studies of Vardamir, and was consequently called Parmaitë. Tar-Meneldur who succeeded him took his name from his love of star-lore.

As teacher the early Númenórean Monarchs learned much from the Eldar and passed on such knowledge in addition to encouraging the Eldar to teach their fellow-Númenóreans. Quenya was an important subject in early Númenor, for cultural, historical and liturgical reasons.

The RITUAL FUNCTIONS of the KINGS and STEWARDS of GONDOR

These five roles were continued by the Númenóreans in exile. Only the King of Gondor could go to the hallow on Mount Mindolluin and offer prayers and thanks on behalf of the people. Tolkien comments¹² that the

'hallow' on Mount Mindolluin [was] only approachable by the King, where he had anciently offered thanks and praise on behalf of his people.

Only the King had the authority to call Eru Ilúvatar to witness: even Gandalf in crowning Aragorn-Elessar only invokes the Valar.¹³ However, on one occasion only this authority was exercised by a Ruling Steward. In Unfinished Tales is recorded¹⁴ that Cirion, the Steward of Gondor, and as such representative of the lost line of Elendil, used the Name when making the oath with Eorl. Aragorn, as King Elessar, used it on renewing that oath with Éomer.¹⁵ It was not used between those two occasions, a gap of over 500 years and seems not to be used by the Ruling Stewards earlier.¹⁶

It is very significant that, for all the Rulings Stewards' delegated authority, it was only with the return of the King that Eru Ilúvatar could be worshipped properly and His Name uttered by a rightful priest-king. Tolkien comments¹⁷ that, with the re-establishment

of the lineal priest kings (of whom Lúthien the Blessed Elf-maiden was a foremother) the worship of God would be renewed, and His Name (or title) be again more often heard.

There are many references in The Lord of the Rings to the collections of lore held at Minas Tirith. Both Boromir and Gandalf refer to them at the Council of Elrond,¹⁸ although Boromir does not seem to have read them much and to have relied on his father. Some of this lore was secret as Faramir indicated to Frodo¹⁹ and Denethor seems to have been reluctant to pass on his own knowledge. The collections of ancient wisdom were the responsibility of the Kings and the Ruling Stewards as was teaching the secrets to their heirs as Isildur instructed Meneldil at Amon Anwar.²⁰

The Dúnedain Kings were also teachers in a wider sense. As keepers of the ancient wisdom they taught, or were responsible for ensuring the teaching of, this wisdom to ensure that the exiled Númenóreans remained true to the faith, especially in

the knowledge of the True God.²¹

Faramir told Frodo²² that Gondor had remained free from the 'evil arts' and that the 'Nameless One' had not been named in honour there, or at least there was no record of such actions. This wisdom

remained long in the realm of the sons of Elendil the Fair,

and it still lingered there although it had much declined to Faramir's great regret.

For all Faramir's regret it is a sign of the effectiveness of the long tradition of teaching that the Dúnedain of Gondor had rejected Sauron, that they spoke Sindarin, that Beregon was able to express some of the depth of Númenórean history to Pippin,²³ and that they were willing to continue to resist Sauron in a seemingly impossible war. Equally, it was a sign of the decline of learning that Galadriel and Lothlórien were regarded with fear and that, in the words of Faramir,²⁴

"we esteem a warrior, nonetheless, above men of other crafts."

One other example of the priestly nature of Dúnadan kingship is the ritual of self-coronation. Most monarchs are crowned by priests representing the deity in whose name the monarch reigns. However, as priest-king, a Dúnadan King either received the crown from his father, or else took it from the dead hands of his father in his tomb,⁴⁵ and performed the ritual himself emphasising his peculiar status and the fact that he alone had the authority which derived from the Valar.

The SACRED NATURE of DÚNEDAIN KINGS

The sacred nature of Dúnadan kingship can be seen in many areas, most especially in that of healing. The idea of the king as a healer is extremely ancient, probably coming from our shaman past. The King acting as a healer showed his nature as a sacred or semi-sacred person in whom there resided a greater power than was given to ordinary people. Although there is no record of a Númenórean Monarch acting in this function, the Kings of the Dúnedain certainly did, otherwise loreth could never have said,

"The hands of the king are the hands of a healer."⁴⁶

This healing seems to have been hereditary via the Elf ancestry of the royal line. Aragorn refers⁴⁷ to the fact that the herb athelas had been brought to Middle-earth by the Númenóreans and that the Rangers of the North made use of it, but there is no indication as to whether their particular healing power came from their descent via Lúthien (being such a small community they probably all had a common ancestry in the Royal line) or from their race as Númenóreans.

ARAGORN-ELESSAR as PRIEST-KING

Aragorn-Elessar seems to have re-established all of the priestly and sacred roles of the Dúnedain Kings. In rediscovering the hallow on Mount Mindolluin he would have used it once again as the place for offering the prayers at the three great festivals. He harmonised the whole of society, not only by his wise handling of people and sound judgements, but also by his renewal of ancient rituals such as his coronation which followed the ancient form, even though he surprised many by asking Gandalf to crown him.⁴⁸ The crowning⁴⁹ was carried out in the name of the Valar and with their blessing:

"Now come the days of the King, and may they be blessed while the thrones of the Valar endure!"

After Gandalf had placed the crown on his head Aragorn-Elessar is said to have been

revealed to them now for the first time ... tall as the sea-kings of old ... [standing] above all that were near him ... ancient of days ... in the flower of manhood; ... wisdom sat upon his brow ... strength and healing were in his hands ... a light was about him.

He was no longer Aragorn, the Chieftain of the Dúnedain of Arnor, he was now Elessar, the Elfstone, and Envinyatar, the Renewer.³⁰

He planted the newly-discovered fruit of the White Tree in the Court of the Fountain himself. This was a priestly act of consecration re-establishing his link with Valinor whence came the ancestry of the Tree. It may indicate, although there is no evidence for this, that the King planted the first seeds in order to ensure a good harvest. Almost definitely he would have offered the first-fruits of that harvest.³¹

Aragorn Elessar was already a healer: this power was innate rather than being bestowed at a coronation. He acted out this role on a number of occasions: at Weather-top where he found athelas to help Frodo; after the escape from Moria where again he helped Frodo; and in Minas Tirith where his healing of Merry acted out the ancient belief about the King being the healer. By this last action he was recognised as King, even though incognito. Indeed Faramir's first words on waking from the sleep of the Black Breath,

with the

light of knowledge and love ... in his eyes

are to recognise Aragorn as King,

"My lord, you called me. I come. What does the king command?"³²

These words have a ritual/liturgical ring to them and could just as easily be applied to a deity as to a king, even given the 'feudal' atmosphere of Gondor.

The CALENDAR and the LITURGICAL YEAR

U.I. refers³³ to three great holy days:

Erukyermë: [lit. Prayer to Eru] the start of spring;

Erulaitalë: [lit. Praise of Eru] midsummer; and

Eruhantalë: [lit. Thanksgiving to Eru] the end of autumn.

Each of these was also related to the agricultural calendar:

Erukyermë: sowing, when the King made request [for a good year];

Erulaitalë: growing, when the King led praise; and

Eruhantalë: harvest, when the King gave thanks [for a good harvest and brought the offering of the first fruits].

This indicates, if nothing else did, that the Númenórean economy was based on arable farming, with a Monarch whose ritual presence and invocation helped ensure a successful year. The year began in spring and corresponded with the Calendar of Imladris that I referred to in my article in MALLORN 26. This fact leads to the conclusion that both Calendars were based on Elvish Calendars of the First Age which probably themselves had their origins in the Valinórean ritual cycle. This Númenórean calendar formed the basis of the Dúnedain calendar at the time of the War of the Ring.

There is one apparent contradiction. In LotR it is stated³⁴ that the Númenóreans

adhered to the custom of beginning the year in mid-winter, which had been used by Men of the North-west from whom they were derived in the First Age.

However, in UT it is stated³⁵ that

the King (offered) prayer for the coming year at the Erukyermë in the first days of spring ...

Prayers would not be offered for the 'coming year' if the year was already two months old. However, the contradiction is only apparent. Many peoples have several 'New Year' dates; in our own society we have the calendar year, the financial year, the Christian year, the educational year, etc. All of these have different starting dates. It would seem that the Númenóreans had at least two 'years': the calendar year, of Mannish origin, starting in mid-winter, and the liturgical year, of Elvish origin, starting with the coming of spring.

The Númenórean calendar was continued by the Dúnedain of both Arnor and Gondor and was called Kings' Reckoning (KR). Each year was of 365 days and consisted of ten months of 30 days, and two months, Nárië and Cerië, of 31 days. The three extra days, Yestarë, Loëndë and Mettarë, were holy days (holidays). The Dúnedain made very careful calendrical calculations and by the War of the Ring the Revised Calendar of the Steward, Mardil, was in use. This was known as Stewards' Reckoning (SR). Each month had 30 days with five days outside the months. These five holidays included the three mentioned above together with Tuiléré and Yáviéré. The Dúnedain calendar by the War of the Ring can be reconstructed as follows:

[N.B. I have included both the Quenya and the Sindarin names for the months. Only the Dúnedain used the Sindarin form.]³⁶

structure, together with the names, they took with them into exile and it was, apparently, the first of their calendrical methods to be adopted by other peoples. The weekly calendar, with its ritual associations, at the time of the War of the Ring, is as follows:

MONTH [Q]	MONTH [S]	TRANSLATION	HOLIDAY	FESTIVAL	WEEK DAY	QUENYA	SINDARIN	
			Yestarë First-day					
Narvinyë	Narwain	New-Sun						
Nénimë	Nínui	Wet			The Stars	Elenya	Orgilion	
Súlimë	Gwaeron	Windy			The Sun	Anarya	Oranor	
			Tuiléré Spring-day	Erukyermë	The Moon	Isilya	Orithil	
Víressë	Gwirth	Stirring			The Tree	Aldëa	Orgaladh	
Lótessë	Lothron	Blossomy			The Heavens	Menelya	Ormenel	
Nárië	Nóruí	Sunny			The Sea	Eärenya	Oræaron	
			Loëndë Mid-year	Erulaitalë	The Valar	Valanya	Orbelain	The High Day
Cermië	Cerveth	Cutting						
Úrimë	Urui	Hot						
Yavannië	Ivanneth	Fruit-giving						
			Yáviéré Fruit-day	Eruhantalë				
Narquelië	Narbeleth	Sun-waning						
Hísimë	Hithui	Misty						
Ringarë	Girithron	Cold/Shivering						
			Mettarë Last-day					

As with the Elvish calendars, these names indicate whom and what the Dúnedain revered. The name of the fourth day had been changed from Iwo Trees to One Tree as they referred to the White Tree only which was held in immense respect.

Whilst the names of the Dúnedain months are seasonal and climatic in character the rest of the calendar has strongly ritual implications. The holy days are based on the sun, which is used to indicate the beginning (and ending) of each day. The weekly names are derived from natural objects and powers worthy of veneration. The name given to Osgiliath, 'Citadel of the Stars', and the two great cities which flanked it, called Minas Anor, 'Tower of the [Setting] Sun', and Minas Ithil, 'Tower of the [Rising] Moon' together with Dúnedain devotion to the study of the stars indicates the importance of these celestial bodies in Dúnedain belief. The fact that Faramir mentions the moonset over Gondor when about to obtain Frodo's aid in capturing Gollum demonstrates the importance of such an event.

The conclusion about the religion of the Dúnedain from the calendrical evidence must be that they celebrated a ritual year based on the cycle of the sun with holy days certain significant points in this cycle. Three of these days coincided with the ancient Númenórean festivals related to agriculture. Although there is no direct evidence it would seem that on these holy days there would be feasting and rest from work. The Kings of Gondor visited the hallow at Mount Mindolluin, although this practice was not continued by the Stewards. The last day of the week was also used as a day of rest and as a holy day. The sun and moon had an important part to play in Dúnedain thought and some Dúnedain undoubtedly practised some form of quiet thought or meditation at times of the day when the celestial bodies were most prominent. The principles underlying both KR and SR were incorporated into the calendar established under Aragorn-Elessar.

The CALENDAR under the RESTORED MONARCHY

The fall of Sauron and the re-establishment of the royal line of Elendil brought a new calendar which was known as the New Reckoning (NR). It was

a return to the Kings' Reckoning adapted to fit a spring-beginning as in the Eldarin loa.^{42b}

The year would start on the day that Sauron fell⁴³ and would commemorate both that event and the deeds of the Ring-bearers. This meant that the whole calendar moved five days earlier.⁴⁴ Yestarë was now used to celebrate not only the new year (a calendrical event) but also the fall of Sauron (an historical event), the Erukyermë (a ritual event), and the spring equinox (an astronomical and ritual event), although these last two were possibly celebrated on Mettarë.

The three-day autumn festival of the Elves was incorporated and, added to it, was the last day of Yavannië, 30 Yavannië, which was Frodo's birthday and was celebrated in his honour. This day was called Cormarë, Ringday. On leap-years this festival was doubled. According to one interpretation (see n.44) of Tolkien's calculations

It will be noticed from the above table that it is possible to relate the three holy days of the Númenóreans to three of the holidays of the Dúnedain. In addition the two extra holidays added by the SR corresponded exactly with the two holy days, Tuiléré and Yáviéré, of the Númenóreans that were not specifically stated in the KR; this must have been quite deliberate and a recognition by the Stewards of a long-established practice, of treating these days as holy days. Even in exile the Kings of Gondor

offered praise and thanks on behalf of [their] people,³⁷

and whilst I do not think that the Stewards continued this ritual undoubtedly the days remained and the incidental evidence leads to the conclusion that all five days were used by the Dúnedain as holy days with the Stewards changing the Calendar to take this into account. The other two days, Yestarë and Mettarë, corresponded to the Calendar of Rivendell and were doubtless used for similar purposes of celebration.

It is also significant that the festival days corresponded with the sun, so that they related to the solstices and equinoxes. For example under both KR and SR Yestarë (first-day) coincided with the winter solstice. This would have been extremely appropriate for a people who still remembered the Noldorin traditions relating to the Sun. It seems that the rising sun was greeted with trumpets. This Noldorin ritual may only have occurred at Midsummer³⁸ but Fingolfin greeted both the first moon,³⁹ and the first sun,⁴⁰ with such a ritual. The people of Gondolin met the rising sun with song,⁴¹ although this was a time of festival. I think that such rituals may have been daily activities.

For the Númenóreans the sun signalled the beginning of a new day as she rose out of the eastern sea. There is no indication that the Dúnedain changed this practice and it must be presumed to have continued.

Therefore the Dúnedain calendar had an arithmetic function but also a ritual function and the holidays were indeed 'holy days' with roots deep in Númenórean and Elven history.

The Númenóreans began with a six-day week but added an extra day, called Eärenya (sind. Oræaron) "Sea-Day", making it into a seven-day week. This weekly

Cormarë coincided with the autumn equinox which gave the festival, like Yestarë, more than one function. Unlike KR all the months would have 30 days, which did not allow for all the festival holy days that seemed now to be used.

Compared to SR the major differences were: first, Yestarë and Mettarë were moved to between Súlimë and Víressë; second, Loëndë was moved to its correct arithmetic position between Yavannië and Narquelië; third, the use of the Elvish Enderi meant that there was no place for the two extra days of SR, Tuilérë and Yáviérë, which were respectively absorbed into Yestarë and Loëndë.

This created a 365-day calendar with two holiday periods, 2 days at the turn of the year and 3 days (plus Yavannië 30) in the middle of the year. I think that we have to assume the three great Númenórean festivals would have remained basically unchanged in their seasonal place, even given the five-day move in the calendar, as they corresponded to the ritual surrounding agricultural events rather than to arithmetic calculations. Thus the NR allowed for both the Erukyermë, corresponding to Yestarë (and incorporating Tuilérë), and the Eruhantalë, corresponding to Loëndë (and incorporating Yáviérë); but it did not allow for the Erulaitalë.

Therefore I think that Nárië 30 or Cermië 1 was used as a holy day for celebrating the Erulaitalë; there is no evidence for which day was used for this purpose, but, on one likely calculation (see note 44), Cermië 1 coincides with Midsummer, and therefore I think that this was the more likely day to celebrate the Erulaitalë. It may well be that both Nárië 30 and Cermië 1 were holidays. Although, once again, there is no evidence for this, I think that Narvinyë 1 (or Ringarë 26 or 28) was used to celebrate the winter solstice. A winter holiday is important in all cultures in the northern hemisphere.

The calendar under the restored kingship of Aragorn-Elessar can be reconstructed as follows:

<u>MONTH [Q]</u>	<u>MONTH [S]</u>	<u>TRANSLATION</u>	<u>HOLIDAY</u>	<u>FESTIVAL</u>
			Yestarë (First-Day)	Erukyermë
Víressë	Girithron	Stirring		
Lótessë	Lothron	Blossomy		
Nárië	Nóruí	Sunny		
Cermië	Cerveth	Cutting	Cermië 1	Erulaitalë
Úrimë	Urui	Hot		
Yavannië	Ivanneth	Fruit-giving	Yavannië 30	Cormarë (Ring-Day)
			Enderë 1 (Mid-Day 1)	
			Loëndë (Mid-Year)	Eruhantalë
			Enderë 3 (Mid-day 3)	
Narquelië	Narbeleth	Sun-waning		
Hísimë	Hithui	Misty		
Ringarë	Girithron	Cold/shivering		
Narvinyë	Narwain	New-Sun	Narvinyë 1	
Nénimë	Nínui	Wet		
Súlimë	Gwaeron	windy		
			Mettarë (Last-Day)	

The NR broke with the dual Númenórean new year and united the liturgical year with the calendrical year, basing it on the Elvish liturgical cycle including the Enderi. This is a clear statement both in terms of belief and ritual, and in terms of politics, of the 'Lúthienian'

ancestry of the Monarch. It also emphasises the authority of the priest-king to change the liturgical year. In addition it includes innovation, for never before had the Dúnedain included two festivals, Erukyermë and Cormarë, that celebrated (or included in their celebration) historical events.⁴⁵

The RITUAL PRACTICE on the FESTIVALS

As is stated earlier it can be assumed that Dúadan practice followed Númenórean practice wherever possible. I envisage a King of Gondor visiting the hallow behind Mount Mindolluin on each of the three great festivals; unlike the Meneltarma only the King would go.⁴⁶ On these occasions the King, probably dressed in white, would offer the appropriate prayers. These prayers would have been in Quenya, the ritual and sacred language of Númenor, and may well have been identical to those offered by Númenórean Monarchs. [The wording would have been recorded: Tar-Palantir performed the correct rituals at the Meneltarma⁴⁷ and Amandil, the father of Elendil, was alive at that time, and probably was present. It may be that Elendil himself was present when a young man.]

At the Erukyermë, the prayers of the King would be mainly those of supplication and intercession, asking Eru for good weather for the year, for success in the planting of the seeds and for the growing of the crops and the new-born animals. At the Erulaitalë, the prayers were those of praise to Eru for His nature. At the Eruhantalë, the prayers were those of thanksgiving for the harvest.

The Akallabêth mentions⁴⁸

the offering of the first fruits to Eru...

This ritual may have taken place at the Erulaitalë or at the Eruhantalë. Such an offering is more in keeping with a thanksgiving celebration where the worshipper offers gifts as a token of thanks to the deity, but it would not be unknown at an earlier festival. The gifts offered were almost definitely agricultural, both cereal and fruit; there is no hint at all of animal sacrifice in any Númenórean culture. In Middle-earth the Eruhantalë occurred at the end of the month of Yavannië which was associated with fruit-giving and therefore this would have been most appropriate. In addition as these festivals coincided with particular events related to the sun it is probable that hymns in praise of Anar were sung.

It may be that as the seasons were slightly different in Arnor and Gondor there was a difference in the ceremonial at the various holy days but this is unlikely. Festivals that are transported to different climates manage to retain their original customs remarkably well, like Christmas in the Antipodes, and given the very traditional nature of Dúadan society I have no doubt that the particular climatic conditions did not affect the ritual celebration very much.

After the rituals at the hallow the King would have presided at a ritual feast, where sacred songs would have been sung. Unfortunately we have no record at all of what the content of these hymns might have been. Queen Arwen

sang a song of Valinor⁴⁹

in the Court of the Fountain when Frodo went to say farewell, but that gives us very little indication of the royal rituals.

The development of historically-based festivals means that it can be assumed that on the Erukyermë prayers were not only offered by the Monarch for a good year but also in thanks for the overthrow of Sauron, the restoration of the true line of priest-kings and the courage of the Ring-bearers. It is probable that the hymn of praise to Frodo and Sam sung on the Field of Cormallen⁵⁰ together with the retelling of the tale of

Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom⁵¹

was such a one. On Cormarë similar rituals would have taken place.

HOLY PLACES

There are many references to holy places in the

Númenórean scheme of things. The most famous of these is the Meneltarma, Pillar of the Heavens, on the island of Númenor. According to a description in UI⁵² it was a tall mountain with a plateau-like summit which could only be reached by a specially-made path. This plateau was left completely untouched and there was no building, altar, or any other unnatural object. There were even no birds there, except three eagles who were believed to be the Witnesses of Manwë. No tool or weapon could be taken there and although anyone could go there no one could speak at all, except the Monarch on the three great festivals. The place was renowned for its silence which was said to be

so great that even a stranger ignorant of Númenor and all its history, if he were transported thither, would not have dared to speak aloud.⁵³

The emphasis on silence is important in Númenórean/Dúnadan ritual as I shall discuss later.

There were other sacred sites in Númenor, most notably the tombs of the Monarchs below the Meneltarma and the court of the Monarchs where the White Tree, Nimloth, grew. This tree symbolised the link between Valinor and Númenor, being descended from Galathilion, the Silver Tree of Tirion, itself made by Yavanna in the likeness of Telperion, Eldest of Trees. It was regarded with such reverence that Isildur was willing to risk his life to rescue the last fruit.⁵⁴

The Númenórean pattern was adopted in Middle-earth. These were some of the holy places of Gondor:

- a) The hallow on Mount Mindolluin,
- b) The Court of the Fountain where the White Tree grew,
- c) Amon Anwar, the 'Hill of Awe', called the Halifrien by the Rohirrim,
- d) The tombs of the Kings of Gondor and of their Stewards, lying between Minas Tirith and the precipice of Mindolluin.

The hallow on Mindolluin corresponded (but see n.46) in some ways to the Meneltarma. However, there were some major differences. First, as mentioned earlier, it was a closed rather than an open hallow. The path by which Gandalf led Aragorn⁵⁵ was one

that few now dared to tread.

This implies that some, the Stewards and their heirs for example, did use the path, possibly to plant the fruit of the White Tree. This path led

to a high hallow where only the kings had been wont to go.

From it Aragorn seems to have been able to survey his realm.

The sanctity of the Court of the Fountain arose solely because it housed the White Tree, even after it had died. Undoubtedly the courtyard had been built as a replica of the original in Armenelos, and the White Tree was held in great reverence. After the coronation of Aragorn-Elessar and the discovery of the new sapling,

the withered tree was uprooted, but with reverence; and they did not burn it, but laid it to rest in the silence of Rath Dínen.⁵⁶

The Tree was a site of ritual. Songs of Valinor were sung in its presence, while it grew and blossomed⁵⁷ and it was a place where the King and the Queen sat to receive important guests. People would have paid honour to it as they passed. It had been remembered in ancient rhyme,⁵⁸ and came directly after the reference to the King in the song of the Eagle⁵⁹ where the idea is that the renewal of the Tree shall bless the City and by implication signal the renewal of much else. The hallow of the Tree was a central place in Dúnadan thought and ritual.

The sanctity of Amon Anwar arose from it being the site of the tomb of Elendil. As Cirion stated⁶⁰ when

taking the Oath with Eorl,

"... this is his tomb, and from it comes the awe that dwells on this hill and in the woods below."

Isildur has placed a casket containing his father's remains under a mound on Amon Anwar, stating,⁶¹

"This is a tomb and memorial of Elendil the Faithful. Here it shall stand at the mid-point of the Kingdom of the South in the keeping of the Valar, while the Kingdom endures; and this place shall be a hallow that none shall profane. Let no man disturb its silence and peace, unless he be an heir of Elendil."

It was intended as a place where the King could go,

especially when he felt the need of wisdom in days of danger or distress.⁶²

The hill retained its reverence even after Cirion had removed the casket to the Hallows of Minas Tirith.

The burial places of the Kings in Minas Tirith were referred to as the Hallows⁶³ which reflected their status in Númenor⁶⁴ and were treated with great reverence. Only a few could go there, the Kings, Stewards and those who looked after the tombs.⁶⁵ It was forbidden to do acts of violence there, the penalty for which was death.⁶⁶

There are a number of significant features about these hallows. First, with the exception of the White Tree, they were only accessible to the King or his representatives. Second, there was usually only one path to the site. This path might be kept locked, as with the route to the tombs, or might be overgrown and unseen to the casual observer, as with Amon Anwar.

Third, weapons were forbidden, except as part of the ritual, as in the Oath of Eorl.⁶⁷ Fourth, there was an atmosphere of silence. This silence seems to have been an important part of Númenórean and Dúnadan ritual.

FUNERAL RITUAL

In studying most ancient cultures the difficulty relating to funerary rituals is that most evidence refers only to those of a high status whose tombs, mummified bodies, etc., survived whereas those of the common people did not. There follows the danger of assuming that all funerals follow the 'royal' pattern and this is not necessarily the case. There is very little evidence of Dúnadan funerals other than for those of high status.

Boromir's body⁶⁸ was carefully dressed and then placed on a funeral boat with his weapons on him and those of his enemies at his feet. After the boat had disappeared over the falls of Rauros both Aragorn and Legolas sang a funeral dirge. These dirges referred mainly to the loss of Boromir, only Aragorn's second dirge referring to his qualities as a person.

Faramir,⁶⁹ thought by his father to be dead, was carried on a funeral bed to his would-be pyre. Aragorn-Elessar⁷⁰ lay down on a funeral

bed that had been prepared for him.

According to the song⁷¹ of a maker of Rohan after the Battle of the Pelennor Fields both Dúnedain of Gondor and the Rohirrim were buried under mounds, probably on the battle-field itself. Elendil's remains were placed in a casket under a mound (see above), but this may be a unique action for a unique person.

The places where the dead were buried were regarded with great reverence as indicated by their status as holy places, referred to above. In Minas Tirith the dead must have been embalmed for they were laid on marble funeral beds/tables, as if asleep, with their

hands folded, head[s] pillowed upon stone.⁷²

These beds were placed in the Houses of the Dead which were under Mount Mindolluin and which were looked after by special custodians. It would seem from the phrase,

between pale domes and empty halls and images of men long dead,

that each family had its own House where its dead were placed. The dead had their images placed outside these Houses. The dead person was carefully prepared but it was not common for their possessions to be placed with them. The sleeping position undoubtedly reflected the Dúnadan belief about life after death: that they were due to wake and that death was not the end of existence. Apart from burial after battle (when burial in earth mounds was the common practice) there is no evidence for methods of burial other than that provided at Minas Tirith.

The funeral ritual included silence, mourners with bowed heads, and dirges which referred to the grief at the death, and to the qualities of the dead. There is no reference to any other ritual, although a funeral oration was likely. There is no mention at all of committal or prayers. The Rohirrim had a feast⁷³ after the burial of Théoden and that feature may have been copied from Dúnadan ritual, but there is no evidence either way. The placing of the dead under the holy mountain reflected the practice of Númenor and probably the funeral ritual also followed that of Númenor. Funeral rituals tend to follow very ancient forms.

INDIVIDUAL and COMMUNAL DEVOTION - INVOCATIONS and the STANDING SILENCE

When faced by the threat of a wayward Mûmak whilst guarding Frodo and Sam, Damrod cries to his companion, Mablung,

"Ware! Ware! May the Valar turn him aside!
Mûmak! Mûmak!"⁷⁴

As far as I know this is the only reference to the Valar by any Dúnadan other than a King. Unlike Elves who usually invoked Elbereth no specific Vala is mentioned but its use here indicates the perceived power of the Valar to act even after more than three thousand years of exile from Númenor. However, it is an Eagle (with a capital 'E') who brings the message of victory to the people of Minas Tirith, and these were known to be the messengers of Manwë.

The only specific reference to individual ritual in LotR is when Faramir and his companions give what can be called a 'silent grace or blessing' before eating:

Faramir and all his men turned and faced west in a moment of silence.⁷⁵

Their guests, Frodo and Sam had to do the same. After they had sat down Faramir explains it by saying that they,

"look towards Númenor that was, and beyond to Elvenhome that is, and to that which is beyond Elvenhome and will ever be."⁷⁶

He is interested to learn that the Hobbits have no such 'custom' as he calls it, although the Hobbits do have the Dúnadan habit of bowing to the host (before eating) and rising to thank the host afterwards.

The words of explanation that Faramir uses with their triple use of the verb 'to be' in the three main tenses: 'Númenor that was'; 'Elvenhome that is'; and 'beyond Elvenhome ... will ever be'; have an extremely strong liturgical ring to them and they sound like a prayer or hymn. It may have been such and Faramir may have been quoting what was to him very familiar.

The liturgical sense of this 'grace' is heightened by the physical action of standing and facing the west. Everyone was involved in this ritual, the Hobbits with Faramir and the whole company at the feast on the Field of Cormallen, the other reference to

"the Standing Silence",⁷⁷

as it was called. This universal participation not only indicates the importance of the ritual but also possibly the idea that the Dúnadan ritual, being Dúnadan, was inevitably correct as they had been taught by the Eldar who had been taught by the Valar.

Possibly the most important aspect of the 'grace' is that it was silent.

INDIVIDUAL and COMMUNAL DEVOTION - The ROLE of SILENCE

Throughout this article I have referred to silence. Not only at tombs and at funerals, places and occasions where most are quiet or silent, but also at the holiest of places; on the Meneltarma, at Amon Anwar; and on common occasions, like the 'grace' before meals. There are many other references which imply silence, in that activity is carried on alone. Faramir, in his criticism of earlier generations of Dúnedain, comments that,

"Childless lords sat in aged halls musing on heraldry; in secret chambers withered men compounded strong elixirs, or in high cold towers asked questions of the stars."⁷⁸

All of these were activities carried out in silence.

It seems that, rather than use words which might come between the speaker and the listener, the Númenóreans and the Dúnedain used silent prayer and meditation. This may be the reason for the lack of Dúnedain hymns or prayers, unlike the Elves in this respect.

CONCLUSION

The Dúnedain of Gondor followed their ancestors of Númenor in most things including belief and its associated ritual. They were led by divinely-appointed sacred priest-monarchs without whom worship of the True God was impossible. This sacred line was restored in the person of Aragorn-Elessar who re-established the correct forms of worship and the harmony of his people. The three great festivals of Númenor had their counterparts in Gondor (and I assume in Arnor) even though the site of the priest-king's prayers was at a closed hallow rather than the open one on the Meneltarma.

The tombs of the Dúnedain and their devotion to the White Tree were also modelled on the practice in Númenor. The most unusual features of Dúnadan worship were: first, the uniqueness of the priesthood; only the King was a priest and he seems to have had no representatives, save that a Ruling Steward could, under exceptional circumstances, exercise a delegated authority. Second, the liturgical and personal use of silence, which seems to have been the main Dúnadan method of prayer, both in community and individually.

The Dúnedain retained their devotion to the unnamed God, Eru Ilúvatar, throughout all their vicissitudes, and revered the Valar. Although on the surface it seems that they had very little 'religion', in fact they had retained much of their ancestral faith and were able to practise it again with the return of the King. It was this faith, and its associated ritual, which enabled them to survive a thousand years without a King and the seemingly unending struggle against evil. They could agree with the words⁷⁹ of the Eagle bringing the tidings from the Lords of the West:

"Sing and rejoice, ye people of the Tower of Guard,
for your watch hath not been in vain."

FOOTNOTES

- 1 These records and comments on the religion of Númenor are found mainly in UT 'A Description of the Island of Númenor' and in Letters, n° 156. In addition the Akallabêth found in The Silmarillion also contains useful information.
- 2 Letters N° 156.
- 3 Throughout this article I shall refer to Aragorn as Aragorn before his coronation and as Aragorn-Elessar afterwards.
- 4 Throughout LotR, TS and UT the titles King, Queen and Steward are almost always capitalised even when referring to non-Númenórean Kings. For the sake of consistency I have followed this pattern. I have used the word 'Monarch' for Númenor, as both men and women could ascend the throne, but 'King' for Gondor as it was restricted to men.
- 5 The correspondence of Gil-galad with Númenórean Monarchs such as Meneldur implies equality, e.g. UT 'Aldarion and Erendis'.

- 6 LotR II 4 v 'The Window on the West'.
- 7 The debate between Arnor and Gondor on this matter is found in LotR III App. A. Although it was unresolved in principle, in practice only men became Dúnedain Monarchs and only male descent was accepted. Aragorn could claim the throne of Gondor through Elendil.
- 8 Tolkien thinks that the Númenóreans of Gondor
are best pictured in (say) Egyptian terms. (Letters, N° 211).
- However, in the same letter he refers to Númenórean theology as 'Hebraic': this does not involve a contradiction. The kings of both Israel and Judah had special roles at the three great pilgrim festivals: Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, which were also agricultural festivals. With their pure monotheism, their reluctance to utter the Divine Name, their one sacred place, their one sacred family, their three great festivals, etc., the Númenórean kingdom and its successor states are most analogous to the Davidic monarchy of Judah.
- 9 TS, Akallabêth.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 UT, 'the Line of Elros': 'Kings of Númenor', for all the details in this paragraph. (NB, Q. *nólë* = 'long study, lore, knowledge'; Q. *parma* = 'book', *maitë* = 'handed', see UT Index).
- 12 Letters N° 156.
- 13 LotR III 6 v 'The Steward and the King'.
- 14 UT 'Cirion and Eorl' (iii) esp. see n. 44.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Its use by Cirion is interesting for it shows that in this instance at least the rightful regent of the King could, in certain instances, act in a royal role in his absence. The other example of this delegated authority was the accepted right of Denethor, see UT 'The Palantiri' esp. see n.16, although his wisdom might be questioned, in using the Palantir. Saruman also used one but his mind was captured whereas Denethor, although of lesser status than Saruman, succumbed far less than Saruman because he had the right as representing the King. When the Kings of Arnor and Gondor were reigning they gave such powers to the various keepers of the Stones at places such as Isengard. For a full discussion of this matter see UT, 'The Palantiri'.
- 17 Letters N° 156.
- 18 LotR I 2 ii 'The Council of Elrond'.
- 19 LotR II 4 v 'The Window on the West'.
- 20 UT 'Cirion and Eorl' (iv) The Tradition of Isildur.
- 21 Letters N° 156.
- 22 LotR II 4 v 'The Window on the West'.
- 23 LotR III 5 i 'Minas Tirith'. Most Dúnedain seem to have had a sound grasp of the history of their role in combatting Sauron.
- 24 LotR II 4 v 'The Window on the West'.
- 25 LotR III 6 v 'The Steward and the King'.
- 26 LotR III 5 viii 'The Houses of Healing'. British monarchs as late as Queen Anne 'touched' for scrofula, and Charles X of France did so in the 1820's.
- 27 LotR I 1 xii 'Flight to the Ford'.
- 28 He re-established the ancient succession/coronation ritual when he passed the crown onto his son, Eldarion, as he prepared to die. See '... the Tale of Aragorn and Arwen' in LotR III App. A.
- 29 LotR III 6 v 'The Steward and the King'.
- 30 LotR III 5 viii 'The Houses of Healing'.
- 31 TS, Akal.
- 32 LotR III 5 viii 'The Houses of Healing'.
- 33 UT 'A Description of the Island of Númenor'.
- 34 LotR III App.D. The material in this appendix supplies much of the information for this and the following section in which I have only given references for material not found in App. D.
- 35 UT 'A Description of the Island of Númenor'.
- 36 I have used both Foster, R., The Complete Guide to Middle-Earth and Allan, J., An Introduction to Elvish, as sources for the translations of the names of the months.
- 37 Letters N° 156.
- 38 TS Ch. 20 'Of the Fifth Battle'.
- 39 TS Ch. 11 'Of the Sun and Moon and the Hiding of Valinor'.
- 40 TS Ch. 13 'Of the Return of the Noldor'.
- 41 TS Ch. 23 'Of Tuor and the Fall of Gondolin'.
- 42a LotR II 4 vi 'The Forbidden Pool'.
- 42b LotR III App. D.
- 43 It surely can be no coincidence that March 25 is the Christian festival of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and, until 1752, used to be the New Year's Day in Britain.
- 44 The calculations for solstices and equinoxes based on the information in LotR App. D present some problems. The correlation between the Shire Reckoning, the Kings' Reckoning, the Stewards' Reckoning, the New Reckoning and our contemporary calendar is not always clear. According to LotR III App. D, Sauron fell on March 25 in the Shire Reckoning (also in the SR and the KR), and Tolkien calculates this to correspond to March 27 in our calendar. If Yestare is the actual New Year Day, i.e. March 25, then *Víressë* I corresponds to March 26 or March 28 in our calendar. On this basis the festival dates given by Tolkien do not relate to the equinoxes and solstices, e.g. he dates *Cormarë* to September 22 in the Shire Reckoning, old style, but this only occurs in a leap year such as 1420 Shire Reckoning, whereas if March 25 in the Shire Reckoning was March 25 in our calendar there would be a far greater correlation. I have assumed that the dates of the festivals were based around the sun and have written accordingly, but the situation is not satisfactory. [I welcome your reactions and replies to this aspect of Tolkien-lore and would look forward to receiving an in-depth article on the matter. Ed.]
- 45 With the possible exception of Shintö, all major contemporary religions include in their ritual calendar festivals which celebrate an historical event.
- 46 LotR III 6 v 'The Steward and the King'. In a footnote to Letters N° 153, it is pointed out that there was no substitute to the Hallow on the Meneltarma. I think, however, that the Kings of Gondor used the hallow on Mount Mindolluin as such.
- 47 UT 'The Line of Elros' and TS, Akal.
- 48 TS, Akal.
- 49 LotR III 6 vi 'Many Partings'.
- 50 LotR III 6 iv 'The Field of Cormallen'.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 UT 'A Description of the Island of Númenor'.

- 53 ibid.
- 54 TS, Akal.
- 55 LotR III 6 v 'The Steward and the King'.
- 56 ibid.
- 57 LotR III 6 vi 'Many Partings'.
- 58 LotR II 3 xi 'The Palantír'.
- 59 LotR III 6 v 'The Steward and the King'.
- 60 UT 'Cirion and Eorl'.
- 61 ibid.
- 62 ibid.
- 63 LotR III 6 v 'The Steward and the King'.
- 64 Letters N° 156: "the building of splendid tombs - their only 'hallows'; or almost so."
- 65 LotR III 5 iv 'The Siege of Gondor'.
- 66 LotR III 6 v 'The Steward and the King'. Beregon's penalty for killing in the Hallows was remitted on account of his valour in battle and for his intention in attempting to save Faramir.
- 67 UT 'Cirion and Eorl' (iii).
- 68 LotR II 3 i 'The departure of Boromir'.
- 69 LotR III 5 iv 'The Siege of Gondor'.
- 70 LotR III App. A '... the Tale of Aragorn and Arwen'.
- 71 LotR III 5 vi 'The Battle of the Pelennor Fields'.
- 72 LotR III 'The Siege of Gondor'. All references in this

paragraph come from this passage.

- 73 LotR III 6 vi 'Many Partings'.
- 74 LotR II 4 iv 'Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit'.
- 75 LotR II 4 v 'The Window on the West'. In a footnote to Letters N° 153 Tolkien refers to this as a 'glimpse' of 'religion as divine worship' practised by the Dúnedain.
- 76 ibid.
- 77 LotR III 6 iv 'The Field of Cormallen'. Note the capitalisation.
- 78 LotR II 4 v 'The Window on the West'.
- 79 LotR III 6 v 'The Steward and the King'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allan, Jim, An Introduction to Elvish, (1st edition, paperback) (Hayes, Middx., Bran's Head, 1978;
- Carpenter, Humphrey, The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, (1st edition, hardback) London, Allen & Unwin, 1981;
- Foster, Robert, The Complete Guide to Middle-Earth, (1st edition, paperback) London, Allen & Unwin, 1978;
- Tolkien, J.R.R., The Lord of the Rings, (2nd edition, hardback) London, Allen & Unwin, 1966;
- Tolkien, J.R.R., (ed. Tolkien, C.) The Silmarillion, (1st edition, hardback) London, Allen & Unwin, 1977;
- Tolkien, J.R.R., (ed. Tolkien, C.) Unfinished Tales, (1st edition, hardback) London, Allen & Unwin, 1980.

