
Character Biography

Haldad

By Oshun

Origins

Haldad is the first named leader of the second House of the Edain, the Haladin. He came over the Ered Luin into Beleriand from the east in the year 312 of the First Age. He fell, together with his son Haldar, fighting against an onslaught of Orcs against the Haladin in 375,¹ which culminated in the Battle of the Gelion-Ascar Stockade. Haldad is most often remembered by aficionados of Tolkien's legendarium as the father of Haleth the Hunter: "Haldad had twin children: Haleth his daughter, and Haldar his son."² Haleth survived to follow her father as Chieftain of the Haladin and became the most famous leader of their people.³

His people were referred to as the Haladin, later to be called the House of Haleth or Halethrim,⁴ to honor their favorite daughter and beloved leader. In *The Silmarillion*, when Bëor met Finrod Felagund, he described to him how the Haladin were smaller in stature than the Bëorians, presumably with the same dark hair and dark eyes. He further remarked that they were a people who "used few words, and did not love great concourse of men; and many among them delighted in solitude, wandering free in the greenwoods while the wonder of the lands of the Eldar was new upon them."⁵

The Customs and Languages of Haldad's People

One point of agreement which persists throughout all accounts of the House of Haldad (the most detailed of those are to be found in *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*) is that they were self-conscious isolationists: "The Folk of Haleth were strangers to the other Atani, speaking an alien language; and though united with them in alliance with the Eldar, they remained a people apart."⁶ They took orders from no one, not even having designated leaders until harassment by the Orcs had reached a critical stage when combined action became indispensable for their survival.⁷ We read that the "Haladin did not live under the rule of lords or many together, but each homestead was set apart and governed its own affairs, and they were slow to unite."⁸ It was under the circumstances of an all-out offensive against them that Haldad was chosen as the first Chieftain of the Haladin. After much insistence in the texts upon the value the Haladin placed upon their separation, however, we are then told in *Unfinished Tales* that they were multilingual:

Among themselves they adhered to their own language, and though of necessity they learned Sindarin for communication with the Eldar and the other Atani, many spoke it haltingly, and some of those who seldom went beyond the borders of their own woods did not use it at all.⁹

We also discover that, alone among the Atani, the Haladin maintained a special relationship with a people of a wholly different kind, the Drúedain. One of Tolkien's more interesting and unusual flights of imagination is the development of a close relationship between this "unlovely"¹⁰ people, who nonetheless were considered to be "of great service to those among whom they dwelt, and they were much sought after; though few would ever leave the land of the

Folk of Haleth."¹¹ In the time of Haleth, an "emigrant branch of the Drúedain" followed them into the Forest of Brethil at the end of the First Age.¹² They were to remain a small but noteworthy element attached to Haldad's otherwise inward-looking followers.

The status of women within a community tells us something about a people and also reveals something about their leader, in this case Haldad. It is well known that the People of Haldad had a tradition of shieldmaidens among their people, of which Haleth is only the most outstanding example:

One of the strange practices spoken of was that many of their warriors were women, though few of these went abroad to fight in the great battles. This custom was evidently ancient; for their chieftainess Haleth was a renowned Amazon with a picked bodyguard of women.¹³

Tolkien, with his fascination for all things Northern, would have been well aware of the legendry surrounding the shieldmaidens in Norse mythology and other Scandinavian sagas. One does not have to look far for various possible models for Haleth's women warriors. It is interesting, if only as an aside, that in telling the story of Haldad's people there is no attempt within Haleth's saga to tame the wild shieldmaiden, as is done with Éowyn in *The Lord of the Rings*. Haleth is rewarded for her determination with a lifelong position of leadership and respect. And she is permitted, within her narrative, to fulfill this role with wisdom and grace.

Haldad's Defense against the Orcs and his Death

Early in the third century of the Years of the Sun, Orcs began to overrun the eastern part of Thargelion where the Haladin dwelt, posing a clear threat to their survival as a people. Morgoth "sent out an Orc-raid, and passing east it escaped the leaguer, and came in stealth back over Ered Lindon by the passes of the Dwarf-road, and fell upon the Haladin in the southern woods of the land of Caranthir."¹⁴ Haldad rallied his able-bodied warriors around him and built a stockade:

. . . he gathered all the brave men that he could find, and retreated to the angle of land between Ascar and Gelion [rivers], and in the utmost corner he built a stockade across from water to water; and behind it they led all the women and children that they could save. There they were besieged, until their food was gone.¹⁵

There is no detailed description of this fortress in *The Silmarillion*. We can only extrapolate how it might have been constructed and what it must have looked like from examining what we know of real world defensive structures in a similar landscape. When one thinks of early defensive structures discovered in the British Isles, for example, one thinks of the stone and earthwork hill forts. These were often made of stone and their construction would have taken considerable time and skill. Since the Haladin are described as a woodland people, it is unlikely they engaged in stonework or complicated construction of defensive structures. (Although we do read that the early Edain, presumably including even the "less eager for lore" Haladin, "learned swiftly of the Eldar all such art and knowledge as they could receive."¹⁶) Fleeing with Orcs on one's heels, with children and the elderly, makes even rudimentary stonework seem unlikely. It might be easier to imagine the simplest of barricades, with walls constructed of upright logs and perhaps a fortified tower or two.

Penned within their makeshift fortress and running low on food, Haldad led an ill-fated sortie against the Orcs and was slain.¹⁷ Then young Haldar, rushing out "to save his father's body from their butchery, was hewn down beside him."¹⁸ With the death of Haldad, the tale turns to the account of Haleth's valiant defense of their stockade. Haleth continued to fight off the Orc troops for nearly a week, although many had lost hope and some even threw themselves into the rivers and drowned.¹⁹ "But seven days later, as the Orcs made their last assault and had already broken through the stockade, there came suddenly a music of trumpets, and Caranthir with his host came down from the north and drove the Orcs into the rivers."²⁰ Haleth's meeting with Caranthir became for many readers one of the most beloved stories of the First Age and a rare one in which that a self-determined woman is the principal actor.

As for Haldad, the relatively unsung father of this much-admired woman character (quite a switch for Tolkien), had also played a significant and honorable role in the future of his people—strong and respected, loyal to friends and stalwart against his enemies. Following his example, his people stuck to their roots. That became, for good or ill, his legacy:

They did not willingly adopt new things or customs, and retained many practices that seemed strange to the Eldar and the other Atani, with whom they had few dealings except in war. Nonetheless they were esteemed as loyal allies and redoubtable warriors, though the companies that they sent to battle beyond their borders were small. For they were and remained to their end a small people, chiefly concerned to protect their own woodlands, and they excelled in forest warfare.²¹

Works Cited

1. *The War of the Jewels, The Grey Annals.*
2. It is through the descendants of Haleth's nephew Haldan, the son of Haldar (who had sired a son before his early death), that Elrond traces his lineage back beyond Eärendil into the line of the Chieftains of the Haladin. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
3. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
4. *Unfinished Tales*, "Index."
5. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
6. *Unfinished Tales*, "The Drúedain."
7. Ibid.
8. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
9. *Unfinished Tales*, "The Drúedain."
10. Christopher Tolkien notes that "[t]o the eyes of Elves and other Men they were unlovely in looks: they were stumpy (some four foot high) but very broad, with heavy buttocks and short thick legs." Their wide faces distinguished by "deep-set eyes with heavy brows, and flat noses," may not have been considered attractive among the Edain, but they were revered for their good nature and certain magical skills and other uniquely developed attributes, including foresight. (Their use of that in Númenor is a story in itself.) *Unfinished Tales*, "The Drúedain."
11. *Unfinished Tales*, "The Drúedain."
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
15. Ibid.
16. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
17. *The Peoples of Middle-earth, The Quendi and the Eldar*, §25.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
21. *Unfinished Tales*, "The Drúedain."

About the Author

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