



*From Númenóre to the Reunited Kingdom of the  
Fourth Age: A Dúnadan Analysis of Cirya*

*Sanyasur Ciryandil*

*174th Year of the Sun of the Fourth Age*

*Minas Tirith, Twin Capital of the Reunited Kingdom*





# A Scarcely Needed Introduction to *Cirya*



The reader who happens to browse the pages of this humble document will no doubt be familiar with the board game *Cirya*, over recent years a common sight from the noblest of parlours to the lowliest of taverns and across the military classes too. There is good reason for this. In the year 160, forty years after our High King of the Reunited Kingdom, Eldarion Telcontar, ascended the throne, the now-famous *Sanyenyalon* (Q. *Law(s) of memory*) were published, listing the traditions and customs of the Land of Gift, lost for various reasons in the Kingdoms in Exile, and to be revived “*avanairë yo avanainië*” (Q. *without regret or sorrow*). Whilst it is true that some of these traditions and customs endured in Arnor, and later in Arthedain until its fall in the 1975th Year of the Third Age, most were outlawed or overlooked in the first years of Gondor during the reign of Meneldil, son of Anárion, as will be recounted in more detail below.

This treatise is a direct descendent of the aforementioned *Sanyenyalon*, and is written at the behest of the King's Scribe, Findegil. We hope we have done justice to this great honour with extensive historical research. It has been our great pleasure to reconstruct the fascinating history of the game *Cirya* and to explore how closely it is interwoven with the history of Númenóre and the Dúnedain in Middle Earth.

## *Cirya* and its relation to the Fëa

Before proceeding to explain the rules of *Cirya* – an essential, indeed, obligatory formality prior to the main body of the research – it behoves us to remark that of all the forms of entertainment enjoyed by the *Atani*, and in particular by the Dúnedain, *Cirya* is the only one to have been recorded as appearing in the treatises of the Firstborn as evidence that the Secondborn were indeed possessed of Fëa. In fact, this honour is mentioned not once but in two separate instances in the volumes preserved in Imladris concerning the **Annals of the Kings, Queens and Governors of Númenóre**.

The Eldar author, Sailarmo, was impressed, as he remarks in his texts “[...] *how a game of Cirya played between Eärendur and Lindórië did more to raise Elven estimation of the [fëa fīrimaron]* (Q. *soul of the mortals*) *than did many edifices or material accomplishments*”. Sailarmo refers here to a particularly wonderful match in which the two opponents’ playing styles, each highly



sophisticated and singular, reached, to the surprise of the Eldar witness, a zenith of an almost mystical nature, steeped in such beauty as was thought impossible for the *hroa* alone to achieve.

No written record concerning this match has survived, but neither is one needed to affirm what any well-versed *Cirya* player would know when seated before a board: that the rules of *Cirya* may be simple, but what unfolds there is never certain and always closely linked with the personality and the *will* of each player.





# The Origin of *Cirya*



*Cirya* is an intellectual game of great beauty first referenced in the reign of Tar-Telperiën (1320<sup>th</sup> to the 1731<sup>st</sup> year of the Second Age) in Númenórë. It is briefly mentioned in the appendix of a small volume entitled *Aratyalië* (Q. *noble games*) dated to the 1378<sup>th</sup> year of the Second Age, author unknown. In all probability, the copy preserved in Annúminas during the Third Age, and later in Minas Tirith, comes from the Armenelos Library itself.

There is some controversy over whether the origin of the game roughly tallies with the publication date of *Aratyalië*, since the publication date of *Aratyalië* itself raises doubts among historians. However, it is widely agreed that *Cirya* and *Aratyalië* emerged concurrently, given the way in which the name of the game appears as follows: “*Vinya sito imbi arquenië ar ciryaqueni[...]*” (Q. *a recent custom among nobles and seafarers[...]*).

Many scholars believe that, from the 14th century of the Second Age, the Númenórean people began to develop ever more intellectual pursuits. A lengthy game duration was considered desirable. Let us recall here the Númenórean proverb “*Yanta i tyalië na yanta i cuivië*” (Q. *to prolong the game is to prolong life/awakening*<sup>1</sup>) – and a drawn-out playing time was a feature doubtless possessed by the oldest known rules of *Cirya*, as present in *Aratyalië* (see **Annex I** below). *Cirya* may have been based on a rudimentary game practised by peoples of lesser standing inhabiting the western coasts of Endor, whom the mariners and traders of Númenórë always treated with astonishing superiority. Naturally, it may also have originated in response to the boredom of being aboard the numerous naval and merchant ships of the Númenórë fleet.

In any case, the fact that the game itself is called *Cirya* (Q. *boat, ship*) and that a player wins, metaphorically speaking, by establishing a maritime route, offers reasonable grounds to suppose that the game was assimilated through maritime or perhaps naval activity, and did not originate

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<sup>1</sup> The origin of this saying is unknown to many, but is attributed beyond question to the 11th century Númenórean bard, Cairendil, in her collection of poems on destiny and death. Fíriel of Númenórë referred to Cairendil as the undisputed *lómelindë* (nightingale) of Elenna when transcribing the lyricism of her ancestor in the work **Cairë wanwo** (Q. *Lays of loss*).

[...]Yanta tyalië yanta cuivië

yanta cuivië yanta tyalië

ar cuiviesse ve tyaliessë

oioanqualë na eressë.

(Q. [...]To prolong the game is to prolong life

to prolong life is to prolong the game

and in both life and the game

loneliness is the agony that has no end.)

from the island or the royal court. If this is so, the game would have evolved, initially, as a way to while away the long hours of a voyage between the Island of Elenna (primarily the port of Hyarrostar) and various points along the northeastern coastline of Endor, although it is highly likely that it reached the capital, Armenelos, via the key port of Rómenna, given the latter's proximity. This theory brushes aside its inability to explain some of the inflexions of the language employed in Aratyalië, which are reminiscent of, though do not align precisely to, Adûnaic. This remains the most widely accepted theory to date.

## **Anvanima Quenta, the alternative origin of *Cirya***

Other theories entirely refute this conclusion concerning the origin of *Cirya*. One notable example is the so-called *Anvanima Quenta* (Q. *the most beautiful story*): a pun referring to the period in which both the aforementioned volume **Aratyalië** and the game originated. Indeed, this theory would place the game's emergence in the reign not of Tar-Telperiën, but of Tar-Vanimeldë, a queen who lived almost 1,000 years after Tar-Telperiën, and was famed for her love of music, dance and games, as well as for her lack of interest in governing Númenórë, the responsibility of which she entrusted to her king consort Herucalmo.

This theory rests on two main pillars.

Firstly, that the date 1378 marked on the cover of the **Aratyalië** document refers not to the Second Age, but to the *Third Age*. According to this hypothesis, the absence of the term "*Second Age*" is owed not to the well-known Númenórean custom of recording the years following the dawn of Westernessë by number alone and dispensing with any additional marking. Rather, that its absence is explained by the hasty cataloguing of what remained of the by then defunct Annúminas library, from within the walls of its pale reflection in the nearby citadel of Fornost. This is thought to have occurred in times of war against the Witch-king of Angmar during the fateful reign of Arveleg I. Minas Tirith library records reveal that Aratyalië was archived on the orders of Arvedui in the 1970<sup>th</sup> year of the Third Age, abiding by the well-known custom of *Aranna* (Q. *royal donation*, lit. *noble gift*), fearing that the days of Arthedain would soon be over and that cultural treasures would be lost. This hypothesis is based upon the significant difference in parchment type, and the difference between the strokes on the cover of **Aratyalië** and those between its pages.

On the other hand, the inflexions observed in certain parts of the Aratyalië text, in which there seems to emerge a sound that is rather more characteristic of Adûnaic, a language absent from the formulations and texts of the nobility and the scholarly texts of the aforementioned period, likewise serve proponents of the *Anvanima Quenta* in the idea that both *Cirya* and **Aratyalië** belong to a later period, albeit almost 1,000 years before Ar-Gimilzôr was to proclaim Adûnaic the sole official language of Númenórë, outlawing the use of the Elvish languages. Studying and comparing



the different tongues establishes several important similarities with other texts written during the reign of Tar-Vanimeldë, whom we know acted as patroness of numerous treatises concerning music, dance and games in order to promote their dissemination and knowledge thereof. One such notable similarity concerns the frequent use by the **Aratyalië** author or authoress of *oska-* rather than *ohta-* (Q.war, in this case metaphorical) whose resemblance to the Adûnaic *asga* (A.war) is quite impossible to overlook. The disappearance of these features following the reign of Tar-Vanimeldë<sup>2</sup> makes it traditionally easy to date texts bearing these phonological and lexicological characteristics.

In any case, the apparent merits of this theory as to the origin of *Cirya*, the *Anvanima Quenta*, are not enough to outweigh its wide number of internal inconsistencies. This has vastly lowered its prestige in academic circles and it is therefore not taken in earnest.

## The rules of *Cirya*

Outlined below are the rules of the modern version of *Cirya*. The best-known variants as well as the features of previous rules are described in **Annex I**.

### Summary of play

Two players take turns. In each turn, players may place a new piece on an empty square in the board, or move a set of pieces under their control.

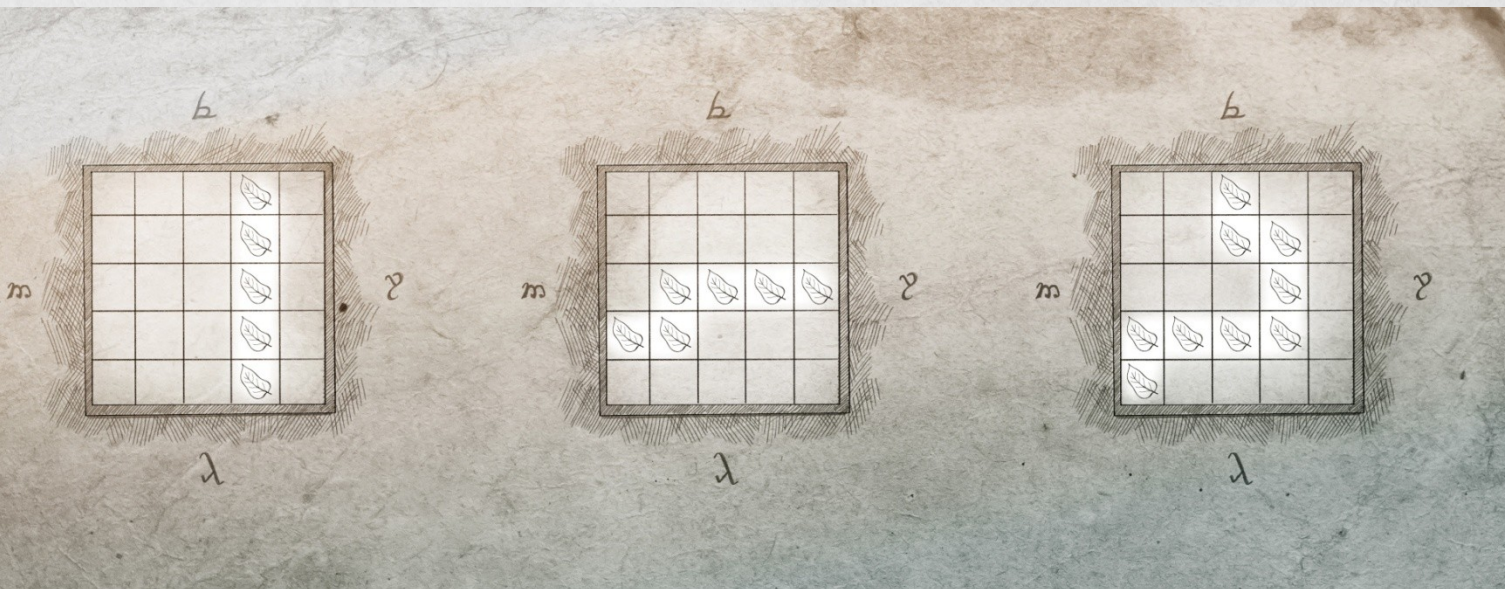


Fig. 1. Three typical examples of a winning londë.

<sup>2</sup> Tar-Vanimeldë, who reigned from the 2277<sup>th</sup> to the 2637<sup>th</sup> year of the Second Age, displays characteristics that are only seen in the transition period from the end of the Middle Adûnaic (5th to 21st centuries) to the beginning of the Classic Adûnaic (21st century to Akallabêth). This makes her reign one of the easiest for dating texts and records.



The aim is to build a *londë* (Q. *maritime route*): linking pieces in a sequence that connects two opposite sides of the grid.

The spaces, or *sati*, on the *Cirya* grid are only considered linked when appearing in a lateral sequence – not diagonally. It is not possible to build routes diagonally and pieces cannot move diagonally either.

### The end of the game

The game ends as soon as one of the players completes a *londë*, loses all their pieces, or when there are no more empty spaces left on the grid. The player who completes a *londë* is the winner. In the other cases, the winner is the player with the most flat pieces (called *ciryar*) placed on top of the entire set of pieces; in this case, a draw may be possible. Completing a *londë* is the preferred way to win; the other two ways are known as *quildëar* (Q. *calm sea*).

### The pieces and the board

There are two kinds of pieces in *Cirya*: *ciryar* (Q. *boat, ship*) and *hallacirya* (Q. *flagship* lit. *tall ship*).



Fig. 2. The two pieces played in *Cirya*: *ciryar* and *hallacirya*. Examples of this typically Númenórean style are illustrated with a five-pointed base representing the five points of Andor. The *hallacirya* possesses the same elegant outline.

*Ciryar* (Q. *boat, ship*) are usually placed flat on an empty square on the grid. *Ciryar* in play may be moved on top of one another to form sets known as *nossë* (Q. *clan, house*). Each *nossë* can be used to complete a player's route, or *londë*, with the topmost *ciryar* piece remaining under the player's control.

When one of the *ciryar* is placed on the board *vertically*, sitting on its base edge, it is called a *tampa* (Q. *block, wall*). The *tampar* control the *sat* (space) they stand on, but they do not count towards a *londë*; nor can other *ciryar* or *tampar* be placed atop them. They are useful for blocking a potential *londë* by another player.



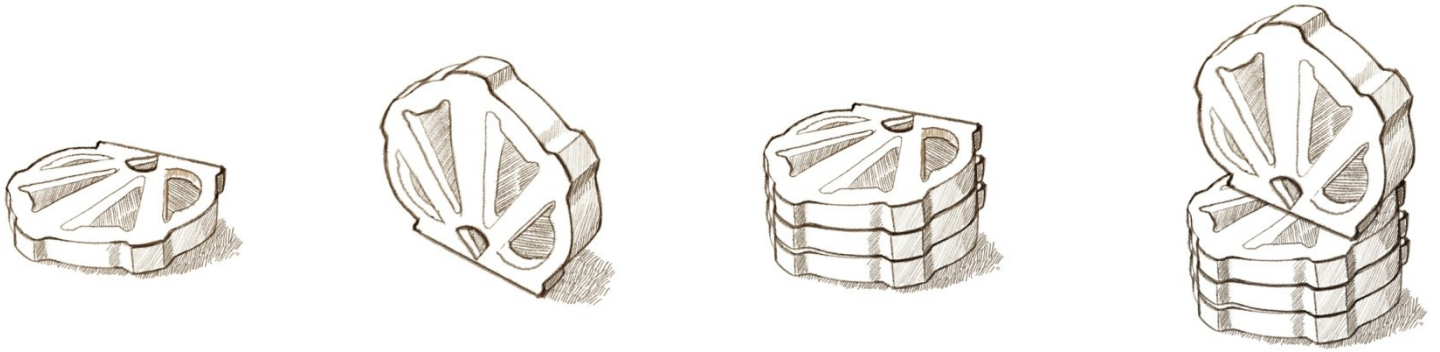


Fig. 3. An illustration depicting a design of the basic piece. It is seen here in its different forms: a *cirya*, a *tampa*, a *nossë* in a single colour, and a *nossë* with a *tampa* sitting on top.

The *hallacirya* combines the best aspects of the *ciryar* and the *tampar*. It can be used to complete a route, or *londë*, but no other pieces can be placed atop it. In addition, a *hallacirya* may move to an adjacent space occupied by a *tampa* and knock it over, thereby turning it back into a *cirya* or a normal piece, after which the *hallacirya* can then be placed on top.

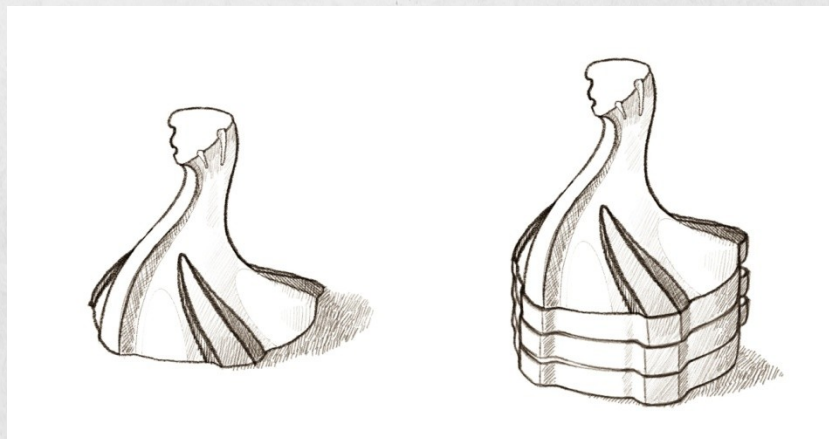


Fig. 4. A *hallacirya* and a *nossë* topped by a *hallacirya*.

The board is typically a grid of 4x4, 5x5 or 6x6 *sati*. The game is as a rule played on 5x5 grids. In this case, each player has 21 *ciryar* and one *hallacirya*.

On the first turn, it is customary for each player to place a *cirya* belonging to the other player on the board. After this, players may only play their own pieces (those available) or the *nossi* that they control<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> This common way of opening the game invites each player to make their respective first move using a *cirya* of the opposite color, before continuing the game with their own *ciryar* pieces. The origin of this custom has been lost to time, although some theories suggest that it is linked to the tastes and preferences of the *Uinendili* in times that were particularly dangerous to the faithful in Númenórë, perhaps as a way of asking an initial covert question in the game's shared code. Though plausible, this is not necessarily probable, in the author's opinion.



### Each turn in detail

On their turn, players may place a piece (*ciryar*, *tampa* or *hallaciryar*) in an empty space on the board, or move one of the sets, *nossë*, under their control.

To move a *nossë*, the player may remove one or more pieces from a *nossë* under their control (the topmost piece must belong to the player whose turn it is). The pieces thus removed from a *nossë* are then moved in a straight line, leaving *at least* one piece in each space of the movement. Both *tampar* and *hallaciryar* may block the movement of a *nossë*, as they do not allow other pieces to be placed atop them. However, a *nossë* may still be moved to a *sat* (space) before a *tampa*.

*Tampar* and *hallaciryar* follow the same rules of movement as *ciryar*. The sole exception is the *hallaciryar*, as, when moved, it may end up on top of a *tampa* and knock it over, thus taking control of the respective *nossë* beneath it.

### The custom of announcing an imminent *londë*

There is no way of knowing when the custom of warning one's opponent of an imminent *londë* arose, but it likely emerged in the very early days of *Ciryar*'s history as a way of extending a friendly match.

When a player realises that, upon making their next move, they are merely one move away from completing a *londë*, they notify their opponent of this by announcing “*londë*” or “*batân*” (see **Ciryar in Númenóre: 1400-3175 Second Age** below). It is not common practice for the player to disclose how this situation came about; the warning is sufficient. Thus, the other player has the opportunity to identify the potentially winning move and react accordingly. Failure to announce an imminent *londë*, or only realising that victory was previously within grasp having made the next move, is widely considered rather awkward. The two best-known modes of play in *Ciryar* – courtly *Ciryar* (known as *Araciryar*), and common *Ciryar* (known as *Nútaciryar*) – are explained in more detail in **Annex II**.

If the board arrangement is such that a player's fate is sealed, and defeat by *londë* is inevitable regardless of what that player does, the other player may announce this fact by proclaiming *londetúrë* (Q. *victory by route/londë, victorious route*). Rashly declaring a *londetúrë* when it does not, in fact, exist is one of the gravest insults in *Araciryar*, and many *ciryandili* are loath to take the risk.





# *Círya* in Númenóre



It is a challenge to return so far into antiquity, and the sources available to us have perhaps exaggerated certain aspects of the history of Númenóre out of conflicting motives and interests. Many of the records and chronicles, and the interpretations of them, are sourced from the private collections of Umbarian nobles. It may be suspected, then, that, disguised as documented history, some records have been manipulated with the purpose of validating and justifying later decisions.

## 1400-3102 Second Age

Nevertheless, it has been possible to salvage from the history of Númenóre at least three elements relating to *Círya*, independently corroborated by all the written testimonies. We may do so without too much risk, albeit working from fragmentary references.

Firstly, let us fasten our gaze on the origin of the term *Entulessë* (Q. *return*), used to describe the first game of *Círya* played by a newcomer. *Entulessë* was the celebrated ship that reached the Elven port of Mithlond in Endor, commanded by Véantur in the 600<sup>th</sup> year of the Second Age during the reign of Tar-Elendir. This voyage was the first time that Númenórean vessels had ploughed the waters of the Great Sea to explore the easternmost coasts. It is for this reason that centuries later the word *Entulessë* was used to indicate a person's first encounter with *Círya*, as most of these people would *return to Círya* a very short time later, entranced by the beauty and complexity of the game.

Secondly, this is the period of the ill-starred reign of Tar-Ciryatan, whose name in Adûnaic is Ar-Balkumagân, *Shipbuilder* or *Shipwright*. However, we will not speak here of the advent of the Shadow that fell over Númenóre caused by his pride, but of his great love of *Círya*, of which he was a keen player. He employed many rules and variants, and it is said that he collected hundreds of *Círya* games, many of which lay untouched. However, it is not for this reason that we speak of him in relation to *Círya*, but for his express desire to change the name of the game from its Quenya origin to Adûnaic. Under his dominion, then, *Círya* became known as *Balak* (Ad. *ship*). The other terms of the game were also adapted, but certainly less successfully, except, perhaps, the announcement of a *londë*, which became *batân* (Ad. *path*). *Círya* and *Balak* coexisted from that point forward, but only until the Downfall, as we shall see in the section on Kingdoms in Exile. The



choice to use one or other name usually signified allegiance or personal taste, while the game itself remained detached from its different denominations.

Eventually, at some point between the 17th and 19th centuries, the expression *Tin v'inga Meneltarmassë* (Q. *silence as on the summit of Meneltarma*) began to circulate, referring to the point of highest tension between two players of *Cirya*, when one's next move was preceded by moments of absolute concentration. This, in the most extreme cases, could last for hours and projected a silence of such enthralling wonder that Númenóreans compared it to the powerful experience of climbing and conquering the summit of Mount Meneltarma.

## 3102 Second Age - Akallabêth

We have been able to pinpoint a second phase in the evolution and popularity of *Cirya*, commencing in the reign of Ar-Gimilzôr when he ascended the throne in 3102. This is rooted in the different laws that were established during this time to ban the use of Elven languages, most particularly Quenya, as well as in the tireless persecution of the loyal *Vorondon*, sneeringly referred to as *Nimruzîrim* (Ad. *elf-friend*). No tradition escaped unscathed. Not only was Adûnaic made mandatory and the *eldalambi* banished from the social and everyday life of the Númenóreans, but any custom, ritual, technique or text of Elven descent was suppressed or dramatically altered. For Ar-Gimilzôr, such Elven meddling was a poison with which the Eldar spies, in the service of the Valar, had injected the Númenórean culture and people. This Elven purge, aggressively driven by the king in his declaration that it was the duty of all Númenóreans to *Azgarâ yôzî=dulgî=nimriyë* (Ad. *wage war upon the dark Elven gifts*) – referring to anything of apparent benefit that had come from contact with the Elves – spawned an obsessive quest for Númenórean purity.

In this context, with *Cirya* considered a Númenórean tradition, the game itself was not persecuted. However, its original vocabulary was. The chapter on the *Uinendili* below details the repercussions of this – in relation to *Cirya* – on the Númenórean faction that opposed the precept of ill will and distrust against the Eldar and the Valar.

The boards, pieces, both *ciryar* and *hallacirya* (now exclusively called *balak pl. balik* and *bârbalak*), and the numerous stylistic elements and accessories associated with the game, such as runes and boxes, were drastically redesigned to suit courtly tastes. The fluid lines became more angular; the motifs lost their Elven quality and became more *imperial*. The scope of the game generally increased. The boards, regardless of the number of *sati*, virtually doubled in size in order to accommodate, in turn, larger and, more specifically, taller pieces. From flat *ciryar*, we begin to see rather larger and squatter *balik*. The *bârbalik*, being the key pieces, likewise grew to such a height that it was impossible to fit them on top of an *azra-zâyan* (Ad. *maritime region*, equivalent to the previous *nossë*) formed of more than six *balik*.



Since the rules of *Balak* remained essentially the same, save for a few variants that we shall explore below in the section on Ar-Phârazon, the game continued to evolve normally. The simple boards and pieces used for more mundane purposes encountered very few problems, and for many unyielding *Vorondon* they were a way of escaping the fashion imposed upon them. There is an unsigned letter dated to the 3155<sup>th</sup> year of the Second Age from a supposedly faithful Númenórean to a friend, also unnamed, containing the following fragment: “*It would seem there is an obsession in the capital for carving ever larger and taller Ciryā boards and pieces. It is a pity in truth, for it causes the game itself to grow ever smaller and poorer*”.

### **During Ar-Phârazon**

The reign of Ar-Phârazon Tar-Calion is a grim memory for the descendants of the Númenóreans. A terror of the End of Days coupled with the excessive pridefulness that gripped the vast majority of the Númenórean people allowed a shadow to creep in and take hold of the hearts of the people of Elenna. This opened the door for Sauron Gorthaur to feign his captivity, all the while plying his insidious arts to bring about the ruin of the Island of Elenna and make a mockery of the Valar.

In the time of Tar-Calion, *Ciryā* played a symbolic role in the events that later unfolded, whose effects rippled far beyond the Akallabêth. Firstly, Tar-Calion was a *Ciryā* player of immeasurable skill. It was said that his approach was particularly aggressive, seeking to dominate the board very quickly and link *batân* after *batân* against his opponent. He was not averse to playing his *hallaciryā* the moment he glimpsed the opportunity, for he saw himself represented in this very piece and did not consider it a sign of weakness. For this reason, the early use of the *hallaciryā* was a feature of most of the *Ciryā* matches played against the king, although players tended to wait for Tar-Calion to play his *hallaciryā* first.

Among the few disagreements between Tar-Calion and Sauron Gorthaur in the years leading up to the Atalantë, *Ciryā* was one bone of contention. We know that Sauron Gorthaur disliked the game, viewing it as an unproductive pastime that all too often hindered the rituals of dark devotion, or hampered preparations for the grand fleet that was to attack the coasts of Valinorë. Such was his scorn that he refused to play even a single game, a fact which, in this humble historian's opinion, accounts for its continued existence in Arnorian tradition in exile, and for our continued enjoyment of the game to this day. Later in this text, we hope to be able to provide some grounds to support this conjecture.





Fig. 5. This remarkable illustration, part of the *Aranna of Arvedui*, is thought to have been brought, along with a number of other treasures and heirlooms, aboard one of the vessels commanded by Elendil and his children, Isildur and Anárion, as they fled the Akallabêth. The player represented in the illustration remains a mystery, but the board reveals that victory for the white pieces is imminent; the player is showcasing a well-known *londetúre* tactic used when teaching the game, which has survived to this day.

Secondly, Tar-Calion brought into fashion a kind of victory *londë*, which joined *east* and *west* on the board. Until that point, the north-south and east-west *londi* were considered equal in players' eyes, and neither type of *londë* was looked upon as better or preferable. However, in the reign of Tar-Calion it became customary to apply a special rule called *Andúnë pella* (Q. *beyond the west*) in which a *londë* was permitted only if it linked the east and west sides of the board. These were seafaring times in which sailing to the west, beyond sight of Númenóre, began to grow into a rather widespread obsession, and the rule did much to satisfy, in leisure times too, the yearning to set course for Tol Eressëa and, farther still, to Valinóre.

Those dubbed the Faithful chose not to recognise this variant of *Círya*. If the other player insisted, they tended to cut short the game and seek alternative entertainment that would cause them less unease. In any case, *Círya* played in this fashion was even then regarded as an insult to the beauty



of the game: “*Círya as Andúnë pella na tyalië vanimalóra*” (Q. *Círya with (the rule of) Andúnë pella is a game devoid of beauty*). Even among those loyal to Tar-Calion, it was accepted that to limit the *londi* was likewise to limit the challenge and the depth of *Círya*, although few dared to voice this opinion in the presence of the king.

### The defence of Tar-Míriel

There is a legend to which few give much credence, but I take the liberty of including it in this study if only to prevent it from fading into oblivion in times to come. It tells of queen Tar-Míriel who so loathed her spouse, Tar-Calion, that she spurned his company at all times. The latter repeatedly insisted on summoning her, but was rebuffed at every turn. As queen and as direct descendent of the line of Elros Tar-Minyatur, by way of her father Tar-Palantir, Tar-Míriel was not subject to Tar-Calion's command and it is believed that she was the only person to defy his ban on visiting the Meneltarma. This prompted Tar-Calion to cast threats of gruesome executions in the temple that Sauron Gorthaur had ordered be built in the beautiful city of Armenelos, should Tar-Míriel continue to refuse his summons. And so Tar-Míriel accepted, but on one condition: that they play a game of *Círya otso* (7x7 *sati*) – with the winner nevermore beholden to the other. The story goes that Tar-Calion immediately accepted the challenge, sure of his victory. Tar-Míriel scorned the rule of *Andúnë pella*, and played with white pieces and an exquisite *hallacirya* in the shape of Nimloth. Ar-Phârazon played with black, jet-like pieces and a *hallacirya* resembling a marine fortress, similar to that which would later be called Alcarondas, *the castle on the sea*, the flagship of the Ar-Phârazon naval force.



Fig. 6. Interpretation of what a *hallacirya* representing Nimloth might have looked like in the age of Númenóre, doubtless a wooden carving of remarkable complexity, although other materials such as marble or glass could have been used.

The legend continues that these two powerful forces waged battle on this *Círya* board, and that every move was an expression of strong will. Those privy daily to the game as it wore on, for there was no end to it, said afterwards that it was to witness, on the one hand, madness and control, and, on the other, music and peace, but they dared not say more lest they should be branded traitors. It



is said that Tar-Míriel kept Tar-Calion occupied day after day, distracting him from his objective of taking the Undying Lands by force, such was her *fëa* and such her husband's zeal for *Cirya*, until Sauron Gorthaur, fearing that his plans were being thrown into disarray, exhorted Tar-Calion to fell the White Tree, Nimloth the Beautiful. And so it was that the scion of Celeborn, scion of Galathilion, scion of Telperion of Yavanna, was felled, and its wood set alight, belching black smoke in the dark temple of Sauron Gorthaur. And when, after this, Tar-Calion returned to seek out Tar-Míriel in the *Cirya* games parlour, he found her chair empty, and there on the board, the queen's *hallacirya*, shaped like Nimloth, blackened and corrupted in the very place in the centre of the board where it had shone so brightly and majestically the day before. An awful silence fell over Tar-Calion, and he quit the room and never again dared to request the presence of Tar-Míriel – nor indeed ever saw her again while they walked among mortals.



Fig. 7. “The defence of Tar-Míriel”: One of very few illustrations supposedly of Númenórean origin. It depicts Tar-Calion, eyes fixed intently on Tar-Míriel, trying, perhaps, to guess the strategy behind her latest move, while Tar-Míriel, ignoring the board, holds her husband's gaze and attempts to keep him in a duel reaching far beyond the game of *Cirya* itself. The anonymous artist depicts a 7x7 sati and a complicated arrangement on the board.




## The faithful, or *Uinendili*

It will surprise the reader to see the term *Uinendili* (Q. *friends of Uinen*) used instead of *Elendili* (Q. *friends of the Elves*) or *Vorondon* (Q. *the faithful*). Indeed, in the time of Tar-Ancalimon, son of Tar-Atanamir, a rift began to appear among the people of Númenórë: between those who thought it reasonable to sail westward without restriction, to set foot on the Blessed Realm and enjoy immortality; and those who respected the Ban of the Valar and maintained a close friendship with the Elves, especially in Pelargir.

It is not clear whether the terms *Elendili* and *Vorondon* were in common usage among the Elves themselves during the reign of Tar-Ancalimon, immediately following the visit paid by the Valar ambassadors to his father Tar-Atanamir. Nonetheless, later, in the reigns of Tar-Telenmaitë and Tar-Vanimeldë, this term was used openly in an attempt by some factions to speak out against this bleak new direction and to try to garner greater support, particularly among the powerful Númenórean fleet. This had sad consequences, for there were certain reprisals, mild to start with, but becoming harsher as time went on. The term *hecili* (Q. *outlawed*) appears in numerous official sources from the reign of Tar-Telenmaitë, to refer to certain groups opposing the official doctrine of hostility against the Ban of the Valar.

In consequence, the *Elendili* spoke less openly about themselves, in dread of accusations of high treason, and *Cirya*, not by accident, went on to play a very significant role in keeping their identity and beliefs hidden. In the reign of Tar-Vanimeldë, the *Elendili* or *Vorondon* are known to have begun referring to themselves as *Uinendili* when they played *Cirya*. Given that *Cirya* was a highly esteemed pastime in Númenórean society, it was an opportunity to connect as allies and kindred spirits during the many hours of play, and exchange information without arousing suspicion.

Uinen, Lady of the Sea, Maia of the Vala Ulmo, and wife of Ossë, who raised the island of Númenórë, was worshipped by Númenórean mariners and especially by the Guild of Venturers, which was based in Tol Uinen in the Bay of Rómenna. These seamen believed that Uinen could calm Ossë and allow the Númenórean sailors to plough in peace the boundless sea that surrounds the the island.

Over time, players of *Cirya* who invoked the name Uinen at the start of a game to ask for protection or inspiration, or who mentioned their connection to the Uinendili, were in fact declaring their allegiance to a faction that could only profess itself in private. Other common, more subtle customs involved sketching the tengwa **Vala**  either on the board, in the air, or by holding a piece between the fingers. This symbolised the person's conformity with the Ban of the Valar, and was usually



effected in the first few turns of the game before it began to demand the players' full and focused attention.

Some histories go even further, suggesting that some games of *Cirya* played among the *Uinendili* were in fact covert conversations, and that every *cirya* positioned in a certain way and every movement of a *nossë* constituted phrases and codes that would be indecipherable to the casual observer. It is believed that every *batân* represented a question. Such is the depth of *Cirya* and the mastery with which the Númenóreans played that it offered them the opportunity to hold conversations with their pieces as the game unfolded.



Fig. 8. A complete set of white *ciryar* pieces, typically Númenórean in style.

*Cirya* was one of the many traditions and customs that enjoyed a greater liberty in Númenórean society in Middle Earth. There was less persecution and less vigilance of it, and the proportion of *king's men* opposing the faithful, or those of a more neutral stance, were in the clear minority.



# *Cirya* in the kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor



The Akallabêth was a profound crisis in the identity of those Dúnedain who survived the Downfall. Many of the symbols and customs of Númenórë represented both nostalgia and shame in equal measure. In the complex process of selecting which elements of the culture of Elenna to preserve and which to denounce, *Cirya* was subjected to harsh criticism.

## *Cirya* after the Akallabêth

Elendil himself realised that he did not have a clear position on the subject, and his two sons, Anárion and Isildur, founders of the kingdoms of Gondor to the south and Arnor to the north, took opposing stances. In Gondor, Anárion forbade the game, while Isildur protected it in Arnor. This difference of opinion persisted for centuries, although it gradually lost its symbolism as Gondor grew in power and magnificence and Arnor succumbed to the Witch-king Angmar following its division into three smaller kingdoms, Arthedain, Cardolan and Rhudaur.

Two customs associated with *Cirya* emerged in the first few years of Arnor, and can only be attributed to a period following the collapse of Andúnië.

Firstly, the custom of sweeping all pieces off the board with one hand. This represented an attack of rage in the player, resulting from the game taking, for them, an unfortunate path, and was ultimately believed to be a bad omen. The gesture was held by the Dúnedain to be a reincarnation of the Akallabêth and prompted great disquiet. Oftentimes, Dúnedain and Dunlendings would confront one another beyond the board if such a gesture of poor taste was made by the latter – often intentionally so, in this author's opinion.

Secondly, the abrupt abandonment of the game's Adûnaic name, *Balak*. Not because Adûnaic, a language then perceived as the language of the exiled Dúnedain, was reviled, but because the word spelled in reverse produced the word *Kalab* (Ad. *to sink, sinking*). Outside of *Cirya*, this coincidence was accepted as a necessary reminder of the power and defeat of Númenórë. Within the game, however, it was decided to revert to the original Quenya word, although some other terms were used interchangeably in Quenya or Adûnaic – with a certain preference for *batân* over *londë*.



In addition, the Late Númenórean custom of marking the western side, Númen, on the *Cirya* board faded. This side of the board no longer featured any special markings, or remained bare in consideration of certain superstitions.

## Kingdoms in Exile: Arnor and Gondor

Arnor and Gondor followed very different paths after the dawn of the Third Age of the Sun. These two great fraternal kingdoms began to diverge ever more markedly in law, economy, society and connexions with other nearby peoples. There are still Dúnedain living today who remember the time when only Gondor remained standing, with Arnor a distant, bitter memory sweetened only by the splendour of the surviving kingdom, whose capital lay in Minas Tirith, even when the war with Mordor and its allies sorely tested the empire.

The Reunited Kingdom successfully brought back together many elements from Arnor and Gondor that had been common over the first few centuries of the Third Age, but, if we are to be honest, the game *Cirya* was not among them, for Arnor and Gondor took opposing paths from the outset.

After the death of his father Anárion, and tutored by Isildur, Meneldil came to the throne in Gondor in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Third Age. A fresh start for Gondor was proposed, leaving the Númenórean legacy behind without a backward glance. The shame felt at any reminder of Númenóre bred plentiful laws and customs, and sparked a spirit of rebirth that proclaimed that a kingdom could rise to glory without succumbing to pride. In the eyes of Meneldil and his closest followers, this clean slate required the rejection of certain symbols and elements closely associated with Númenórean pride or Akallabêth, and *Cirya* found itself caught up in this mood of reproof. It was banned in the second *Avaquetesteli* (Q. *prohibitions of hope*) in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the Third Age.

This ban did not bring about the sudden disappearance of the game from homes and taverns far from the court, where the rule was more strictly observed. The ban on *Cirya* was merely one of many in a long list that ranged from certain ceremonies to architectural motifs depicting *particularly* Númenórean techniques or aesthetics<sup>4</sup>. These second *Avaquetesteli*, unlike the first, were less coercive in nature, but they certainly served to curb certain customs, and *Cirya* was gradually abandoned in favour of other recreational activities and intellectual pursuits. The last reliable trace of the game of *Cirya* in Gondor dates back to the 154<sup>th</sup> year of the Third Age, still during the reign of Meneldil.

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4 There is a magnificent study by the Gondorian historian of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Artandil, concerning the special status reserved for Minas Anor, Osgiliath and most importantly Minas Ithil, built in accordance with Númenórean tastes and techniques, and which saw very few architectural modifications despite the various *Avaquetesteli*.



In Arnor, however, the memory of Númenóre lived on in a more conciliatory frame of mind<sup>5</sup>. Having settled into the first few years of the Third Age, Vandalil, king of Arnor, as well as his son, Eldacar, reigned with an identity of their own, but without shunning references to Andor. In fact, Eldacar defended his right to reign until his death, arguing that it respected the custom of Númenóre<sup>6</sup>.

*Cirya* in Arnor, contrary to Gondor, was not obliged to contend with the qualms or objections of the court or the people. Doubtless, the knowledge that Sauron Gorthaur had detested the game, and had refused to play even one match, so the *Uinendili* said, was motivation enough to preserve and promote *Cirya* as one of the few stainless legacies to have survived the Akallabêth.

As the custom of playing endured, over time a number of new rules and particularly Arnorian expressions were incorporated into the game. These were respected to a greater or lesser extent in the successive kingdoms of Arthedain and Cardolan. For example, winning with a *londë* of nine nossi was said to bring good fortune to both players for it represented the nine ships of Elendil, Isildur and Anárion, who escaped the Akallabêth with the aid of the Valar. It is known as *turulissë* (Q. *sweet defeat*), but today this reference has been lost and in its stead we have the modern term *turulissë* – in honour of the Fellowship of the Ring and its nine members, in a curious transfiguration of the meaning of word describing the original move.

## **The Rangers of Ithilien under the command of Faramir; the exception of *Cirya* in Gondor; and a special contribution**

It is a well-known fact that one of the most surprising and celebrated wedding presents received by our Prince and Princess of Ithilien, the Lord and Lady of Eryn Arnor, Faramir and Éowyn, on the day of their union was a full set of *Cirya*. King Elessar Telcontar bestowed upon them a rare gem that had long since disappeared from the Kingdom of Gondor.

The black pieces, of glittering black obsidian, included a *hallacirya* with the head and mane of a proud, fiery mare, representing Éowyn and her indomitable Rohirrim people. The white pieces, of white opal with subtle tones of aquamarine, included a *hallacirya* in a faithful reflection of Nimloth

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5 This attitude of greater acceptance and the continuity of Númenóre in Arnor can be interpreted in two very plausible ways: overcompensation due to lineage and history, as self-affirmation against the greater economic and military power of Gondor; and a second, kinder interpretation of the history of Númenóre – elevating the *faithful* as equal, or even greater, representatives of the culture, whenever the idea of exile became outdated.

6 This is true only in part, and has been the subject of countless debates among scholars. It is indeed true that the last twelve kings and queens of Númenóre, from Tar-Atanamir to Tar-Calion, reigned until their death. When we speak of *Númenórean custom*, we typically refer to the first twelve governors, who voluntarily ceded the scepter to their successor, having reached an advanced age and felt that the time was come.



the White, the White Tree of Númenórë. The board, a 9x9 *sati*, was made of an exotic and unknown wood, radiating soft golden tones and adorned with exquisite filigree, doubtless an Elven design.

The Lady Éowyn at once asked Elessar to teach them how to play, though the wedding toasts were still in progress and the banquet for the newlyweds was far from over. King Elessar merely smiled and, looking at Faramir, whose eyes were misted with emotion, told the Princess of Rohan and Ithilien, that he was but an apprentice and indeed it was he who was waiting for a lesson from Prince Faramir.

Witnesses to this moment recounted much later how Prince Faramir reached out his hand and embraced King Elessar, thanking him with whispered words that Éowyn alone was able to hear.

Here in the present day, we know why this gift prompted such a reaction in Prince Faramir. In this treatise, it is certainly appropriate to pay tribute to one of the most important contributions to the game's development – which we owe to the valiant Rangers of Ithilien at the close of the Third Age. For, it was while they guarded the path to the Anduin and harried the Enemy forces that the board underwent a necessary simplification.

Prince Faramir would have learned of the existence of the game *Cirya* during his training at the court of Minas Tirith. The Minas Tirith Library, among its many papers and tomes, would have given him, perhaps entirely fortuitously, access to information about the game outlawed so long before by King Meneldil of Gondor.

His erudite character and sense of connexion with the history of Númenórë would certainly have enabled Prince Faramir to see in *Cirya* a nostalgic window into Elenna, and he guarded the rules of the game in secret and tucked them away in his memory. Many years later, in the company of the Rangers of Ithilien, he passed on this knowledge to the men and women with whom he shared day and night the heavy burden of vigilance and attack. He proposed replacing the unwieldy board – made of wood, leather or parchment – with a single central piece, today known as the **Sat of Ithilien**. It was large enough to accommodate a *cirya* or a *nossë*, and for players to be able to visualise the position of all the remaining *sati* on the board, which would gradually emerge as the *ciryar* and *hallaciryar* were set down.

In this way, the Rangers of Ithilien were able, in rare moments of rest or leave, to snatch a few games of *Cirya* on almost any improvised surface, since all they needed was a full set of *Cirya* pieces and a flat surface for the central *sat* of an imaginary board of odd-numbered *sati*<sup>7</sup>.

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7 It is likely that the most common imaginary board for these matches was a simple 5x5 *sati* so as to limit the game's duration. We know, too, that the most commonly used material for this central piece was a humble chalk board.



There are no earlier records to suggest a similar object to the Ithilien *sat* was ever used in Númenóre or Arnor to represent a board that was invisible in the early stages of the game. However, the idea that there were similar occurrences in the past is not entirely far-fetched.

In any case, the introduction of this piece saw the return of *Cirya* to Gondor almost an age later now accompanied by a new trend or fashion: to include an Ithilien *sat* in the making of the game; some of which rival the *hallaciryar* themselves in detail and craftsmanship.

For King Elessar to furnish the Prince and Princess of Ithilien with such a gift, he must have known of this, and been aware of the Arnorian tradition of looking favourably on *Cirya*. Prince Faramir agreed to teach the Lady Éowyn and his lord, King Elessar, the game in all its depth, but, it is said, on one simple condition: that they three should meet one evening outside the walled city of Minas Tirith, on the hill at Amon Dîn, with the land of Ithilien to the east bathed in the last light of the day.

We have the remarkable testimony of Éowyn herself in a letter to her brother Éomer, in which she expresses her emotion at the memory of it:

*“My dear Brother, this week our King Elessar met with my Prince Faramir and I: we went to the hill which the Dúnedain call Amon Dîn, on the edge of the Ered Nimrais, which offers a marvellous view of Ithilien to the east and the desolate Wetwang to the north. We walked in comfortable clothing, suitable for the journey, and seated ourselves beneath an enormous holm oak. My Lord Faramir explained how he had learned of the game when he was just a boy and how it had served him well in building an understanding of martial tactics, with which he later trained his company of Rangers during the long years of service in the border province of Ithilien, close to the Enemy. The game is simply delightful and I should love for all of Rohan to know it; perhaps when we visit there next Spring. I find, moreover, that I have a knack for playing in a style characterised by subterfuge and surprise attacks.*

*There was a moment, as twilight descended upon us three, and it was my turn to look on as King Elessar and Prince Faramir manoeuvred artfully against one another, that I became witness to an astonishing sight. I was leaning against the holm oak that sheltered us, looking down upon the other two, who sat cross-legged with their dun-coloured capes wrapped around them, their gaze fixed intently on the imaginary tablet of my Lord Faramir's travel *sat* and the humble pieces that he had brought with him. In my vision, and in their silence, they suddenly appeared transformed. On one side, I recognised he who had been known as Strider in other times, and whom I knew as Aragorn, and opposite him, a learned soldier, leader of the faithful Rangers of Ithilien. Myself, I saw as Éowyn, shieldmaiden of Rohan and niece to Morwen of Lossarnach, and this enchantment*



*lasted a few moments more until the last ray of sunlight broke the spell and they became themselves once more, King Elessar and Prince Faramir, and I, the Princess of Rohan, of Ithilien, and of Eryn Arnem.*”

It is easy to infer that the Lady Éowyn’s reference to the travel *sat* is what later came to be known as the aforementioned *sat* of Ithilien.



Fig. 9. Two excellent examples of the Ithilien *sat*. On the left, in silver; on the right, a cruder version carved from wood, but perhaps more faithfully inspired.

Today there is a certain fondness for *Cirya* in Rohan, in one of the first examples of the game played among peoples that are not strictly Dúnedain. Most likely, this springs from the love of the game cultivated by Éowyn, our own Princess of Ithilien.

## ***Cirya* in the Reunited Kingdom**

In the present day, now that the game of *Cirya* has been fully reinstated in the Reunited Kingdom, it is enjoyed not only within our vast frontiers but is also observed in the homes and public spaces of other kingdoms and peoples. This is, in part, owed to efforts to build lasting peace, but it is also the fruit of commercial and cultural exchange. The author of this treatise was privy, on a diplomatic mission, to an exchange of gifts among several princes of Harad, one of which was a distinguished game of *Cirya* with pieces carved from black and white marble, each set with *Mûmakil* (H. *oliphants*) as *hallaciryar*.



Today, there is a notable preference for Aracirya, the *lempë* or *enquë* boards (5x5 and 6x6 *sati*), and a great deal of liberty is taken in the design of the *hallaciryar*. The most typically seen figures include the svelte keel of a ship, the White Tree, a horse's head and a simple tower.

Every year, a number of special tournaments are held, played always in the Aracirya mode. Of these, the *Omentië Ciryandilion* (Q. *gathering of Cirya friends*) is particularly worthy of note for its affluence and prestige. Having taken place for twenty-nine years almost without interruption, it is hosted alternately between the twin capitals: Minas Tirith and the rebuilt Annúminas in the north. Admission is open to all, with no heed paid to origin, and a grand prize is awarded to both finalists. In this tournament, *Cirya enquë* is favoured over *Cirya lempë*, and both players are awarded the title of *Ciryaher* (Q. *ship master*) regardless of who takes the final victory.

The future of *Cirya* in Middle Earth certainly shines as brightly as the fair Vingilótë that pierces the heavens.



Fig. 10. Two hallaciryar: Nimloth and Meara



# Annex I *Cirya*: Special rules, variants and archaic forms



One would need to devote an entire treatise solely to the discussion of all the different rules and variants that *Cirya* has inspired over its thousands of years of history. Here we shall list those that offer, in the author's judgement, a relevant historical or cultural insight.

## ***Tyalië úmetta* or *Tyalië oiala* (Q. *game without end*)**

This rule, typical of the people of Elenna, where a game could be enjoyed for hours or days, consisted of greeting a victorious *londë* by extending the playing board by one row and one column, thus turning a 5x5 *sati* grid into a 6x6 *sati* grid, and so forth. It is customarily the defeated player who has the right to choose which side of the board to increase by one row of empty *sati*, leaving the winning player to choose a row from between the two remaining options.

In the spirit of this rule, players commenced with a small board, normally 5x5 *sati*, continued with 6x6 *sati*, then progressed to 7x7 *sati*, 8x8 *sati*, and, on the rarest of occasions, 9x9 *sati*.

To achieve this, *Cirya* boards were usually at least 9x9 *sati* in order to allow the game, by virtue of the evolving board, to grow in any direction from 5x5 *sati* to 7x7 *sati*. Henceforth it was accepted that freedom to keep enlarging the board was limited more by previous choices and by what remained available of the physical board.

Winning a *londë* every time the grid is extended in a *Tyalië úmetta* is considered proof of vastly superior skill compared to the other player. This participant is then at liberty to decline the offer to extend the board at any time without prejudice.

## **Number of *hallaciryar***

The *hallaciryar* is indubitably the preeminent piece on a *Cirya* board in might and influence. For this reason, some players avoid it on a 5x5 *sati* board, deeming it disproportionately powerful. Similarly, it is not uncommon to observe a preference for two *hallaciryar* to be permitted per player on a 7x7 *sati* board or larger.



## The Imladris variant

Also known in the age of the Isle of Elenna as the *virtue of Tol Eressëa* or *tyalië eldaron* (Q. *the game of the Elves*) in what appears to be a shared motif in Firstborn efforts to adopt *Cirya*. It represents a condition of the game in which a *Cirya* match may be declared concluded, without a *londë* having been achieved. In point of fact, both in the time of Elrond Half-elven during his reign in Imladris, and, it would seem, in other, earlier ages, the Elves dismissed the *londë* as a legitimate way to close a match. Instead, they appraised the beauty of a move made by the other player, and, depending on the emotion evoked within them by such a move, they judged it a worthy end to the game in progress.

Why a particular move should awaken such unbridled joy whilst simultaneously kindling a desire to cease playing the game that brought the player such light is perhaps not so far removed from we *Atani*, as some *Eldar* have on occasion asserted. It does, nonetheless, represent a form of *Cirya* that borders on orthodoxy.

The likely motivation behind this variant is explained in **Appendix III** below.





# Annex II Aracirya and Nútacirya



The gracious reader will allow me to detail in an annex what many scholars would consider an intrinsic part of the rules of *Cirya*, since *Aracirya* is known to be the perennially preferred variant and is thus afforded all the prestige; *Nútacirya*, however, must content itself with being a side note. The author opines that both modes are equally classed as *Cirya*, although it is true – and we are not unmindful of this idea – that *Aracirya* is perhaps the more cultivated expression of the game and the one that evolved to the greatest degree in Númenórë.

## Aracirya

*Aracirya* or courtly *Cirya* has two main features. Firstly, an imminent *londë* must be announced, and if one of the players hides this fact, or only realises it upon making their winning move, their opponent has every right to demand that pieces be returned to their previous positions on the *Cirya* board i.e. to return to the configuration wherein the notification of the *londë* should have taken place. This right is never disputed, and players reverse as many moves as may be necessary until arriving at the point at which the *londë* should have been announced, but was not.

Secondly, those playing *Aracirya* do so to demonstrate a *will*, a style, a strategy, and a *beauty*. They do not necessarily play to win. It is said of many games of *Aracirya* ending by *londë* that victory, in fact, belonged to the other player. It is a victory beyond the board that may be appreciated just as much, or even more so, than a *londë*.

There is a story that in the court of Imladris, Gilraen, daughter of Dírhæel, played a game of *Aracirya* with Faradin, one of the Elves in Elladan's retinue. At some moment, Gilraen perceived that Faradin was about to make a move that would cede her, Gilraen, the match. It had been an engaging game well worth the watch, and Gilraen offered Faradin the chance to reverse his last move and continue playing. Faradin accepted gratefully. Some while later, Faradin won victory over Gilraen with an exquisite *londë* running from north to south. Onlookers could not agree upon who had in truth won the match. Assuredly Faradin had completed a *londë* – but only on account of Gilraen's gesture. What the spectators did agree upon, however, was that they had been witness to a most remarkable game.

*Aracirya* places less weight on the final victory, whether achieved through a *londë* or a *quildëar*, instead valuing smaller triumphs won throughout the match. The most symbolic partial victory in



*Aracirya*, as everyone knows, is won when a player brings their *hallacirya* into play. When one of the players feels that the time has come to set their *hallacirya* on the board, they are acknowledging a moment of vulnerability and their need to resort to this most formidable of pieces in order to redress the balance. Other partial or symbolic victories during a match usually relate to surprising or ingenious moves.

## Nútacirya

*Nútacirya* is *Cirya* too, but it is a more direct game, rewarding only the final victory. There is no obligation to announce a *londë*; any delay in bringing the *hallacirya* into play is viewed solely as a tactical approach; and although memorable moves are admired and appreciated, the primary aim is to win. This is why *Nútacirya* matches are shorter, almost always played on a *lempë* board, and are usually played in taverns or on the road – betting is a common companion in such cases. However, the *Cirya* enthusiast should not disdain this blunter form of play, for it has at times produced matches that are as astonishing as the amount of money that has changed hands because of them.





# Annex III *Cirya* and the Firstborn



If one must offer a conclusion to this study of *Cirya's* place in Dunadan history, it is to my great regret that we must end with the Firstborn.

Here in our time – which the sages and scholars call the *Randa atanion* (Q. *the Age of Man*) – the Elves are the most sorrowful and elusive of creatures. Some linger here still, in Middle Earth, alone or in small bands, having resisted the song of the Great Sea to embark at The Grey Havens with a final show of willpower that is now much diminished. For them, there will be no White Ship waiting in Mithlond, for the last vessel set sail with Cirdan one cold, starry night in a winter decades gone. They have become trapped in their renouncement, and Eru alone knows the fate of those who remain in Middle Earth.

For the generation to which this author, born after the destruction of the One Ring, belongs, the era of peace and prosperity in the Reunited Kingdom following the round defeat of Sauron Gorthaur has also signified an immeasurable loss: the departure of the Elves and their waning presence. There is a different light in the eyes of those *Atani* who stood in the presence of the *Eldar*, and there are barely two dozen of them still alive in the Reunited Kingdom today. Many of us must, then, settle for this pale reflection, tormented meanwhile by the thought of so many questions that shall ever remain unanswered, and by how much grace has vanished from Middle Earth with their absence.

The worthy reader will therefore excuse my inability to elaborate upon this section in greater depth.

It is our understanding that the links between *Cirya* and the *Eldar* have been tenuous throughout the game's history. During the Second Age in Númenórë, even when an unwavering friendship existed between the inhabitants of the Island of Gift and the Elves of Tol Eressëa and other Elven settlements and ports, *Cirya* was routinely viewed as a curiosity.

We know this through indirect means – and not without a certain degree of speculation, as with most statements concerning the Firstborn. There is an absence of records pertaining to *Cirya* matches between Númenóreans and Elves, and to the protection that *Cirya* enjoyed in the times of Ar-Gimilzôr – protection that would have been hard to justify should the game have been viewed in any other way.



More directly, on the other hand, we may look to oral tradition, paraphrased here, for our answer, inspired by the response said to have been given by Cirdan himself, Master of the Grey Havens, to the Númenórean committee that presented him with the game.

*“Your game, which you call Cirya with proud ignorance, could not rouse me to any great admiration.*

*Who among us should wish to pursue a route that is not one we seek? The vast Sea is not a board, nor is it sailed with the desire for victory.”*

In this author’s view, this sentiment, heightened during the Third Age, may have been echoed in different *Eldar* settlements and peoples in contact with the *Atani*. *Cirya* would have been interpreted, then, not as a promise of delight, but as a heavy burden. A burden associated with the Elves’ sojourn in Middle Earth and their decision to tarry here as the ages passed, before heeding the call of their final departure from the Grey Havens. Only in Imladris, on account of its role as custodian of the legacy of Arnor and Númenörë, does the game seem to have enjoyed minor recognition, but now even that has been lost forever.

It might please us to imagine, however, that *Cirya* was finally redeemed in the eyes of even Cirdan himself, deep within his heart, aboard the last White Ship weighing anchor from Mithlond, bound for the Undying Lands to seek a *londë* beyond any board.





# Sources



**B**elow are listed the key works and manuscripts perused by the author in the course of her research. Most are found in Westron, either in their original form or as a copy, but there are notable exceptions in Quenya.

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