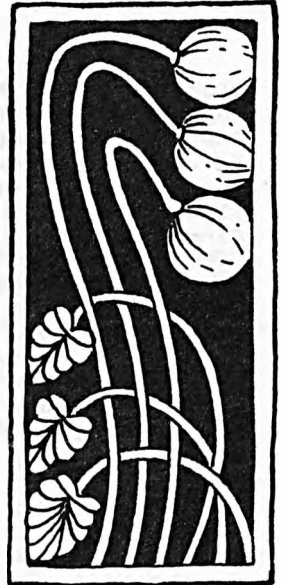




Studies in the Chronology of Middle-earth

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The First Age: The Beginning of Calendar Time

We possess five events of the First Age for which Tolkien has provided temporal information: (i) the Mereth Aderthad, which took place "when twenty years of the Sun had passed" [QS p.113]¹; (ii) the Dagor Bragollach, 455 years "since the coming of Fingolfin" [QS p.150]; (iii) the Evil Breath, in the 469th year "after the return of the Noldor to Middle-earth" [UT p.58]²; (iv) the sack of Nargothrond, "when four hundred and ninety-five years had passed since the rising of the Moon" [QS p.211]; (v) the birth of Eärendil, in the 503rd year "since the coming of the Noldor to Middle-earth" [QS p.241]. Every reconstructed chronology³ of the First Age has, by necessity, assumed that this temporal information can be resolved and merged to provide a unified, coherent calendar with a fixed starting point.

The chronologies hitherto published have furnished varied interpretations of the beginning of calendar time. D.S. Bratman (p.4), R. Foster (p.436) and P.H. Kocher (p.257) have chosen the rising of the Sun in the West as their base point. The title of the article by W. Good (p.26) suggests that he used the rising of the Sun as his base point, but he does not indicate whether he has chosen the rising of the Sun in the West or in the East. Incidentally, he includes the death of Elenwë, the wife of Turgon, in year one of his chron-

(1) J.R.R. Tolkien: The Silmarillion, George Allen & Unwin, London (ed. Christopher Tolkien), 1977.

(2) J.R.R. Tolkien: Unfinished Tales, George Allen & Unwin, London (ed. Christopher Tolkien), 1980.

(3) D.S. Bratman: 'The Chronology of The Silmarillion', Minas Tirith Evening-Star, no.7.1, 1977, pp.4-8; R. Foster: The Complete Guide to Middle-earth, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1978, pp.436-441; W. Good: 'The Chronology of the First Age from the Rising of the Sun', The Eye 5, 1978, pp.26-31; C. Tolley: 'A Chronology of the First Age', Mallorn 13, 1979, pp.31-32; J.E.A. Tyler: The New Tolkien Companion, Pan, Suffolk, pp.217-222; P.H. Kocher: A Reader's Guide to The Silmarillion, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1980, pp.253-264; D. O'Brien: 'A Chronology of the Careers of Turin and Tuor', Mallorn 18, 1982, pp.21-24. I had inadvertently omitted reference to Tyler's work in my earlier study of the chronology of the First Age. Tyler assigns the Nirnaeth Arnoediad to 470, the sack of Nargothrond to 495, and Turin's death to 497.

ology, an event which preceded all risings of the Sun and the Moon (QS p.90). The base point used by C. Tolley (p.31) is vaguely expressed. He refers to an unspecified "rising of the sun" and includes the returns of both Fëanor and Fingolfin to Middle-earth in year one. J.E.A. Tyler (p.219) adopts the rising of the Sun in the East. Thus these calendars are all based on one rising or other of the Sun as the starting point for time measurement. Can a resolution of the confusion surrounding the beginning of measured time be established? A re-examination of the data presented is necessary.

The date of the fourth event is based on the rising of the Moon, which may mean its first rising in the East or in the West. The Moon first arose in the West upon the return of Fingolfin's host to Middle-earth, after the Noldor led by Fëanor had already reached the Lake of Mithrim (QS pp.90, 100, 106). Its first rising in the East occurred at an unspecified time after its rising in the West and after the Sun had already arisen in the East (QS pp.100-101). Regardless of which of these two base points one might choose for the beginning of calendar time, it would seem more natural to choose the starting point of measured time as the first rising of the Sun in the East (Tyler), for in all calendar systems of Middle-earth, such as the Kings' and Stewards' Reckonings and the reckonings of the Eldar, including the Calendar of Imladris, the basic temporal interval was the solar day, based on the passage of the Sun in the sky from East to West (RotK pp.385-387)⁴. Event four, however, suggests that time measurement reached back to the rising of the Moon. If one adheres strictly to the temporal reference of event four, we are led to a choice between the two alternatives, the risings of the Moon in the West or in the East, as a time base.

Events three and five are based on the coming of the Noldor to Middle-earth. This statement may refer to the coming of the hosts of either Fëanor or Fingolfin. Fëanor reached Middle-earth at some unspecified time prior to the rising of the Moon in the West, whereas Fingolfin arrived simultaneously with it. It is noteworthy that the arrival of neither coincided with a rising of the Sun. If one equates the coming of the Noldor with Fëanor's return, then time measurement must begin prior to the risings of both the Sun and the Moon. If one equates it with Fingolfin's, then the coming of the Noldor coincides with the first rising of the Moon in the West. This latter choice

enjoys the support of event two, the date of the Dagor Bragollach, which is said to have taken place 455 years "since the coming of Fingolfin". Further, if one interprets event four as referring to the first rising of the Moon in the West, then events two, three, four and five are all based on a single, coincident base point, the first rising of the Moon in the West and the coming of Fingolfin to Middle-earth, for the initiation of calendar time measurement.



These deductions suggest that it was Fingolfin's return which is to be linked to the beginning of calendar time. Event one adds some corroborative evidence to support this proposition. It is stated that the Mereth Aderthad took place "when twenty years of the Sun had passed" (QS p.113). It is significant that the feast was conducted by Fingolfin. Hence, it may be deduced that the beginning of calendar time originated with the arrival of Fingolfin.

If one assumes that calendar time began with the return of Fingolfin to Middle-earth and the first rising of the Moon in the West, there remains one difficult problem, the fact that time was measured in Years of the Sun, indicating, doubtless, years of the Sun measured according to its passage from East to West in the heavens. Tolkien states that time was reckoned in Years of the Sun among the Valar after the rising of the Sun in the East (QS pp.101, 103). Presumably, the Noldor must have acted accordingly. It is not impossible that time measurement had been initiated even as early as the first rising of the Moon in the West, for the Noldor could have used mechanical devices, such as the hour-glass, prior to the appearance of the Sun in the East, and would consequently have been able to fix in Years of the Sun the date of any event with respect to a base time anterior to the rising of the Sun in the East. In fact, all reconstructed chronologies which have assumed that the first rising of the Sun in the West is the base point for the beginning of year one (Bratman, Foster and Kocher) necessitate the measurement of time prior to the Sun's first appearance in the East. How does one deal, however, with the seasons, which could not only have been erratic, but even non-existent, prior to the rising of the Sun in the East, but regular after it? This question does not pose a problem. Consider: if 'x' number of days had passed as measured by a mechanical device between the first rising of the Moon in the West and the rising of the Sun in the East, a requisite number of days would have been added to bring this number to a whole number of Years of the Sun, and when this additional number of

[4] J.R.R. Tolkien: The Return of the King. George Allen & Unwin, London, [2nd. edition], 1966.

days would have elapsed, a whole number of years would have come to an end, regardless of the seasons. The seasons, as we know them, would only have followed their regular cycle after the rising of the Sun in the East. For example, suppose that in a calendar system of 365 days per year, it had been determined that a time interval equal to 402 days according to the Years of the Sun had passed between the first rising of the Moon in the West and the first rising of the Sun in the East, the second year of the First Age would have come to an end at the conclusion of an additional 332 days. We thereby avoid the assumption that the first year "probably lasted more than 365 days"⁵, by measuring the time elapsed prior to the Sun's appearance in the East by retrogression and by allowing the possibility that this time interval may have exceeded one Year of the Sun.

On the basis of the above deductions, can the date of Fingolfin's arrival be determined? It has been demonstrated⁶ that the chronology of events in The Silmarillion and Unfinished Tales must be ordered within a 'january' calendar system, such as those of the Kings' and Stewards' Reckonings, which both began on the winter solstice, roughly December 22⁷. The calendar which the Elves used in Middle-earth in the First Age most probably resembled the Calendar of Imladris (cf. RotK pp.385-386), in which the year began on yestarë, the day immediately preceding the 'month' tuilë. Tolkien translates tuilë as 'spring'. Thus if Fingolfin's calendar began on the day yestarë, he arrived in Middle-earth in the spring of year one of the First Age according to a 'january' calendar. This conclusion results from the fact that in The Silmarillion and Unfinished Tales all temporal information has been provided within a 'january' calendar. To obtain a chronology of the First Age as determined by a calendar whose year begins in the spring, one must first order the events according to a 'january' calendar, and then translate the chronology by the requisite number of days in order that Fingolfin's arrival falls on the first day (yestarë) of a 'spring' calendar⁸.



[5] R. Foster, op. cit. no.3, p.436.

[6] D. O'Brien, op. cit. no.3, pp.23-24.

[7] For a comparative study of the calendars of Middle-earth, cf. J. Houghton: 'The Calendars', Minas Tirith Evening-Star, no.9.5, 1980, pp.5-7.

The First Age: Dagor Bragollach

It is necessary to examine afresh the chronology of events bounded by the births of Húrin and Túrin. It has been widely assumed that the Dagor Bragollach took place in the year 455 (Bratman, Foster, Good, Tolley, Tyler and Kocher). This interpretation is erroneous. Since the chronology of the First Age must be reconstructed on the basis of a 'january' calendar system, then, as Foster (p.437) has indicated, the Dagor Bragollach within such a calendar must have commenced in early 456. It ended in the spring of the same year (QS pp.150-151).

Foster has removed two years from Barahir's outlawry in Dorthonion. His calculations are based on the assumption that, if the deaths of Galdor and Barahir are isochronous (also Bratman), the time interval bounded by the Dagor Bragollach and the birth of Túrin could not accommodate both the seven years from the battle to Galdor's death and the four years of Beren's outlawry⁹. Tolkien writes that Galdor died "when seven years had passed since the Fourth Battle" (QS p.160). Immediately after the account of the death of Galdor, in a closing statement to the chapter "Of the Ruin of Beleriand", Tolkien adds, concerning the death of Barahir, that "in that time also the outlaws of Dorthonion were destroyed ... and Beren son of Barahir alone escaping came hardly into Doriath" (QS p.161). It is simplest to assume that the last statement does not define the two deaths as isochronous, but rather implies temporal proximity. The events anterior to the birth of Túrin, according to my hypotheses, are reconstructed as follows:

- 442 - Birth of Húrin.
- 445 - Birth of Huor.
- 456 - (winter-spring) Dagor Bragollach.
- *458 - Sauron captures Tol Sirion.
Huor 13 years old.
- 459 - (autumn) Barahir slain in Dorthonion.

[8] R. Foster has constructed his chronology of the First Age on the assumption of a 'spring' calendar. His assignation of the birth of Nienor to the same year as the birth of Tuor is correct for a 'spring' calendar system, for she was born early in the year following the birth of Tuor according to a 'january' calendar (QS p.199; cf. UT p.73). His reconstruction, however, of the chronology of events from the Fell Winter to the death of Turin contains errors because he has attempted to construct his chronology directly from the data in The Silmarillion into a 'spring' calendar, rather than utilize a 'january' calendar initially and then translate the resulting chronology.

[9] R. Foster, op. cit. no.3, p.440.

- 463 - Galdor slain at Ethel Sirion.
- 459[late]-463[late] - Beren solitary outlaw in Dorthonion.
- 463/464 - (winter) Beren flees from Dorthonion.
- 464 - Birth of Túrin.
- [summer] Beren meets Lúthien in Doriath.

In the above reconstruction no adjustment in the length of Barahir's outlawry is required and the integrity of the temporal data in *The Silmarillion* is preserved. Tyler (pp.220-221) has exactly the same temporal interstices between and sequential distribution of events as in my reconstruction. However, because he assigns the Dagor Bragollach to 455, his chronology is displaced by one year. Thus he places Sauron's capture of Tol Sirion in 457, the death of Barahir in 458, the death of Galdor in 462, and the meeting of Beren and Lúthien in 463.

It has been previously assumed that the birth of Húrin fell in c.441 (Foster), and the birth of Huor in 442 (Bratman and Tyler) or 444 (Foster). Huor was thirteen years old when he went to do battle with the Orcs which issued forth after the loss of Tol Sirion. Sauron gained control of Tol Sirion approximately two years after the Dagor Bragollach (QS pp.155-158), that is, in 458, and the invasion southward by the Orcs probably followed in the same year. Therefore Huor was probably born in 445. Húrin was three years older than Huor (UT p.57), and therefore was born in 442.

It is stated that Beren met Lúthien in the same year in which Túrin was born (QS p.198). Tyler (pp.220-221) curiously places Túrin's birth a year before their meeting. Túrin was five years old in the year of the Evil Breath, that is, 469 (UT p.58). It is also known that his birth occurred in the first half of the year according to a 'january' calendar, for he is said to have been almost eight years old in the month of Gwaeron (UT p.62). Consequently Túrin was born in the first half of 464, and Beren met Lúthien in the summer of the same year (also Good and Tolley).



The Second Age: Númenor

There are numerous discrepancies between the chronologies of events found in 'The Line of Elros' in *Unfinished Tales* and in the Appendices in *The Lord of the Rings*.

In 'The Line of Elros', hereafter designated as LE, the birth of Silmarien is assigned to the year 521, and in 'The Tale of Years', to 548. C. Tolkien (UT

p.225, note 4) says that there is no doubt that Silmarien was older than her brother Tar-Meneldur (cf. *RotK* p.316), whose birthdate in LE is assigned to 543. He further writes that the entry in 'The Tale of Years' (hereafter designated as TY) "should have been revised but escaped notice".

In LE Tar-Telperien surrendered the sceptre of Númenor to her son Tar-Minastir in 1731, but in TY Tar-Minastir is said to have dispatched a great fleet to Middle-earth in 1700. C. Tolkien (UT p.226, note 9) points out that this discrepancy is inexplicable. It is possible that the entry in TY for the year 1700 is essentially correct. Tar-Minastir may have been sent by his mother Tar-Telperien in the capacity as captain of the fleet, just as other heirs to the throne were captains of the fleet under their fathers (e.g. Tar-Aldarion under Tar-Meneldur, Tar-Ciryatan under Tar-Minastir (UT p.221), and Tar-Calmacil under Tar-Álcarin (UT p.222)). Thus in TY one should read that Tar-Minastir was sent to Middle-earth by his mother.

In TY it is written that Tar-Atanamir received the sceptre in the year 2251. C. Tolkien (UT p.226, note 10) points out that although his death is assigned to 2221 in LE, in earlier manuscripts it had been assigned to 2251. There was some confusion between the date of his accession and the date of his death. C. Tolkien states that in TY Tar-Atanamir's death, and not his accession, should be assigned to 2251, and the rebellion and division of Númenor belongs to the reign of Tar-Atanamir's son, Tar-Ancalimon. This last statement finds confirmation in the *Akallabêth*, where it is written:

"Then Tar-Ancalimon, son of Atanamir, became King ... and in his day the people of Númenor became divided" (QS p.266).

The resulting discrepancy between the emended date for the death of Tar-Atanamir (2251) in TY and the year 2221 of his death in LE must be attributed to a later alteration in the manuscripts of LE.

In the list of Kings and Queens of Númenor in the Appendices to *LotR*, Ar-Adûnakhôr is listed as the successor of Tar-Calmacil (*RotK* p.315). Tar-Calmacil is everywhere stated to have been the eighteenth King. In the *Akallabêth* Ar-Adûnakhôr is said to have been the nineteenth King (QS p.313). In the Appendices, however, he is said to have been the twentieth King (*RotK* p.316). In LE Tar-Ardamin is listed as the nineteenth King, Ar-Adûnakhôr as the twentieth. C. Tolkien (UT p.226, note 11) points out that reference to Tar-Ardamin was inadvertently omitted in both the list of Kings and Queens of Númenor and the *Aka-*

llabêth. The date of the death of Tar-Ardamin (2899) in LE is correct.

In LE Ar-Gimilzôr is said to have died in 3177. Yet, in TY his son Tar-Palantir is said to have repented from disrespect of the Valar in 3175. C. Tolkien (UT p.227, note 15) writes that this repentance should probably be assigned to the year of his accession, but that the discrepancy between these two dates must remain unexplained.

In LE Gimilkhâd, son of Ar-Gimilzôr, is said to have been born in 3044, and to have died in 3243. In Akallabêth, however, it is stated that he died two years before his 200th birthday (QS p.269). This discrepancy can be resolved if one assumes he died two years early according to his age, that is, before his 199th birthday, and not two years numerically according to the calendar.



The Third Age

There are some discrepancies surrounding the chronology of the Third Age which shall be dealt with here.

In the Appendices to LotR, it is stated that the Easterlings attacked Gondor for the first time in the year 490 in the reign of King Ondohor [RotK pp.324, 366]. According to UT, the first attack occurred in the reign of King Rómendacil I [UT p.308].

According to TY, the emigration of the Stoors from the Angle took place c.1356 [RotK p.366]. According to the "Annals of the Kings and Rulers" it appears that the emigration is assigned to c.1409, following the invasion of Arnor by the Witch-king from Angmar [RotK pp.320-321]. Tolkien confirms the former date in his Letter no.214¹⁰.

In the Prologue to LotR, Tolkien writes:

"It was in these early days, doubtless, that the Hobbits...forgot whatever languages they had used before, and spoke ever after the Common Speech" [FotR p.13]¹¹.

Tolkien is referring here to the time when the Hobbits migrated into Eriador and came into contact with Men and Elves. Since this statement precedes the description of their migration from Bree to the Shire in the year T.A. 1601, the adoption of the Common Speech preceded this year. In Appendix F, however, Tolkien writes:

"The Hobbits of the Shire and of Bree had at this time, for probably a thousand years, adopted the Common Speech" [RotK p.408].

The phrase 'at this time' refers to the time of the War of the Ring. This last quotation would allocate the adoption of the Common Speech to c.2000 of the Third Age, which is widely at variance with the earlier date above.

According to TY, Belecthor II, Ruling Steward of Gondor, died in the year 2852 [RotK p.369], but in the "Annals of the Kings and Rulers" his death is assigned to 2872 [RotK p.319]. Also in TY, Sam Gamgee's birth is assigned to 2983 [RotK p.371], but in the Longfather-tree of his family, it is dated 2980 [RotK p.383].



[10] J.R.R. Tolkien: The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, George Allen & Unwin, London (ed. Humphrey Carpenter, with Christopher Tolkien), 1981, p.290.

[11] J.R.R. Tolkien: The Fellowship of the Ring, George Allen & Unwin, London, (2nd. edition), 1966.