

# ARNOR: THE NUMENOREAN INHERITANCE



eaders of the Lord of the Rings must surely have wondered where the Rangers of the North went to or came from: where, for example, Gilraen went to when she left Rivendell 'to live with her own people in Eriador'. The following extract, which attempts to answer this question, derives from a work by a historian of c. 1500 Fourth Age (Arnor: the Númenórean Inheritance) in which the writer examines the development of the North - South divisions within modern society (the Three Kingdoms, ruled by Arvedui II) and explores their origin in the Third Age.

In the third chapter of The Númenórean Inheritance (Fornost: the Aftermath) we are given a lengthy and detailed account of the way in which King Arvedui's sons recreated a Dúnedain society that was capable of moving forward with some vigour and decision into a new role. The extract given below appears at the beginning of chapter four: The Between-Time (Ehedre), and analyses the eventual character of that society in c. 3000 Third Age.

In the days of the High Kingdom, the province of Nenuial<sup>1</sup> with its capital at Annúinas corresponded roughly in character (if not in size) to the Arandor of Númenor. With Lake Evendin at its heart, the province measured some 80 miles from east to west (at the confluence of the Lhunael<sup>2</sup> with the Lhûn) and some 120 miles from north to south, its southern boundary being the outlying hills of Evendin beyond Emerch (modern Amaig). When the kings moved their seat to Fornost, the province remained the Arandor of Arnor and of Arthedain. After the fall of Fornost and the end of the North Kingdom, the province became not merely the heartland<sup>3</sup> but the sole territory of the Dúnedain. Most of the countryfolk of Arnor had retreated south and west: and as knowledge faded, to be replaced by folklore

- (1) Nenuial: by the end of Valandil's reign Arnor was divided, administratively speaking, into twelve provinces (always so called, i.e. endorenke) not fiefs (arandutael). It is tempting to suppose that these corresponded to the hereditary lands of the twelve Houses of Arnor, but in fact evidence is lacking for this tidy view. Probably the actuality was more complicated.
- (2) Lhunael: this river rose on the west side of the Hills of Evendin (marked on all maps but unnamed) and flowed south-west for about 90 miles before reaching the Lhûn, many miles above the Gulf of Lhûn and Mithlond.
- (3) Even before the Downfall of Númenor, the exiled Elendili were settling on the south-west shores of Nenuial.

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and superstition, the Plain of Evendim was regarded with mingled awe and dread by all as a haunted land - a view encouraged by the Rangers of Eriador in the early days of their guardianship.

Thus, the approaches from the south-east were guarded by superstitious dread, the western approaches by the Elvish lands of Lindon; over the southern marches the great beech woods grew back thick and tall; while beyond them flourished the Shire. To the north-west grey empty fells reached away to the icy shores of Forochel and to the north-east lay the great whalebacks of the North Downs. It was thus an enclosed and hidden land, and the Rangers did everything in their power to keep it so. Its northern and eastern boundaries were patrolled ceaselessly; to the south, the Shire itself was guarded meticulously through the years.

Within these perimeters the province of Nendor - as it came to be jokingly called - remained an enclave of northern and Númenórean civilisation. Here lived and flourished a tightly-knit, highly organised community of between 1000 and 1500 Dúnedain, together with their households, farms, orchards, cornfields and coppices, dependants and tenants, and all the range of crafts and small industries that served the community, from weaving to metal-working.

In the days of its power, Arnor had been a rich and prosperous realm, and though the foundation of its economy was agricultural rather than industrial, its craft skills did not entirely vanish when the kingdom ended. Cloth-making and smithying, woodworking and building had always been its principal industries, and these survived the long wars with Angmar to flourish and grow in the comparative peace that followed the Battle of Fornost (1975 Third Age).

The exact population of the whole province throughout this period is difficult to determine. By no means all the ordinary folk who lived there were engaged in domestic or household employment among the Dúnedain, of course; farms had to be worked, fields tilled, implements made, tools mended and so forth. There was also a number of small hamlets and villages round the lake where fishing and related occupations provided the bulk of the villagers with their livelihood. Some of these settlements were very ancient and may even have pre-dated the founding of the Realms-in-Exile. The small town of Annúinas itself, larger than the others, was the centre for the building of boats and small ships, since these offered the speediest and most convenient method of travelling from one great Dúnedain household to another. Almost every such house had a waterfront on the lake, the chief exception being Marnui in the upper valley of the Baranduin (easily accessible from Annúinas by road).

Inevitably, some degree of specialisation in crafts and farming developed over the years. The House of Coronach on the north-west shore of the lake became the province's horsebreeders; rearing, breaking and training the strong rough-haired mounts which, characteristically, the Rangers used when riding abroad. The House of Amaig bred sheep for wool, and a great deal of

the province's spinning, fulling, teasing, cloth-making and dyeing took place here. Hallas (from which came Gilraen, mother of Aragorn) was famous for its deep soil and rich orchards; Marnui for its cattle, and so forth. Annúinas<sup>4</sup> itself, facing south and west among the hills, grew herbs and other plants (flax, sadder, rapeseed) as well as vegetables. Timber, both for ships and for domestic use, came south by water from Rathan, which lay along the north-east shores of Nenuial.

A high degree of interdependence naturally fostered extreme closeness and intimacy. One must suppose that the community was saved from parochialism by two factors. The first of these was the (literally) far-ranging nature of the Rangers work in Eriador and elsewhere, which demanded a comprehensive knowledge of the world 'outside'; and an adaptability to circumstances that precluded complacency. The second was that for a highly gifted, individual and energetic people with a long intellectual and cultural tradition, there were rich and diverse kingdoms of the mind to escape to (when escape became imperative) or to enjoy otherwise. The old summer palace of the kings at Annúinas acted as a repository of lore, music, tradition and practical knowledge, which catered for such needs and abilities. Here the children of the Dúnedain came to school; here their daughters and young women were trained for the demanding business of administering a great household (largely single-handed) with all its attendant requirements. Here their sons and young men were trained for their tasks in Eriador and elsewhere; here stood the hospice where the healers arts of medicine, physic and surgery were cherished in the service of the whole community. Here reposed the great library of Annúinas in the charge of its loremasters and scribes, whose task it was to know and maintain the archives thoroughly and write the 'Annals of the Years' according to the best accounts they could collect. Here the chieftains held their councils, celebrated the Feast of Vireessë, presided over the weddings of their kindred, and the disputes-in-law of their subjects. Here, whenever necessary, the orc-ridings<sup>5</sup> gathered before going east to the high passes of Hithaeglir.

A young man or woman of the Dúnedain could expect to spend ten impressionable years, from the age of eight or nine to the age of nineteen at Annúinas, learning their business in the world and taking in a strong sense of duty, destiny, and the great sweep of their races history, before embarking on their tasks in Eriador. Typically, a boy arrived in Aeryn with three or four years tuition behind him, already bilingual (in Sindarin, the usual language of his family, and

(4) Annúinas: between T.A. 1976 and 3019 Annúinas was sometimes called Aeryn or Eryn to distinguish it from Elendil's capital and to denote its altered status.

(5) Orc-ridings: gatherings of (comparatively) large numbers of Rangers for the purpose of conducting an armed and mounted expedition against the Orc hosts of the Hithaeglir. These usually took place in spring or late autumn and mustered at Aeryn or Rivendell, where they were often joined by the sons of Elrond. It seems that King Elessar's first experiences in the wild were obtained on such an expedition.

in Westron), able to read and write, to ride and (probably) to handle a boat; and conscious, as far as his age allowed, of the part he had in the world and the career he could look forward to - such as his father and his elder brothers already had, perhaps. Increasingly aware of the fact that he must expect to pass something like ninety years in the Wild, unless death or serious injury intervened, he also knew that he would be engaged in largely thankless, arduous and dangerous tasks designed to preserve the peace of Eriador and the security of its ordinary folk. The best he could hope for was to reach old age with the approval of his peers, and to die quietly, unregarded, leaving children to follow him and to repeat the pattern for as long as anyone could foresee. 'It is every Ranger's ambition', remarked one chieftain dryly, 'to die in his bed: it is the hope of every Ranger's wife that he will'.



Necessarily, in a society from which most able-bodied Dúnedain men were absent for the greater part of every year and more, the ordinary business of life was carried on by its womenfolk. They were its farmers, administrators, merchants and to some extent its lawmakers. It was an ancient and well-worn joke in the province to refer to 'The Ruling Queens of Arnor', but there was no malice in it. Rangers had, ineluctably, to trust their wives with the management of family lands and property, and their womenfolk expected that they would. Both sexes had a trust, therefore: in the case of women this trust was often increased by the presence of young children and by the fairly common necessity of ministering to the needs, sicknesses and perplexities of their dependants on the estates they managed. Thus, most Dúnedain women were regarded as very properly being practical governors and judges in their world<sup>6</sup>, who were therefore largely responsible for its prosperity, orderliness and its continuance.

Under such circumstances, the role of the Chieftains wife - the Lady of Arnor, as she was generally known - was crucial. This fact may help to explain Dírhael's intense opposition to his daughters early marriage to Arathorn. At 22 Gilraen was some years below marriageable age, as the Dúnedain accounted such things, and her father was naturally reluctant to see such burdens thrust onto her shoulders so soon. In the event, his worst fears were realised, briefly at any rate, though it would seem that Gilraen herself was little troubled by this<sup>7</sup>. Certainly the story shows that it was Dírhael's wife who (apparently) had the last word on the matter:

(6) When Aragorn reminds Eowyn that no man could ride away from his (dull) responsibility (*LotR* III.5.II), he may have had just this situation in mind. His own kinswomen had been unable to ride anywhere for a good many years.

(7) Gilraen: although this name has been translated as Wandering Star, it can also mean Dancing Star. It seems that Aragorn inherited something of his mother's buoyant temperament.

clear indication that it was often the Dúnedain women who managed these affairs for the good of their society.

In such a close-knit community as this, the chances of intermarriage were correspondingly increased. In general, the Chieftains (and their ladies) applied the Númenórean principle which forbade marriages between first cousins, as well as to some extent the process whereby a brother and a sister married a sister and a brother: though it seems that Elessar's elder son, Eldarion, disregarded this uncertain ruling and married his brother-in-law's (half-) sister. Circumstances alone made exogamy practically impossible, though it is recorded that during Aragorn's chieftaincy, the heir of the House of Narnui married a lady of the Southern Dúnedain, Teleriel of Lebennin, and brought her to the North. It can scarcely be a coincidence that this happened at the very end of Aragorn's service in Gondor as 'Thorongil', nor that she was the niece of Aminardas of Ithilien - one of 'Thorongil's' close friends there - and lived in Pelargir. But otherwise, such contacts were extremely rare.

The unusual stability of this realm-in-little seems to have been largely voluntary. For the women of the Dúnedain, life was busy and secure. Their role was important, undisputed and well recognised. Their knowledge of the outside world seems to have been far greater than their contact with it; and they had both freedom and leisure to explore the boundaries of their lives as well as its ageless feminine concerns. Whatever the limits and strains of life in this society may have been for them, they cannot have been unduly severe. It was always possible to pursue a personal vocation such as lore or teaching, or the study of physic and medicine (as was Gilraen's original intention). Whether one's bent was practical or intellectual, there were recognized ways of fulfilling it and of achieving something not only of value to that community, but also of personal standing.

As a matter of course, a society like this acquired certain characteristics, not least an intense awareness of itself and an acute sense of its own identity. But it also developed its own idiom and language, the latter being (among the Dúnedain themselves) the Sindarin of Rivendell, which retained a high incidence of Quenya terms and phrases. Personal names were a mixture of Sindarin and Quenya<sup>8</sup>; the titles of festivals (e.g. *Víressë*) and terms of endearment (*envanyar*, *vanimelde*) were Quenya; technical terms such as those of the constellations were often given their Quenya form (e.g. *Valacirca*). These usages made for a certain inwardness of expression and feeling, as well as increasing the Ranger's sense of historical remoteness from their southern kindred. This was not its purpose, but was the inevitable consequence. The meticulous practice of certain Númenórean customs and rituals which in Gondor had become abbreviated<sup>9</sup> or had fallen into desuetude, increased this feeling of separation and the sense of distance on which both Faramir and Elendur commented when they came north in the year 4, Fourth Age. Accustomed to take the colour of their surroundings

(8) E.g. Aragorn, Amandil, Gilraen, Vardamiriel.

(9) E.g. the Standing Silence, as used in Gondor, had its more elaborate equivalent in Aeryn.

when outside Nendor, the Rangers reverted to (or translated themselves into) Númenórean terms when at home. This was neither a mere pose nor an alternative disguise, but their natural mode of living, and thus a relaxation; though Aragorn's southern Dúnedain companions may not have found it so.



Like Rivendell, Aeryn was an island; unlike Rivendell, it was a kingdom within a kingdom, isolated yet not solitary, busy yet tranquil, self-effacing yet passionately royal and proud. In some ways it was a highly tolerant society, as it needed to be when two peoples coexisted in such a rigidly defined social and geographical enclave; and its acquaintance with the customs and lives of ordinary folk was intimate and precise. The rangers, like their own tenants and farming neighbours, lived close to the land; yet the business of their lives was guerilla warfare and intelligence work. They guarded and policed a vast area, more than ten times the size of Nendor. They regarded themselves as the true heirs of Erendil, yet to the countryfolk whom they protected they were no more than vagabonds of dubious origin and occupation. They seem to have passed themselves off successfully as outlaws and robbers to Sauron's spies; yet at home they could think and behave like the princes of the Dúnedain that they really were. Their songs and poems of this period (which they later called Ene-dre, the Between Time) are full of these contrasts, often comically expressed... Such songs are only one example of the sort of joke, good or bad, punning or otherwise, which lightened the seriousness of their work; but puns and wordplay seem to have been an integral part of the Nendorin idiom. "Resting and rusting", Aragorn told some of his young Rangers once, "are two words but one thing; the difference lies in 'U'". The somewhat tart sense of humour which he displayed on other occasions, therefore, may be in part a Nendorin trait as much as a personal one. The only example of a Linnod that we have from this period is that coined by his mother, Gilraen of Hallas, and is entirely in keeping with the idioms of Nendor.

Quite certainly, such jokes and puns were not only a characteristic response on the part of the Dúnedain but also a form of defence against the inherent grimness of their (chosen) lot. The style of life they adopted at home in Nendor<sup>10</sup>, however, was voluntary, reflecting three distinct (if not disparate) elements in their culture. The first of these is the extent to which the Dúnedain had assimilated and adapted Elvish influences to their own use. The second is their inherited Númenórean tradition of fine building and associated skills such as wood-carving; and the third is an inherently feminine preference for the practical, the elegant and the well-made item over the merely functional or grandiose. Probably economic consid-

erations had something to do with this, but all the traditions of Arnor were against mere display (at least on the scale of ostentation that King Atanamir Alcarin of Gondor contrived).

A typical Nendorin house of the period c. 2500 to 3020 Third Age would have seemed grand to a Bree farmer and impressive to a well-to-do Hobbit; but probably strange and countrified to (say) Imrahil of Dol Amroth. Comfort and a pleasant, gracious way of living were the keynotes to strike in Nendor, so that the quality of the appurtenances and furnishings were all the more important.

A Nendorin house of this period, then, combined all or most of the following features (Aeryn itself always excepted). It was large, though certainly neither a castle nor a palace; it faced south to south-east, as the lie of the land allowed; it was built on a slope, wherever possible, so that its gardens could be terraced at least once; it was constructed out of stone or (very rarely) brick and flints; it was within sight of Nenuial or within a few minutes walk or ride of the waterside. Kitchens, stables, storehouses and other offices were usually built at the side of the house rather than the back so that the house could stand amid gardens and lawns. It was several storeys high, usually three or four, but was entered by a flight of broad stone steps on the first (not the ground) storey. Despite this, and the heavy shutters at every window, it was in no sense a defensive structure; any surrounding walls or gatehouse reflecting ancient tradition rather than contemporary need, and being chiefly decorative in character. Water was frequently piped into the house itself from springs or streams further up the hill, and flowing water was a common feature in the grounds and gardens.

Inside the house, the visitor was likely to find long matted galleries linking suites of rooms panelled in a variety of woods, and ceiled with fine plasterwork. Hearths might be of stone or wood, with tiles or metal plates at the back to throw the heat forward into the room: necessary in some of the long northern winters. Windows were glazed, often tall and coming down to the floor, and were usually hung with curtains of embroidered cloth. Furniture was carved, inlaid with different woods (beech and pale oak being common). In the largest houses, each storey was connected with the one above by corner stairs, but separated by a low-ceiled passage from which small rooms opened off: servants quarters, these, where they could sit and smoke in comfort or prepare food and wine if required when in attendance.

Many houses were built around open courtyards, one side of which would have been used as a guest wing when needed (e.g. for weddings and other family occasions). The ground floor was used for bulk storage, usually of dry goods and foodstuffs such as grain, cured meats, flour and preserves. Dried herbs and pickled foods were also kept here through the winter and early spring. Such practicalities loomed large in the minds of a community thus isolated and dependent on its own agriculture for its survival. Provident management enabled Nendor to survive the Long Dearth<sup>11</sup> and the Fell Winter without too

(10) Nendor: a typical pun. Nen-Dor = (literally) Lake-land, but also N'-Endor, 'Not-Land' because Nenuial formed so large a part of it; 56 miles from N to S and 20 miles from E to W.

(11) Dearth: also called the Days of Dearth, or (by the Dúnedain) Anringare, Andring or Lossyestare.

great hardship; even to assist, albeit somewhat sparsely and secretively, their needy and more afflicted neighbours to the south and East.



As far as we can tell from the evidence of the annals and other, more inadvertent testimony, the Dúnedain themselves avoided social hierarchies as far as possible. The House of Isildur (honorifically known as the House of the Garland or the Menelmíriel, because of the seven stars of Andunië which were its chief blazon<sup>12</sup>) was, of course, pre-eminent among the Eight Houses of Arnor<sup>13</sup>; but the Eight Houses themselves seem to have enjoyed parity with one another. Whatever distinctions their members acquired sprang, apparently, from individual quirks of temperament or from more recent episodes in their family history. The Amaigs, it is true, were reputed to be the gentlest of the Dúnedain, and the Coronachs the most daring and adventurous; the House of Almanag was descended from Malbeth the Seer, and Ivorwen, Aragorn's grandmother, also belonged to this family remarkable for its gifts of foresight and poetry. But these are the only indications of separate distinction, and they do not seem to have constituted a system of rank; under the circumstances an unnecessary elaboration. When Aragorn referred to the company of the Dúnedain whom his cousin Halbarad brought south with him to Rohan as 'his kin', he was being literally accurate; whereas Denethor's usage of the term to mean the Northern Dúnedain (as opposed to those of Gondor) was more figurative.

It is one of the paradoxes in which history delights that the Dúnedain of Arnor who (no less than their southern kindred) were builders of, and dwellers in, great cities such as Fornost and Annúminas, should have become such inveterate countrymen and wanderers in the Wild. As the 'Lament for Fornost' shows, their sense of loss when their kingdom passed away was profound and grievous; and for years afterwards the very name of their capital, nicknamed 'the Singing City', stirred associations plangent with grief. Dúnedain poets of the third millenium never wearied of recalling the beauty of their chief citadel - 'most lovely and royal, queen among queens, her towers as tall lilies white in the first of morning'. But in Nendor the Dúnedain did not quite forget their city-

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- (12) Menelmíriel: the blazon of Andunië naturally reverted to Isildur on his father's death, as the elder son. The kings of Arnor used this as their private armorial bearings throughout the days of the North Kingdom and Arthedain.
- (13) Eight Houses: originally twelve; but three disappeared during the wars with Angmar and the fourth, the House of Araene, ended with an heiress who became King Arvedui's second wife (and queen), thereby becoming absorbed into the royal line, although she had twin children (a son and a daughter) shortly after the Fall of Fornost.

made customs. The Feast of Viressë (the spring festival) was celebrated throughout the Eredre without interruption and played an important part in establishing the younger Dúnedain as members of the Nendorin community. The chieftain and his wife presided over it wherever possible, or if they could not appointed someone to deputise for them. There were two so-called 'Marshalls of the Feast', a boy and a girl both about sixteen years old, whose function it was to invite guests of honour to the celebration, to lead the singers in to the Great Hall of Aeryn and to propound the ritual questions to the Chieftain - why and where was the first feast made. Ritual attire, green and white, and wands of office accompanied these functions; the processional hymn to spring was sung by all the children as they entered the hall, to one of a variety of settings. The subsequent banquet varied as to dishes but one at least was traditional: Year Cake (or New Year Cake, as it was sometimes called) always figured prominently on the table. Inside each of the two cakes there was a sugar token which conferred on the recipient the right to demand a song or story (to be specified) from any of the adult guests present. This part of the festival accomplished, dancing, riddles and games followed until bedtime.

Every society develops codes, customs and rituals of its own which become part of its identity. Nendor was no exception. The last relic of the North Kingdom-in-exile, it had retained with love and fierce pride much of its ancient heritage. Traditionally flexible and peace-loving, it had become the custodian of Númenórean practice to a degree that its more warlike and conservative southern sister realm had supposed peculiarly its own; an ironic inversion which Nendor appreciated to the full. It is ironies such as these which account for the apparent contradictions on which non-Nendorin observers commented so frequently.<sup>14</sup>



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- (14) One of the most interesting accounts of Nendor as it was before 3020 Third Age is that of Imlach, Parentan of Dol Amroth; How He Came to Nendor and What He Found There. This MS was once well known, but of recent years it has remained in the (private) royal archives and is little consulted.

A second account, this time written in Sindarin and later translated, is that of Elendur of Minas Tirith, who accompanied King Elessar and his other companions north in the spring of year 4 Fourth Age and who recorded his impressions of Nendorin society with some care. This MS is now in private ownership but can be consulted by arrangement with the present holder. Like his friend and companion, Aminardas of Ithilien (elsewhere referred to) Elendur had been one of 'Thorongil's' close associates in Gondor and was one of the six men whom Aragorn chose to ride north with him. He was also the father a son whom the King had healed after the Battle of the Pelennor, he having accompanied Faramir to the Causeway Forts and taken hurt then. Although Elendur's account postdates the actual working life of Nendor, as it were, it is still a useful and interesting piece of description, which examines through a different lens the nature of a society in a state of flux.