

SOCIAL MILITARY and POLITICAL ASPECTS of ROHAN

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This is a greatly shortened version of a paper first given to University College London Hobbitsoc on May 18th. I have entirely omitted a long introduction on methodology, and some quotations from Montgomery's "History of Warfare" illustrating various cavalries.

The traditional view of Rohan is of grassy plains, inhabited by a nomadic population devoted in their life style to horses. This view is substantially false; the geographical limitations of Rohan - extensive marshes along the Entwash, and the unnavigability of its rivers - has forced its people to live for the most part not on the plains but in the valleys of the White Mountains. These valleys have the two advantages of being easily defensible, and of having a climate similar to that of the Rohirrim's homeland at the head of the Anduin.

The Rohirrim living in the plains would do so in small, isolated, but fortified farmsteads, with larger settlements around the Marshalls' seats. They would drive their horses southwards across the Entwade in the early spring to be collected and sold in the South. Those living in the valleys would live in villages (e.g. Upbourn and Underharrow) and raise crops; agriculture would be confined to what women could maintain should the men be away all summer. It is unlikely that this way of life could support more than 250,000 people - calculating population from the 3019 weapontake produces a figure of of approximately 150,000.

While tribal organisation had disintegrated, Rohan did not yet possess a centralised government or anything more than the most rudimentary feudalism. There was a military aristocracy from whose ranks the Marshalls, officers of State, and leaders of the army, were drawn. The Riddermark was divided up into three Marches; the most sizeable, though not necessarily the most populous, was the Eastmarch, which was governed by the powerful Eastfold dynasty, who reached their zenith under Eomund the chief Marshall of the Mark, when he married Théodwyn in 2989; his son Eomer succeeded not only to his father's power and position, but also to the throne. Within each March were demesnes of local magnates - Dunhere, for example, is described as lord and as chieftain of Harrowdale. The most powerful of the aristocratic families held the hereditary tenure of such offices as Marshall. It was the Marshall's responsibility to protect his March against such enemies as marauding orc bands trying to rustle horses; in this context the exploits of the Marshalls of the Eastern Marches at the close of the Third Age were particularly noted. Should the local defences be insufficient - as when Saruman defeated Erkenbrand at the Fords of Isen, 3019 - the King's éored, which was stationed at Edoras, would be called out. At times of national disaster, such as the Long Winter 2758-9, the Rohirrim evacuated the plains altogether and retreated to their strongholds in the White Mountains, while help was awaited from Gondor.

On the battlefield, the Eotheid were masters of the art of offence on horse and defence on foot. While every man had to provide his own horse, weapons and equipment were standardised and provided by the King or Marshall. When an éored met an enemy force, they first softened it up with the bow and arrow; then attacked with the lance, encircling it if it was small enough; and finally moved in with the sword. When fighting in a larger force as part of a set piece battle, the Eotheid charged in waves; they seem to have overcome the problem of one wave piling into the back of the previous one, or impeding its retreat, by the first wave penetrating

