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The Kindreds, Houses & Population of the Elves during the First Age

Abstract

A study of the Elves of the First Age, reviewing their social structure (the Great House or Kindred), population, and demographics. Includes detailed charts and estimates of population numbers. (Middle-earth studies.)

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Elves—Demographics, First Age; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Elves—Kinship system, First Age; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Elves—Population, First Age

The Kindreds, Houses & Population of the Elves during the First Age

Tom Loback

For the Elves, the First Age of Middle-earth was their Golden Age. The publication by Christopher Tolkien of much of his father's work on this subject, as well as his own commentary, has provided the student of Middle-earth history a quarry of information about this people. However rough hewn these foundation stones are, they may be cut and dressed to provide a clear look at the social structure of the First Age. This article gives a comprehensive view of the growth of the Elven people from their awakening early in the First Age (F.A.) until peak of their power and glory in Beleriand around 450 F.A.

The first part of this article will give a general review of the key element of Elven social structure -- the Great House or Kindred. It will be shown how and why the Great Houses were formed. The second part of the article will, by taking what is known of the Great Houses and the few clues and statements as to the actual number of Elves, give a theory showing the size of population of the Elves during the period of the F.A. The third part of this article is a chart in which the first two parts are graphically synthesized for easy reference while charting the growth of all Elven Kindreds up to 450 F.A.

When broken down and then reorganized in this form, little contradiction and a great deal less confusion is found concerning the Elves and it is hoped this clarification will aid in the study and enjoyment of the rich Elven history in the works of Tolkien.

Kindreds and Great Houses of the Elven Race

Soon after their awakening the Elves divided into three Major Kindreds: the Vanyar, the Noldor and the Teleri. This is the first and overall division of all Elves. The next two divisions occur about the same time historically and seem to cloud the issue, but in fact they delineate much of the Elven social organization. One occurs within a Kindred and is called a "familial division" and the other is called a "charismatic division" as it is not confined within a Kindred.

These two divisions occur right around the start of the Great Migration to Valinor. The familial division occurs when the Teleri population under their lord Elve grows past a certain size and part of this excess population forms a new Great House under Elve's brother Olwe. Olwe as a younger male member of the leading family has reached his majority (around 30 years old) and a new Great House of the excess population forms under him. This familial division becomes institutionalized and customary throughout the Elven Race. The second division is a charismatic division. Some of the Elves of all three Kindreds and all four Great Houses refuse the summons of the Valar to migrate to Valinor and form a new group called the Avari. It is basically the disagreement as to purpose or direction that results in the formation of the "charismatic" Elf expressing this disagreement. The Elf need not be of the ruling house. This is demonstrated in the next charismatic division of the Teleri: when upon reaching the Misty Mountains, there is a dis-

agreement among them as to go on or not. Those who choose not to go on form a House under the leadership of Lenwe who is not in the immediate family of Elwe and Olwe.

At about this time an embryonic familial House is forming under another brother of Elwe -- Elmo. Therefore, it is seen that the formation of a new House of Kindred can occur through the leading family structure or by the choice of the Elves as in the case of Lenwe. It would appear that any Elf has the freedom to choose to remain or leave a House to join a new one.

It can probably be said that when a young male of the leading family began a new House he was joined mostly by Elves near his own age. In the forming of a charismatic House a broader spectrum of generations was likely to join. It can also be said that the Noldor and Vanyar are likely to be following this same pattern.

By the time the Teleri reach Beleriand, new Houses are forming along both these lines. Olwe's following has again divided along charismatic lines with Cirdan arising as the head of the new house along the familial line.

By the next generation, Celeborn son of Galadriel son of Elmo has begun a House, as has Denethor son of Lenwe and probably Olwe (son unknown -- there's a problem if he is the father of Celeborn, as Tolkien later stated, since Galadriel would then be marrying her first cousin¹). Elwe, who had not as yet started his own family, probably has had a couple of charismatic formations under Mablung, Beleg or Daeron, as has Cirdan some of whose following went to Nevrastr (possibly under Galdor).

The charismatic divisions under Elwe show that this division need not result in a sundering of the Kindred. Beyond a certain size a House was now expected to divide and form under Elves, who were not of the leading family, nor disagreed with its direction or purpose but showed some special qualities or talents.

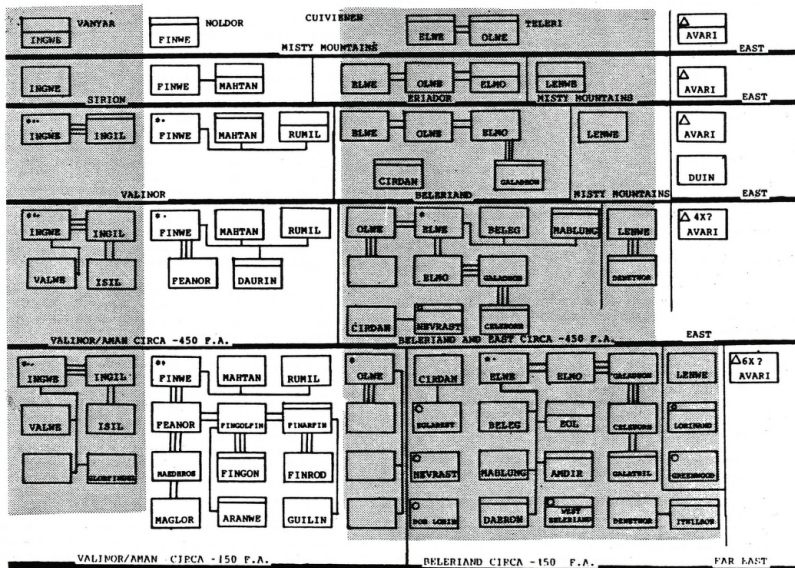
In the Kindreds of the Vanyar and the Noldor, the early divisions are much harder to trace but it is assumed they occurred in ways similar to those of the Teleri. Important Noldor such as Mahtan, the great smith, and Rumi were likely to have formed Houses following along charismatic lines because of their talents. Once the sons of Finwe begin coming of age they, and eventually their sons, are the basis for the formation of new Houses along familial lines.

The formation of a House apparently occurs only under male Elves. Females, regardless of high birth do not seem to have had more than a small personal following of retainers. When they married they became part of the house of their husband or a new house was then formed under him if he had none of his own (as in the case of Tuor and Idril). Although females

THE GROWTH OF ELVEN POPULATION IN THE FIRST AGE

key

- Great House or Kindred representing 5500-6500 Elves. Lord unknown.
- Indicates less than a complete House or Kindred.
- Great House or Kindred and the name of its Lord.
- Great House or Kindred: Lord's name unknown, location unknown.
- Great House or Kindred: Lord's name unknown, location known.
- Estimated number of Great Houses or Kindreds.
- Questionable estimate.
- Familial fealty; that of son to a father.
- Familial fealty; that of a younger brother.
- Vassal fealty; of House or Kindred to a Lord.
- King.



were known to leave their husband's house (as in the case of Feanor's wife Nerdanel), it is unlikely they formed their own House.

There are also known occasions of a new House being formed, yet retaining only one Lord (as in the case of Penlod of Gondolin²) perhaps indicating a late born son not yet at his majority or high rate of growth within the House (further indicating a limit having formed as to the acceptable number of Elves in any given House).

The chart shows the formation of the Houses of the Elves generation by generation. Since it also postulates various growth rates some of these are theoretic. The existence of others is confirmed by statements in Tolkien (i.e. Four Kindreds led by Finrod at the foundation of Nargothrond mentioned in the *Lays of Beleriand*³). It also shows leaders and likely leaders of Houses, as well as the relationship of these to one another. The heavy black horizontal lines separate the identifiable generations. Thin vertical lines indicate divisions occurring during that generation. Place names outside the boxes indicate the general location of that group during a particular time. The dates prior to the rising of the Sun are highly speculative, as time was then of a different nature. Shaded areas are a graphic device to help distinguish certain groups in the same vicinity. Dots, after a star for a king, indicate a high king.

Some confusion arises since Tolkien uses the words kindred, Kindred and House or Great House seemingly interchangeably. However, the chart clarifies this to some extent. But a hierarchal breakdown might be -- Kindred (Noldor), Great House (Fingolfin), House (Aranwe), kindred (Voronwe). This is not consistently expressed in Tolkien nor in this article where House and Kindred (aside from the Major Kindreds) express the same thing.

The rules used for the formation of a House on the chart are:

1. A new House will form when any House goes beyond a certain population size.
2. A new House will form if there is a disagreement inside a House of Major Kindred as to direction, goals, or purpose.
3. A new House may form under a talented, charismatic, or heroic Elf.
4. A new House will form under any son or brother, upon his majority, of a ruling Lord.
5. Elves of a House are free to seek their fortune by joining a new House.
6. The eldest son or eldest brother, if the son has not reached his majority, usually inherits Lordship of that House.
7. Females marrying a male of another House join his House.
8. A House may exist without a ruling Lord.
9. Any Elf described as being "of the House of _____" may be a) a member of the Lord's own House, b) a member of a vassal House, c) Lord of a vassal House serving that other Lord.

The naming of the Lords of Houses on the chart followed the following rules.

1. A male Elf described as a Lord or leader must have a House.
2. A son of an Elf Lord may have a House when he reaches his majority.
3. The sons of Kings have a House upon reaching

their majority, as may the King's brothers and their sons.

4. Important Elves may have Houses based on the following criteria: a) martial prowess, b) merit, skill or talent in a particular area of Elven culture, c) charisma or leadership qualities of a social nature (i.e. Lenwe, Cirdan).

5. If an Elf is mentioned as "the son of" (i.e. Saeros son of Ithibor) the father probably was Lord of a House.

6. Elves mentioned in magic spells may be important enough to have been leaders or Lords of a House.

The Theory of Population

Using the formation of the House as the basis for the theory of population and comparing it with later known members of Houses such as shown in "The Fall of Gondolin" it is possible to postulate a growth rate for the Houses of the Elves. By charting family trees with approximate birth rates, it seems reasonable to accept the establishment of a new generation of Elves approximately every 300 years. Although a population boom is apparent during the first generation in Valinor an average rate of two births per family seems acceptable overall. This was modified for the different branches of the Elves, the Elves in Valinor being the highest rate; the Avari being given the lowest birth rate; with all the others falling somewhere in between.

Using these assumptions combined with statements in the tales, it becomes possible to postulate a fairly complete picture of the Elven population up to 450 F.A.

It is *The Silmarillion* and "The Fall of Gondolin" which provide the key to the theory of population.

The 10,000 Elves of the Host of Turgon at the Fifth Battle was described as being armed with spears, long swords and mail (S, 190). There is no mention of archers, axemen or any other weapon type described in "The Fall of Gondolin" in *Lost Tales, Volume II* or *Unfinished Tales* (U, 46-51). Specifically it is stated in *The Silmarillion* that the phalanx of the King's guard was there (S, 192) and of his captains Glorfindel and Ecthelion commanded the flanks (S, 194) (probably leading the Elves of their own Houses). Also present was Maeglin, but it is unlikely that he brought the Elves of his House as they fought with axes (LT-2, 172), and he was initially to remain behind as regent and guard Gondolin, all but two can be eliminated on the basis of their weaponry and dress.

This gives a total of four, possibly five, Houses of Gondolin at the Fifth battle. Therefore we can assume that the average field strength of an Elven House was 2,000 to 2,500 warriors.

Using the average, it is reasonable to assume the estimated size of the entire field army of Gondolin at the time of its fall must have been around 24,000 to 30,000. Add in the detachments which were guarding the Seven Gates (approximately 1,000) and watches on the Hills (perhaps another 1,000), we get a total of 26,000 to 32,000 males of warrior age at the time of the Fall, assuming some losses at the Fifth Battle were made up of Elves of Fingon retreating with Turgon.

Since Elves were nearly immortal it is assumed nearly all adult males were included in the army, but perhaps 10% can be added to the total that were not subject to service giving a total adult male population of some 30,000 to 35,000. The birth rate of females to

males is probably about the same and adding some females as they suffered no battle losses prior to the Fall. This gives an adult female population of around 35,000 to 40,000 and an overall adult population of 65,000 to 75,000.

The children of Gondolin are much harder to calculate. If the generations of the Elves are mapped out with the sons of Finwe being the first generation Aman, Turgon is second generation Aman and Idril third, but just a child during the return to Beleriand. The third generation Aman actually overlaps the return to Beleriand. Although there aren't precise dates for the birth of the children it seems apparent that many second Aman began families after year one F.A.. Based on these and later births, it would seem a generation of Elves was something around 250 to 300 years. That would give the first generation of Gondolin matured and part of the second generation Gondolin still children at the time of the Fall.

Since the Elves don't die of natural causes there is no deduction for that between generations and it seems at least in Aman that there was a baby boom of sorts in the second generation. The average family based on known births having four or five children, but this is probably exceptional.

Taking a safe minimum average of two children, the progressive growth of total population over the generations would be second Aman plus 100%, third Aman (first Beleriand and Gondolin) F.A. 1 to 300 plus 50%, Second Gondolin, F.A. 301 to 600 plus 25%. Since Gondolin fell around F.A. 510 to 512 only two-thirds of that generation can be accepted as children -- actually somewhat less, as some had reached adulthood in that 200 years. So at the outside 3,000 to 5,000 children and 15,000 to 18,000 adults included in total adult population, this gives the total population of Gondolin at the time of the Fall as 70,000 to 80,000 Elves.

This figure with some adjustment, will give a theoretically possible average population of a House. If Turgon is given 10% of the overall as the King's Tithe and the balance divided amongst the other eleven Houses then the average is around 5,500 to 6,500 Elves in a House. This number can be used generally but must be modified specifically because newly formed Houses (like Tuor's) have less folk, while a larger House like Galador's may be on the verge of dividing and have more. But it is a working number for where we only have indications of size and strength. It may also explain why certain Lords (like Celeborn and Curufin, Amrod and Amros, Angrod and Aegnor) did not seek single realms of their own when other brothers did. They may not have had enough of their own following to strike out on their own and therefore attached themselves to a brother with a larger or similar following.

Counting backwards gives the following figures for Turgon when he left Nevrastr to occupy Gondolin -- 33,000 to 37,000 Elves. More than half were Sindar according to Tolkien (5, 126) , say 18,000 to 20,000 the rest Noldor say 15,000 to 17,000. The Noldor of Turgon were, according to the tale, a third of Fingolfin's following (ibid.). Therefore Fingolfin's remaining Noldor come to some 30,000 to 35,000. Further, Turgon could not have had less than six (three Noldor and three Sindar based on population). A good guess is eight with two of these being germinal Houses. In fact some of the names of the Houses indicate their formation after the occupation of Gondolin (i.e. the folk of

the Fountain of the South -- a place in Gondolin itself; and Rog's folk of the Hammer of Wrath, made up of many escaped Noldor thralls) (LT-2, 174).

Returning to Fingolfin, in 150 F.A., assume a House for him and for Fingon. Assuming not less of a following for Fingon (an older brother) than Turgon, then a minimum total of Houses would be five or six and one or two germinal Houses would result.

Looking at Finarfin and his children, it is known he remained behind in Aman with his tithe and other Noldor who did not follow Feanor. Finrod assumed leadership and by 150 F.A. had founded Nargothrond with four kindreds (or Houses) (LB, 72). Angrod and Aegnor founded a realm in Dorthonion with probably under two full houses. Orodreth remained under Finrod as a vassal with perhaps one House in Tol Sirion, and probably should be considered one of Finrod's four kindreds. This gives Finrod and his brothers four or five houses with two to three germinal Houses at 150 F.A., and a total population of approximately 20,000 to 33,000.

Feanor, as Finwe's eldest son, probably started out with largest Noldorian contingent. Losses during the Kin Slaying and the Second Battle probably exceeded those Fingolfin and Finrod suffered during the crossing of the Grinding Ice, therefore reducing Feanor's numbers below Fingolfin. Further, the Feanorians for various reason intermarried less with the other Noldor and the Sindar, and might have experienced a slightly slower growth rate. A good estimate for the Feanorians would be six Houses and four germinal Houses at 150 F.A. for a total population around 38,000 to 45,000.

Summing up and rounding off results in some 115,000 to 130,000 Noldor in 150 F.A.

Considering the Sindar: it is known from *Lord of the Rings* Appendix F "Of the Elves" that the Grey Elves or Sindar were more numerous, but it could hardly have been less than 20% and still be worth mentioning. Accepting this as a minimum gives a Sindar population of 130,000 to 160,000 150 F.A.. When converted into Houses this shows a slower growth rate which seems logical.

For the Vanyar, Avari, the Noldor remaining in Valinor and others, it is hard to be exact, but estimating their starting sizes (the Vanyar are described as the least numerous during the migration), and assigning probable graduated birth rates results in numbers not out of keeping with those of the Noldor and Sindar in Beleriand.

The chart shows the results of these calculations. Numbers are excluded from it, since if it comes to light that the assumption about Turgon's forces in the Fifth Battle proves wrong, the specific totals may change. However the numbers of Houses should be considered quite firm with the following reservations. Finrod, Cirdan, the Green Elves, and the Sindar in general are considered minimum estimates. The Sindar of Nevrastr and Doriath are median estimates. Eol and the Noldor in general are maximum estimates.

It is interesting to note that within this theory the seven kindreds Turgon led from the Fifth Battle in *Lays of Beleriand* (LB, 97) works out quite nicely. The Kings House of Turgon contained three units, each of which may have been a lesser kindred; Ethil-

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 ion and Glorfindel make five; while the last two may be the two may be the kindreds of Penlod. So we have five Houses with seven kindreds. Also it is mentioned in *Lays of Beleriand* that Thingol has 33 Champions (LB, 157). If these are the Lords of the Houses, then it must be remembered that the estimate for Doriath is median, or that there could be a greater number of germinal Houses than is shown. Certainly Doriath is described as being the greatest Elven realm of Beleriand and falls out that way on the chart.

In conclusion, it seems plausible that there are some 245,000 to 290,000 Elves in Beleriand in 150 F.A. This number rises to 410,000 to 480,000 in 450 F.A. Throughout Middle-earth and Valinor Elven population can be estimated as 800,000 to 1,000,000 in 450 F.A. After 450 F.A. the Great Battles with Morgoth resulted in drastic changes in Elven population worldwide. It rightfully deserves a study by itself which would set the stage for the Elves of the Second Age.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1980. (hereafter *U*) pp. 232-234. *The Silmarillion* edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977 (hereafter *S*) p. 194. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* edited by Humphrey Carpenter. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981 (hereafter *L*), p. 425.
- ² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales Part II* edited by Christopher Tolkien. London, George Allen and Unwin, 1984 (hereafter *LT-2*) p. 173.
- ³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand* edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985 (hereafter *LB*) p. 72

Seeing Williams' Work, from page 18

- _____. *Many Dimensions* (1931). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.
- _____. *The Place of the Lion* (1931). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.
- _____. *Poems of Conformity*. London: Oxford University Press, 1917.
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- _____. *The Rite of the Passion. Three Plays*. London: Oxford University Press, 1931.
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- _____. *Windows of Night*. London: Oxford University Press, [1925].
- _____. compiler. *The New Christian Year*. London: Oxford University Press, 1941.
- _____. compiler. *The Passion of Christ*. London: Oxford University Press, 1939.

Creative Uses of the OED, from page 24

- ³ The Tolkien Collection of the Memorial Library at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin contains all of the original manuscripts holographic, typed, and typeset copy for *The Hobbit* and *The*

Lord of the Rings plus an enormous amount of unpublished material related primarily to these two works. As is indicated in the text of the paper, the marginalia quote comes from Tolkien's personal galleys now in the Library. The quote is used with permission of the Tolkien estate and is copyright for it belongs to the Estate, F.R. Williamson, Executor (Oxford).

- ⁴ See also a rather elaborate (but scholarly) discussion of this and other items in T.A. Shippey's *The Road to Middle-Earth* (Houghton Mifflin, 1983), pp. 73-76.

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