
Character Biography

Amdír

By Oshun

Amdír was a Sindarin Elf who ruled as the King of Lórien in the Second Age, governing a people in its vast majority Silvan. In at least one early version of the tales of Middle-earth published in the *Unfinished Tales*, the name of Malgalad of Lórien occurs, referring to what appears to be the same individual as Amdír, the name more commonly used for the character. Christopher Tolkien explains that

Malgalad of Lórien occurs nowhere else, and is not said here to be the father of Amroth. On the other hand, Amdír father of Amroth is twice (pp. 311 and 315 above) said to have been slain in the Battle of Dagorlad, and it seems therefore that Malgalad can be simply equated with Amdír.¹

When the Calaquendi or Elves of the Light of Aman (in this case Noldor) return to Middle-earth, they find scattered Sindarin communities as far north as Lake Mithrim, the largest and best known grouping of which dwell in the highly protected settlement ruled by Thingol and Melian in Doriath. There are also the people of Círdan, the Sindarin of the coastal area of the Falas, also known as the Falathrim.

In addition to the Sindar, the returning Noldor encounter Silvan Elves, or as they are often referred to in the texts related to the First Age, Wood-elves. Apart from meeting these Sindarin, Nandorin, and Silvan Elves the Noldorin exiles learn of the existence of the ever reclusive, most remote and darkest of the Dark Elves, the Avari.

The Silvan Elves (*Tawarwaith*) were in origin Teleri, and so remoter kin of the Sindar, though even longer separated from them than the Teleri of Valinor. They were descended from those of the Teleri who, on the Great Journey, were daunted by the Misty Mountains and lingered in the Vale of Anduin, and so never reached Beleriand or the Sea. They were thus closer akin to the Nandor (otherwise called the Green-elves) of Ossiriand, who eventually crossed the mountains and came at last into Beleriand.²

We are given to understand that some of these combinations of Silvan and/or Nandorin Elves made their way to the important gathering called by Fingolfin early in the First Age which is called the

Mereth Aderthad, the Feast of Reuniting. Thither came many of the chieftains and people of Fingolfin and Finrod; and of the sons of Fëanor Maedhros and Maglor, with warriors of the eastern March; and there came also great numbers of the Grey-elves, wanderers of the woods of Beleriand and folk of the Havens, with Círdan their lord. There came even Green-elves from Ossiriand, the Land of Seven Rivers, far off under the walls of the Blue Mountains . . .³

From among these various Sindarin groupings, two leaders step in to organize kingdoms which comprise largely Silvan Elves: Amdír in woodlands of Lórien (later, of course, Lothlórien) and

Oropher in the enormous forest of Greenwood the Great (later referred to in its marred and blighted form as Mirkwood at the end of the Third Age).

Of these various shades of Elves, dark to light, Verlyn Flieger notes in her book *Splintered Light* that

The Sindar are Grey-elves, called Elves of the Twilight, and with them a new shade appears in Tolkien's spectrum. Grey is a middle shade, twilight a midpoint between daylight and dark. Like their name, the Sindar occupy the middle ground between Calaquendi and Moriquendi, between enlightenment and ignorance.⁴

One could interpret these gradations of light to dark, defined by both their relationships to one another and those who have seen the light of Aman as opposed to those deprived of that light, to reflect as well a measure of development versus a more primitive state dependent upon the distance from or closeness to the original directive of the Valar to move West. Perhaps for these reasons, Tolkien chooses to give his Wood-elven peoples Sindarin leaders. Flieger explains that

This would seem to suggest—and Tolkien's development of plot and character supports the idea—that the Sindar can go in either direction. Theirs is not just a case of seeking or rejecting the light. Theirs is a world in which even those who have not seen the light can, if they wish, be aware of it and of its power.⁵

The Noldor have seen the light of Aman, and, in fact, under the tutelage of the Valar profited on every level from their exposure to it, only to rebel. In their outrage with what seems to them to be passivity on the part of the Valar, they seek vengeance for the theft of their greatest national icons and the murder of their king. Or, perhaps in the case of some, like their Sindarin and Telerin kinsman before them, they harbor a yearning for independence that causes them to reject Aman and return across the Sea.

Why does Tolkien have Sindar assume leadership of the Silvan Elves? The Sindar originally reject the exhortation to cross the Sea, but to the degree that they know of anything of the Valar, they know it initially from their relationship with Thingol and Melian and gain a certain amount of their enlightenment and technological progress as part of that secondary exposure to the light.

Amdír, as one of two Sindarin leaders of important settlements of largely Silvan Elves, takes upon himself the responsibility to protect his people from the rising shadow of Sauron that threatens once again the free people of Middle-earth in the Second Age. The other, of course, even better known by *Lord of the Rings* aficionados is Oropher, the father of Thranduil, grandfather of Legolas.

The most significant event which involves Amdír in Tolkien's legendarium is his role in the war of the Last Alliance of Elves and Men, when he leads his army into the Battle of Dagorlad.

Michael Martinez notes in an article about the Last Alliance that Amdír was the least powerful of the Elven kings. But although he might not have had the history and might of Lindon behind him like Gil-galad, or the sheer numbers of the population of the extensive Greenwood the Great of Oropher, Amdír had an interesting collection of ethnicities.

He ruled fewer people than Oropher yet was friendly toward the Noldor, taking many refugees from Eregion into his kingdom. He must also have been on friendly terms with

the Dwarves of Khazad-dum, his neighbors and perhaps sometimes allies²⁸.

28 *The Silmarillion*, p. 288-90. "From that time war never ceased between Sauron and the Elves...." Being closest of all Elven realms to Mordor, Amdir's kingdom in Lorinand must have borne the brunt of this extended period of conflict, and the influx of Noldor and Sindar from Eregion after the fall of that Elven realm would have provided impetus to a friendship between Amdir's people and the Dwarves, though certainly not one as close as had existed between Eregion and Khazad-dum.⁸

When Amdir led a significant force of armed men into the attempt to overthrow Sauron in conjunction with the military force of the rest of the Last Alliance, given the make-up of the people in Lórien, his army would have contained significant numbers of the Silvan peoples, but also Noldorin and Sindarin refugees from Eregion.

Despite the desire of the Silvan Elves to meddle as little as might be in the affairs of the Noldor and Sindar . . . Oropher [and presumably Amdir] had the wisdom to foresee that peace would not return unless Sauron was overcome.⁷

The armies of Amdir and Oropher would have had much in common, not only a predominance of Silvan Elves, but also similarities in their armor and weapons.

He [Oropher] therefore assembled a great army of his now numerous people, and joining with the lesser army of Malgalad of Lórien he led the host of the Silvan Elves to battle. The Silvan Elves were hardy and valiant, but ill-equipped with armour or weapons in comparison with the Eldar of the West . . .⁸

Of even greater consequence was the attitude of the two forces of largely Silvan warriors led by their Sindarin kings toward the authority of the High King of the Noldor Gil-galad and his far better armed and equipped and more numerous forces out of Lindon.

. . . also they were independent, and not disposed to place themselves under the supreme command of Gil-galad. Their losses were thus more grievous than they need have been, even in that terrible war. Malgalad and more than half his following perished in the great battle of the Dagorlad, being cut off from the main host and driven into the Dead Marshes.⁹

The harrowing description of passage of Frodo and Sam through the Dead Marshes in *The Two Towers* are an unforgettable and heart-wrenching reminder of those terrible losses.

. . . grim faces and evil, and noble faces and sad. Many faces proud and fair, and weeds in their silver hair. But all foul, all rotting, all dead. A fell light is in them.' Frodo hid his eyes in his hands. 'I know not who they are; but I thought I saw there Men and Elves, and Orcs beside them.'

'Yes, yes,' said Gollum. 'All dead, all rotten. Elves and Men and Orcs. The Dead Marshes. There was a great battle long ago, yes, so they told him when Sméagol was young, when I was young before the Precious came. It was a great battle. Tall Men with long swords, and terrible Elves, and Orcses shrieking. They fought on the plain for days and months at the Black Gates. But the Marshes have grown since then, swallowed up the graves; always creeping, creeping.'¹⁰

The price of their independence from the central command structure in that war was that both Amdír and Oropher were slain in the first assault upon Mordor.

. . . rushing forward at the head of his most doughty warriors before Gil-galad had given the signal for the advance. Thranduil his son survived, but when the war ended and Sauron was slain (as it seemed) he led back home barely a third of the army that had marched to war.¹¹

Like Oropher, Amdír is survived by a son, who leads his survivors back to Lórien. Amroth succeeds Amdír as the King of Lórien. For those who might want to consider how the tale would be told if one accepts the version of Amroth as the son of Celeborn and Galadriel, the answer would be that Tolkien would have to write that story himself and attempt to bring all of the other text into congruity with it. Christopher Tolkien asserts that

There is no part of the history of Middle-earth more full of problems than the story of Galadriel and Celeborn, and it must be admitted that there are severe inconsistencies 'embedded in the traditions.'¹²

In the Index of names to the *Unfinished Tales*, Amdír is listed as "King of Lórien, slain in the Battle of Dagorlad; father of Amroth. See Malgalad."¹³

Again in the story of the love affair between Amroth and Nimrodel, Amdir is stated as the father of the last Sindarin king of Lothlórien.

Amroth was King of Lórien, after his father Amdír was slain in the Battle of Dagorlad [in the year 3434 of the Second Age]. His land had peace for many years after the defeat of Sauron. Though Sindarin in descent he lived after the manner of the Silvan Elves and housed in the tall trees of a great green mound, ever after called Cerin Amroth.¹⁴

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About the Author

Oshun's *Silmarillion*-based stories may be found on the [SWG archive](#).