

Engsvan hla Ganga

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The Ever-Glorious Empire:

Éngsvan hla Gánga

By

Baréka hiShanyál

**Of the Clan of the High Pinnacle,
Librarian, and Curator of the Museum of
Our Lord Prince,
Rereshqála Tlakotáni,
At His Palace Near the Divine City
of Jakálla, the Mighty, the Glorious**

1. A WORD...

Perhaps the greatest influence on modern Tékumel is that of Éngsvan hla Gánga, also named Engsvanyálu, the Golden Age, the Empire of the Priestkings. Gaze upon any city: those graceful spires and arched colonnades are Engsvanyáli. Listen to the languages of the Five Empires: they overflow with Engsvanyáli borrowings, grammatical categories, concepts, similes, idioms, and metaphors. Look upon any sculpture, any picture, any book-illumination: the influence of Engsvanyálu is there, from the Isles of Tsoléi in the west to the pastel domes of Ssórmu on the east coast of Salarvyá. Pick up any book: the voices of the ancient Engsvanyáli sages speak to you again from out of the past.

I, Baréka hiShanyál, of the Clan of the High Pinnacle, Librarian, and Curator of the Museum of the gracious Prince, Rereshqála Tlakotáni, do set down this brief account in order to delight those who seek wisdom. My treatise cannot match the offerings of those who have gone before.: I do homage to the Priest Dumán Langshá, who composed the learned *Shártokoi Guál Dáimi* ("A Priest There Was"), and to the Committee of Prelates who created the encyclopaedic *Éngsvan hla Gánga, Kolumébabàrdàlisa* ("Éngsvan hla Gánga, the Mighty and Powerful Empire") in the reign of our noble God-Emperor Arshú'u, the Ever-Splendid, in days gone by. I must also praise the various editions of the *Jurrúmul Pavártio* ("The Scrolls of Pavár"), over which scholars have laboured all their lives, and I will furthermore speak highly of the records of the Chancery in Avanthár. I have also consulted other treatises without number and spent long nights sitting by my rush-light in the musty darkness of the Great Library of

Tumíssa. My thanks, thus, to these, and to others who have aided me.

The Immortal Gods have seen fit to gift me with the curiosity, the perseverance, and the talent to set pen to paper in this endeavour. May they grant me the life, strength, and health to complete it!

[Baréka hiShanyál's text has been edited in order to make it intelligible to a non-Tsolyáni reader. Some data unknown to the author are also included, as are occasional comments. -- Translator.]

2. Lord Enomé:

The story of Éngsvan hla Gánga begins in the last millennium of the First Imperium. The Three States of the Triangle were already dust. The Dragon Warriors had come and gone, pillaging, ravishing, and ranging the land like the monsters they are said to have ridden. The Fishermen Kings ruled for a time, and were followed by the First Imperium, created by the ambitious and lustful Queen Nayári, named "She of the Silken Thighs." No one now knows the names of all of the deities these peoples worshipped, their customs, or their histories. As the adage says, "The world is different with every sunrise."

One of the major deities of Nayári's realm was Lord Enomé, one of the Aspects of the deity we call Lord Ksáru today. He was not as bloodthirsty as hideous Jráka, that Aspect of Ksáru worshipped by the Bednálljans at Maryáflu [*Mrelú*], or dazzling Chótl, the Blinding Sun, whose temples filled the skies of Ja'akáth [*Jakálla*] with the smoke of sacrifice. Among these, Lord Enomé was considered mild: he figured in many legends, and occupied himself with scholarship, magical research, and the arts. Yet he also accepted the blood of infants,

whose corpses were then interred in pottery jars beneath the foundations of cities and temples to ward off such as the Wanderers Between the Worlds.

Enomé's shrine on Gánga Isle in the Southern Sea was visited by pilgrims seeking remedies and miracles. The island was inconsequential of itself: "a haven for clam-diggers," as one Bednálljan writer puts it. Still, Ships crammed with devotees plied the waters from Jakálla, Vrá, Penóm, and even from Chame'él and Tsatsayágga in Salarvyá to seek the Shrine of Lord Enomé. A fragmentary record preserved in the Bednálljan Chancery speaks of "85,700 *Rachár* [*Bednálljan silver coins, each worth about .4 modern Tsolyáni Káitars*], paid as taxes upon a year's income from this temple." A later text speaks of "crowding throngs of worshippers, garbed in robes of a myriad hues, singing praises, and bearing gifts of incense and treasure to Lord Enomé." Alas, there is no trace of this temple today; it lies beneath the murky waters of Msúmtel Bay, drowned in the catastrophe that overtook Gánga.

Pavár's temple was considered fairly large for its time: a sprawling complex of halls, shrines, offices, hostels, and courtyards, where priests and pilgrims jostled with administrators, guides, hawkers, pimps, seers, scribes, prostitutes, beggars, and gawkers. It included shops where visitors might purchase flowers, incense, amulets, talismans, copies of Enomé's texts, astrological readings, and religious artefacts. The redolence of smoke, *Vrés*-incense, spices, dust, and perfume vied with the stench of sweat, rotting fruit peels, and excrement. Hymns, chatter, laughter, braying horns and squealing flutes, dancers' bells and cymbals, and the droning thunder of

processional drums constantly assailed the ears. This was a temple much like those found today throughout the Five Empires, familiar, yet different. In those far-off days the folk of Gánga Isle did not speak Tsolyáni but the harsh Salarvyáni of the Bednálljan overlords, the softer syllables of nascent Engsvanyáli, or a dozen, a hundred, other tongues from the lands bordering the southern ocean. Members of the nonhuman races, too, came to this shrine: the erudite Pé Chói, the Páchi Léi, the reptilian Shén, the Swamp Folk of what is now Mu'ugalavyá, and the gruff Ahoggyá of Salarvyá. Modern farmers tilling their fields have even exhumed the exoskeletons of Tinalíya and the bones of the sharp-fanged Pygmy Folk of Yán Kór, although these species must have been rare so far from their homes.

3. A Priest There Was ...

As with the forest that grows from the seed of a single *Gapúl*-tree, the Empire of the Priestkings arose from a single source: a priest named Pavár, who served in Enomé's shrine on Gánga Isle. It is not known whether he was born and raised on the island, or whether he travelled there as an adult, perhaps to escape the ugliness of the mainland where the lords of the First Imperium struggled and slew one another interminably. Nothing is known of his antecedents, his clan, or his childhood. We know only what has been preserved in later histories; this is all too often blurred by the fingers of the Weaver of Skeins, and so lost forever.

Pavar's position in Enomé's shrine is also unknown. The earliest texts speak of him as a "ritual priest" [*Tsolyáni: Shártokoi*]; others call him a "scholar priest" [*Tsolyáni:*

Kusijáktokoi]. Did he officiate at one of the rites of his stern deity, or was he one of those who hunch over records and deeds and wills and scrolls? Did he kneel upon the dais behind the altars, chanting the praises of his deity? Did he collect prayer petitions from pilgrims and submit them to those who passed them on to the god? If he was lucky, he may have served as a teacher or even a researcher in the temple's Hall of Wisdom. It is certain that he was not a senior scholar or powerful prelate.

There are no contemporary pictures or descriptions of Pavár, although there are hundreds, thousands, of later depictions. Most of these latter show Pavár as small, thin, stooped, middle-aged, and crippled. This may be a conventional and fictitious portrayal, of course: an insignificant little man who brought down a mighty empire. Yet Pavár has also been drawn as tall and heroic -- a concession to artistic conventions that require important persons to be shown large, while minor characters are small. In Fasíltum he has been given the hawk-beaked nose of the noble Vríddi clan; in Salarvyá he is dark, hairy, and a trifle over-plump. At least the nonhuman Pé Chói have not painted him as one of themselves! In fact, we know little of his personal life and physical form.

4. The Gods of Pavár:

At some time during his later life, Pavár began those studies that eventually led to the formulations contained in his greatest composition: *Jurrúmul Pavártio* ("The Scrolls of Pavár"). He himself speaks of a "visitation" from the Gods of Stability: a vision, an actual meeting, a dream? He does not describe this, except to say that he was

"contacted" first by gentle, grey Thám [*Thúmis*]; then came Nallál [*Hnálla*], the Lord of Light; then Lady Evuén [*Avánthe*], the Goddess of crops and fertility; then other-worldly Ba'álk [*Belkhánu*], the Master of the Paradises of Those Who Have Gone On; and finally imperious Kerék [*Karakán*], the War-God. These are the *Tlomitlányal*, the Five Lords of Stability. To Pavár, these deities revealed their essences and attributes, their legends, their theology, and their commandments for humankind.

Each of these Gods is accompanied by one "Cohort": a lesser deity who embodies some particular feature of his or her master's sphere of activity: Kátén [*Keténgku*], the Healer, Cohort of Thúmis, Dhré [*Drá*], the Uncaring, the Hymn-Singer, who stands in endless adoration of bright Hnálla, Dhalé [*Dilinála*], the Chaste, who serves Avánthe, Khúan [*Qón*], the Guardian of the Souls of the Hereafter, whose master is Belkhánu, and Chökhár [*Chegárra*], the Hero-King, who embodies statecraft and wise rule for the war-god, Karakán.

The terrible deities of the First Imperium also appeared to Pavár, but differently than they had been pictured previously by the Bednálljans and the priesthoods of the First Imperium. They had been worshipped under many names and guises since time immemorial: Khéri [*Hrü'ü*], the Master of Change and Chaos; Jráka [*Ksáru*], the Doomed Prince of the Blue Room, who loves knowledge for his own benefit alone; Vaomáhl [*Vimúhla*], the Principle of Fiery Destruction; Qúrgha [*Sárku*], the Lord of Worms and Tombs, whose province is the survival of the intellect, whatever may transpire with the body; and languorous Tyalméya [*Dlamélish*], the Emerald Lady of Fleshly Joys. These are the *Tlokiriqáluyal*,

the Five Lords of Change; Pavár included them, too, in his pantheon.

As with the *Tlomitlányal*, the *Tlokiriqáluyal*, have "Cohorts" too: Örü [*Wurú*], the Foe of Stability, who serves Hrü'ü; Göghün [*Grugánu*], the Knower of Spells, who aids Ksárul; Chanákh [*Chiténg*], the Drinker of Blood and Reaper of Cities, whose master is Vimúhla; Do'oróm [*Durritlámish*], He of the Rotted Face, the Opener of Catacombs, who is the Cohort of Sárku; and seductive Hráil [*Hriháyal*], the Dancing Maiden of Temptation and Mistress of the Thirty-Two Unspeakable Acts, who aids Dlamélish. All ten "Cohorts" together are called the *Hlimékluyal*.

Pavár understood that these beings are interdimensional entities, rather than theological "gods." They are immanent and act within history, as do creatures of flesh and blood. They communicate with their worshippers and have their own objectives, unintelligible as these may be to less-powerful, limited beings. On occasion, they work "miracles" and answer prayers. Proofs of their existence and actions abound. There are thus no atheists on Tékumel, for the Gods demonstrably exist! These "Gods" differ from the constructs of humankind's theologies and philosophies, however, in that they are not simple projections of our own anthropomorphic instincts. As Pavár says:

"We strive, and yet our imaginings bring forth nothing but glorified portraits of ourselves. We see naught but a mighty Father, the magnified image of our own fathers, or else a divine Mother, who will take us to her bosom and comfort our tears as did our own mothers. Everywhere we perceive the cosmos in terms of our own sexual organs and urges. When we tremble before the

Unknown, we exalt the rain, the wind, the sun, and the darkness. Why? Because we are limited, and we do not understand. Yet think: why should the Gods -- the Creators and Maintainers of universes -- conform to these petty fancies? Can we even recognise the Divine when we encounter it? What can the lowly *Shqá* beetle comprehend of the nature of the man who casually brushes it from its twig in passing? Should the man turn to the humble insect and somehow address it in terms it could understand, what else could it do but kneel in awe and obey?" *Scroll III, Stanza 90.*

In reference to what humanity can perceive of the "Gods." he says::

"The Gods are like stones seen through rippling water. They are neither of the shape we see, nor are They quite where we see Them. We know Their reality. The seeker can plunge his hand into the current and touch the stones. Thus it is with the Gods. Yet, like the boulders of the riverbed, They are elusive, slippery, and distant from our ken. They are the Gods." *Scroll XXXIX, Stanza 76.*

We are limited beings. The Many Planes contain other entities who are mightier and more puissant than we. Our bragging is:

"... The puffing and croaking of the *Hórok*-frog, who sits in his puddle and propounds his wisdom to an uncaring universe." *Scroll XXIV, Stanza 43.*

And again:

"... And if the *Drí*-ant is eaten by the *Shqá*-beetle, and if the *Shqá*-beetle is consumed by the *Küni*-bird, and if the *Küni*-bird falls prey to the beak of the *Shánu'u* [another large flying predator] -- what profits it to any of them to know that we are all composed of the same substance and essence? Each sees itself as the supreme pinnacle of being, and yet each is food for something mightier than itself. To know that the *Shqá*-beetle is but a creature like the *Drí*, save mightier and more

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potent in its hunting, gains nothing for the poor *Drí*, whose Skein of Destiny is ripped violently from the Loom. That the Demons and Heroes are but larger and more puissant beings like ourselves may tickle the fancies of the philosophers and provide meat and drink for the debate in the temple dormitories once the lamps are out -- but the ultimate truth is not within our circumscribed understanding. We can no more comprehend the Gods than the *Drí* can comprehend a man -- for this is the ratio between our intellects. Only if there be some Final Answerer at the very end of time will we know, and such a contingency appears most unlikely. In this world it is certain that there is no final answer, no "Truth" which we may come upon and cry with our tiny, piping voices, "Here it is! See, now I know it all!" Nay, the *Drí* must avoid the foot of man and dog alike, and he must hide from the *Shqá*-beetle as well, without ever comprehending the why of it all." *Scroll XLII, Stanzas 33-42.*

Pavár sees no ultimate purpose, no final goal, no ability for humankind to transcend its limited nature and comprehend the Infinite. He also sees no innate "morality" that corresponds to human society: there is no "good" and no "evil." The Gods are beyond such petty, anthropomorphic concepts. We must obey the Gods and serve them. It is for us to develop our own social norms, laws, and standards; such minor matters, says Pavár, are not the duty of a god.

The pantheon of Pavár first attracted those who were poor and without hope: chattels, slaves, and labourers. Simple folk came to hear Pavár, sat at his feet, and stayed to offer service and fealty. They came to see him as their champion, although it is not clear that he perceived himself in that rôle.

Why the poor and disadvantaged were drawn to Pavár's pantheon is a trifle

puzzling. The Lords of Stability accept worship according to their stated natures. In many cases this means only sacrifices of flowers [*Thám: Thúmis*], or fruits and green boughs [*Evuén: Avánthe*]. The others sanction human sacrifice on certain occasions, however, and the war-god Kerék [*Karakán*] regularly approves offerings of war-captives, felons, and other unfortunates. Pavár's deities are thus not paragons of meek non-violence. Yet, compared with the ferocity of Bednálljan Chótl or Jráka, Pavár's *Tlomitlányal* were gentility itself.

The Five Lords of Change maintained their traditional power. Offerings to them were as grim as ever. In the temples of Vaomáhl [*Vimúhla*], men and women were daily hurled into the flame pits as before. The catacombs beneath the shrines of Qúrgha [*Sárku*] echoed with the screams of those taken thither to be consumed by the Eternal Worm. Changes were occurring, however, but most people's lives were not greatly affected.

Pavár himself favoured the gentler members of the *Tlomitlányal*, leaning towards Thám [*Thúmis*] and the aloof, coruscating splendour of Nallál [*Hnálla*]. He prospered, taught, gathered students, and wrote many treatises, of which only a few have survived. He seems to have left Enomé's service at this time, and his small house near his former temple became a shrine in itself, filled with discussion, disputation, and worship.

His erstwhile colleagues, the hierophants of Enomé, treated him with disdainful patience. Reformers, heretics, and philosophers had come and gone before. What did one more matter? It is recorded that one Artúkko Alá'a, a particular foe of Pavár, wrote In his "*The Inevitable of the Ineffable*":

"How is it that Pavár's 'gods' are far beyond human comprehension; yet each has a sphere of activity that neatly caters to some specific human need? The concerns of these 'deities' appear very human, indeed! Lady Evuén gives solace to barren clanswomen, to budding maidens, and to burghers who plant their crops. Lord Kerék favours soldiers and the military clans. Lord Thám is but a paler shadow of Lord Jráka: a seeker who collects knowledge for the general good, rather than for his own aggrandisement -- as proper self-interest ought to dictate! The others are the same: his *Tlomitlányal* are naught but mirror-reflections of our gods, whom he names the *Tlokiriqáluyal*. These we have worshipped for generations! The only ones of our pantheon that Pavár ignores are those who have no easy counterpart in human affairs. For example, he omits one of the greatest of our deities, one to whom sacrifices are offered daily throughout the land, and to whom the Emperor himself bows.. I refer to fearsome Aíkh Amóm [*literally, "The One Other" in Bednálljan*]. The Lord Aíkh Halóm [*"The One (Who) Exists" in Bednálljan*] is also snubbed. The most terrible of all, the Goddess Mshékh [*The Goddess of the Pale Bone, named Kúù Tép in old Llyáni*], is also ignored, left to twiddle her extremities in the antechambers of 'gods' less powerful than She! The theology of Pavár is trite, jejune, and without merit: the formulation of a stuffy little schoolmaster!"

Pavár's reply to this diatribe was typical: "If wise Artúkko is not convinced by my revelation, then let him bring forth one of his own! Perhaps the gods will speak to him as they have done to me." Any further rejoinder by Artúkko is not recorded.

The common folk had grown tired of war and slaughter. They had no part in the pomp and pageantry of the palaces. Their lives and property were not secure, and the threat of hideous sacrifice hung ever over their heads. They thus joined Pavár's religion in droves.

5. First Flight.

The histories record that Pavár died in his sleep, being then about ninety years of age. A few apocryphal texts claim that he did not die at all, however, but was taken up by the Gods and transported to some mysterious College at the End of Time, where he still studies, meditates and argues philosophy with all who will listen. Who can say?

Pavár was not a king or general. He left no heir to succeed him, no armies to defend his new faith, no rich temples or well-planned organisation. The hierarchs of Lord Enomé expected his adherents to fall away, his house and library to decay, and his heresies to disappear as swiftly as they had come.

They were wrong. Sometimes, for reasons historians do not understand, the logical and the expected do not happen. The Weaver of Skeins grows bored, rips his fabric from the Loom, and begins anew. Change occurs, even without any visible, compelling cause. Thus it was with Pavár's pantheon. A multitude took up the staff he laid down; students who had sat under his *Gapúl*-tree, now carried his words to far away cities and lectured to pupils of their own. The peasantry, always quick to see "truth" in superstition and legend, circulated tales of miracles, magical healings, and visitations of the *Tlomitlányal*. The Gods appeared in the skies; young girls were possessed by Evuén or Dhalé [*Avánthe or Dilinála*]; boys took up swords and trained as devotees of Kerék [*Karakán*]; joyous crowds proclaimed life everlasting in the Paradise of Ba'álk [*Belkhánu*], called the *Engsváanal Cherténtio* ("The Isles of Teretané"). The Gods of the First Imperium prospered as well: were they not the *Tlokiriqáluyal*, respected members of

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the pantheon? Folk reported spectral manifestations of Qúrgha [*Sárku*], appearances of Vaomáhl's [*Vimúhla's*] flaming hosts, mysterious indigo images of Jráka [*Ksárul*] in the labyrinths beneath the cities, and the sensuous music of Lady Tyalméya's [*Dlamélish'*] orgies heard at night emanating from deserted copses and forest dells. These things were taken as omens by the gullible. The masses were awake, and the movement could not be stopped without much bloodshed.

Once the bird of change has tried its wings,
it cannot remain in the nest.

Pavár's followers erected a beautiful marble tomb for him in the garden of his house. A school and academy were built nearby, and the first temples of the *Tlomitlányal* were consecrated there. Students came from half the world away, and scholars wrote books and hymns and treatises on his pantheon. At last the prelates of the old religion realised their peril. They sent soldiers to burn Pavár's tomb, house, and academy, but these were turned back by a governor of Gánga who had taken a fancy to Lady Evuén's [*Avánthe's*] fecund loveliness, however. In some cities the faithful suffered death and torture for their beliefs: over a thousand adherents of kindly Thám [*Thúmis*] were slaughtered in the great square of Ja'akáth [*Jakálla*]; virgin girls devoted to Dhalé [*Dilinála*] were sacrificed in the main square of Thámis [*Tumíssa*]; missionaries of Nallál's [*Hnálla's*] sect were flayed alive and impaled before the gates of Béy Sü, with copies of Pavár's writings sewn to their bloody breasts. Still more gruesome things were done elsewhere.

New converts came forward to take the places of these martyrs. What had been a

trickle became a stream, then a torrent. Civil war erupted, and the stench of burning fields and villages overspread the land. The richest agricultural regions went over to Lady Evuén [*Avánthe*]: the basin of the Missúma River from Ja'akáth [*Jakálla*] north to the gates of the capital, Béy Sü [*lit. "the Soul of the World" in Bednálljan*]; then the "Breadbasket," the triangle between Ramüş, Chanatlál, and Shanásh [*Úrmish, Katalál, and Usenánu*]; then the south-eastern city of Tí Horúa [*Thráya*], which had always been a centre for mystical movements. Blood flowed, and commerce came to a halt; war and revolution bestrode the land, followed inevitably by famine and plague.

The old religion dug in its heels. Vaomáhl's [*Vimúhla's*] fires burned high in Fa'ásal [*Fasiltum*] in the north-east. Qúrgha [*Sárku*] held sway in his own city: gloomy Sru'úm [*the City of Sárku*] in the north-west, in Fedhám [*Penóm*] on the southern coast, and in the forests of Dó Cháka. Lord Jráka's [*Ksárul's*] temples prospered in Jmái [*Mekú?*] and Maryáhlu [*Mrelú*], in the ancient ruins of Hmakuyál, and elsewhere. Lord Khéri [*Hrü'ü*] lost ground but still was paramount in Poróth [*Púrdimal*] and in distant Zhékkat [*Sokátis*]. Lady Tyalméya [*Dlamélish*] plied her arts in Ja'akáth [*Jakálla*] and other cities, as she had always done. In the capital, Béy Sü, the glittering courtiers and princes of the First Imperium could only watch with apprehension. It was in this period that work was begun to expand the ancient citadel of Evú Nithóru [*Avanthár*], a stronghold since before the Time of Darkness, into the fortress it is today.

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Engsvanyáli guard from the city of Hmakuyál.

Courtesy of the Imperial Chancery, Avanthár

The pantheon's spread was slower in foreign climes. Mu'aghátl [*Mu'ugalavyá*] had always been a staunch follower of the Flame, and also of a local deity named Hrézhö [*Hrsh*], who was said to share attributes of Vaomáhl and Jráka [*Vimúhla and Ksárul*]. Pavár's gods were either rejected or else adapted to fit local tastes. Llurusé [*Livyánu*] held to its indigenous Shadow Gods with only minor admixtures of Pavár's theology. In the east, the priests of Tsavrátl [*Salarvyá*] joyfully accepted Pavár's Lady Evuén [*Avánthe*] -- but melded her with Lady Tyalméya [*Dlamélish*], making the two goddesses one, and named her Muruggéshcha [*modern Shiringgáyi*].

The peoples of the minor nations modified Pavár's formulations similarly. In some

cases, his pantheon was adopted in its entirety; in others it was rejected, or was muddled into local cults and distorted almost beyond recognition. The nonhumans, too, reacted: the Pé Chói decided that their "Father of Nests" was an amalgam of all five of Pavár's *Tlomitlányal*, and their "Black Old One" was equivalent to the five *Tlokiriqáluyal*. The Shén similarly decided their "One of Eggs" was a "Pavarian" opponent of "The One Who Rends." The other races remained aloof. What the Ssú and the Hlüss, the "Enemies of Man," thought is not recorded.

Some say the turmoil raised by Pavár's heresies lasted as long as two hundred years, others more or less. No record exists of the first decades of Pavár's revolution -- for such it was -- and its leaders, its opponents, its successes and failures, are all now forgotten. The converts' zeal eventually subsided. By the end of the first century, the canonical text of the *Jurrúmul Pavártio* ("The Scrolls of Pavár") was published, copied by scribes, stamped with the seal of the Temple of Lord Nallál [*Hnálla*], and dispatched to cities all across the continent. Each copy was borne by delegates attired in white and gold, the hues chosen by Pavár to symbolise his faith. These ambassadors carried no weapons but were accompanied by city dignitaries, clan leaders, priests, and hordes of common folk. It is said that people could almost feel a tangible change in the air, a sense of excitement and anticipation. The old was being swept away; the new would bring harmony and glory.

In this atmosphere, the temples were compelled to come to an understanding: strife must cease, or else civil war would destroy all that had been accomplished during the centuries of the First Imperium. It is said that one Ghiyál Tranúo, High Priest

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of Nallál [*Hnálla*] on Gánga and anointed successor to Pavár, held council first with prelates of the other *Tlomitlányal*, then with those of the temples of the Lords of Change. Together, these hammered out the "Concordat": a treaty of peace between the competing sects. Under the terms of this pact, none might insult, plot, or connive against members of another faith. Any who attacked or slew a priest of another deity would be brought before a tribunal of the priesthoods, and if condemned, would be executed. The Concordat is the highest law, the priesthoods declare: not even kings and emperors can flout it with impunity. The only places where the Concordat does not run are the labyrinths and catacombs below the cities, in wildernesses, and other places where no eye can see. In these locales, indeed, the Concordat does not apply. A quick dagger, a silent spell, a whispered word of treachery: whatever is needed, is permissible and possible. In truth, these exceptions are no more than logical concessions to the inevitable.

Only the followers of the three Pariah Gods (the One Other, the Goddess of the Pale Bone, and the One Who Is) refused to accede to the Concordat. These deities had always been an aberration. They had been worshipped during the long centuries of the Empire of Llyán of Tsámra, the Three States of the Triangle, the Dragon Warriors, the Fishermen Kings, and the First Imperium. Excluded from Pavár's pantheon, their clergy saw no need to abide by its rules. They retreated into their shrines and sulked, refusing even to recognise the existence of Pavár's tribunals.

The problem is their intrinsic difference from the other gods: their objectives are so alien, so abhorrent to followers of Pavár's

pantheon, that they cannot be reconciled. The Pariah Gods' goal is the consumption -- the emptying -- of every Plane of Being, all across the Many Planes of the Multiverse -- of *all* substance, of every material atom. Nothing is to be left after their passing. The Goddess of the Pale Bone is said to be the "hungriest," the most violent in her methods. The One Who Is displays more patience. The One Other occasionally takes part in the affairs of the other gods: according to the legend of Dayúkti Durúmnatio [*Dórmoron Plain*], he, alone of the three, joined with the other deities in curbing the ambitions of Lord Jráka [*Ksárul*] and imprisoning him in the Blue Room. The current recension of this story is Engsvanyáli, but there are older versions in which the gods have their Bednálljan names, and there is a partial manuscript of the myth in Llyáni as well.

The goal of these mighty beings can hardly be expected to appeal to humankind. Yet they do attract followers, particularly the One Other and the Goddess. The One Who Is remains aloof; he has few worshippers and fewer temples. These beings are not "monsters"; they do not "raven"; they do not attack without reason, or exhibit emotion. Their purpose is fixed and icy clear. Why, then, would any choose to serve them?

Quite simply, the attraction is greed: riches and power and whatever else their devotees may desire. These deities require co-operation from the inhabitants of a Plane in order to enter it and consume its substance. Yet this may not occur for millions of human years! They are, after all, Gods, and they possess divine patience. Worshippers may thus expect to live out their lives, receive their compensation, raise their children, and know that their descendants, too, will be safe and prosper, perhaps for

millennia, before the Pariah Gods come to collect their due.

The Concordat saved the nations of the continent from destruction. Folk returned to normal lives, had children, married, built homes and cities, and grew complaisant. Those who had been firebrands became plump bureaucrats. The flames of religious fervour burned low and guttered down. Distant lands accepted the idea of the Concordat: even far-off Llorusé [*Livyánu*], lost in its convoluted visions of its Shadow Gods, accepted the inevitable. The Mu'ugalavyáni allowed some of the more violent features of Vaomáhl [*Vimúhla*] and their Lord Hrézhö [*Hrsh*] to lapse, while the Salarvyáni erected ornate shrines to Lady Shiringgáyi on the islands of Lake Mrissútl. "All was as it had ever been," to quote the last line of the epic "Lament to the Wheel of Black."

6. Looking to the Sky.

In the year 253 A. P. [*"After Pavár"*], the Emperor, Meshkanúma Améssu III invited the High Priests of the *Tlomitlányal* to Bény Sü to advise him.

[*N. B. The first Engsvanyáli calendar dates from Pavár's birth. Various other notations were already in use: see below.*]

[*N. B. Beginning with the Bednálljans, when a ruler is crowned, he or she chooses a "Throne Name" from one of the ancient lists of "Titles of Power." These are said to date from the Latter Times and before. Throne Names usually have no lexical meaning in any modern language. but do possess traditional connotations: e. g. bravery, wisdom, magical prowess, etc.*

Unfortunately for historians, different dynasties often used the same Throne Names: e.g. Ssirandár, employed by the Bednálljans, the First Imperium, and the Engsvanyáli, resulting in some confusion. Compare the prevalence of "William" and "Henry" in Terran European history. The Throne Name "Meshkanúma" connotes sophistication, eclectic taste, and sagacity. The second part of this name, "Améssu," is said to be a dynastic lineage-name, the significance of which is lost. The custom of adding a further meaningful Throne Title was adopted only during the Second Imperium: e.g. "The Stone upon Which the Universe Rests," "The Maiden of Beauty," "Eternal Splendour," etc. -- Translator]

Meshkanúma was descended from Queen Nayári, the bloodthirsty founder of the First Imperium; yet he had little stomach for violence. It is written that he loved garments, gems, and fashions. His scholars strove to devise perfumes that could be infused into inks, so that one needed only touch a writing in order to smell the sweetness of flowers, the scent of a woman's hair, or the cool blue depths of a mountain lake. Meshkanúma had never shown much interest in religion: the gods of his ancestors held no fascination for him. He had almost abandoned Nayári's ancient capital of Purdánim for the elegance of Bény Sü, and Nayári's city thus fell into ruin and is now lost to history. When Pavár's followers appeared at his court, thus, he was quick to adopt Lady Evuén [*Avánthe*] as his patron. (It is said that he wished to choose Lady Dhalé [*Dilinála*], who is even more chaste and virginal, but she allows no males into her temples, and it would have been bad form to turn away an Emperor!)

The priests laid their demands before the throne: a central council backed by Imperial

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power, advisors at court who must be consulted in religious matters; funds allocated to the building of new temples for the *Tlomitlányal* -- and, as a sop to the old Gods, for refurbishing the shrines of the *Tlokiriqáluyal* as well; more schools, academies, and libraries; Imperial posts and stipends for those clan leaders who chose to follow the new religion; and much else. They also added one further, secret clause: the Emperor must never worship the Pariah Gods or give any concession to their devotees again.

Most of the cities of what is now Tsolyánu accepted, or at least were resigned, to Pavár's faith. His followers were encouraged to donate funds and lands to the establishments of his Gods. The third and fourth centuries after his passing were a period of consolidation, expansion, and stabilisation. There was still bitterness, however. To quote from a letter written by one Chorújja Ssánmirin, High Priest of Qúrgha [*Sárku*] in Ja'akáth [*Jakállá*], dated 279 A. P.:

"Not a blade of grass grows but some busybody priest of Evuén must be there to water it. The sun does not rise unless it is summoned up by one of Nallál's chanting hierophants. Even the dead are not buried until Ba'álk's officious embalmers have had their way! Is there aught left? Shall the rest of us take ship and seek our fortunes across the Deeps of Chanayága? Appeals go unheard, and the time-hallowed traditions of noble clans are ignored ..."

Meshkanúma was followed by his eldest son, the Emperor Changgála, who hated the *Tlomitlányal* and sought to undo whatever Pavár's adherents had accomplished. His death in 310 A. P. was attributed to poison or perhaps to hostile magic. His nephew, Balakanúma I, then took the throne and

devoted himself to Kerék [*Karakán*] and the army. He ruled for forty years, doubled the size of the realm, marched into Milumanayá and along the shores of the Northern Sea [*what has now become the Desert of Sighs and the great plain of Yán Kór after the rising of the land*]. His troops seized Hlekér [*modern Ke'ér*] from the remnants of the Dragon Warriors and the Lorún tribes, and went on to assault Saá Allaqí. They reached the shores of Lake Parunál somewhere near modern Káitlan, "where they halted to view the world ... "

The priests of the *Tlomitlányal* had grown avaricious and hungry for power. The temples became landowners, repositories for gold and treasure, and storehouses for magical items from before the Time of Darkness and the Latter Times. The priesthoods added armies of scribes, who administered temple lands, animals, crops, crafts, businesses, and investments. As bureaucracy flourished, worship and scholarship declined. Many priests became time-servers, addicted to luxury and privilege. "Become a priest," the adage says, "and know neither hunger nor calluses." And: "Pens are easier to wield than either swords or mattocks."

By the year 600 A. P., priestly advisors at the Imperial court had become the real masters of the realm. The High Priest of Nallál [*Hnálla*] wielded more power than did the Emperor. The affairs of government and the police were the province of Chökhár's [*Chegárra's*] clergy. The High Adept of Kerék [*Karakán*] had charge of the army, and trade and economic affairs were managed jointly by the temples of Evuén and Thám [*Avánthe and Thúmis*]. The *Tlokiriqáluyal* played smaller parts in these affairs, and their membership and power

decreased accordingly. They preferred to occupy specific regions instead, filling the highest posts there and governing like small states within the state. Thus, Vaomáhl [*Vimúhla*], the Lord of Flame, was served by the Verídh [*Vríddi*] clan in Fa'ásal [*Fasíltum*], and also by a coalition of "Red" clans in the south-western city of Thámis [*Tumíssa*]: Red Sun, Red Sword, Red Mountain, and Red Stone. The other Lords of Change "dug in" similarly. These regional principalities could have become autonomous nation-states, but the tradition of a united empire was strong, and the armies of Béy Sü were too powerful. Fa'ásal did break away several times over the ensuing centuries, but always something occurred to return it to the fold.

The Emperor was still venerated at Béy Sü: his ritual dignities were maintained, and lip-service was given to his glory, majesty, and power. Twelve Emperors, each named Tarishánde, came and went, surrounded by such luxury and decadence as had never been seen. The royal person was bathed by the delicate hands of princesses from a score of lands; he was fed from gem-encrusted platters by the scions of the noblest clans; his toilet was performed for him by jealous handmaidens. His every act -- even the most private, in bed with his concubines -- was observed by choruses of singers who immortalised each movement, each sigh of passion, in hymns and paeans of fulsome praise. His foot was never allowed to touch the ground but must always rest upon the bare back of a slave, and when -- *if* -- he travelled, his palanquin was like a veritable temple tower, borne by scores of chanting servitors, escorted by musicians, dancers, ceremonial guardsmen, and hundreds of chamberlains, each with an appointed rôle to play.

The temples established their headquarters not in Béy Sü, where the intrigues of the old court and the ambitions of Imperial bureaucrats made matters difficult, but near Pavár's academy on Gánga Isle. Subordinate offices were set up in the major cities, backed by local clans and army Legions.

[N. B. These have now been amalgamated into the "Palaces of the Realm" under the Second Imperium. -- Translator]

The administration of the crumbling empire needed reform. In 800 A. P., one Tirisán Jakóna, a Patriarch [*Tsolyáni: Tsémelkoi*] of Ba'álk [*Belkhánu*] took the office of Temple Proctor in Tí Horúa [*Thráya*]. He set up councils that put forward far-reaching changes: simplified tax laws, issued new agricultural regulations, set up a tribunal to hear inter-clan disputes, organised a corps of market police and another of road guards, revised the criminal statutes, restructured the educational system, etc. To his colleagues' surprise, he married a Licentiate [*a high-level Scholar-Priestess: Tsolyáni Jokáltorakoi*] of Qúrgha [*Sárku*]; this woman, Milézha Tlalésu, did much to reorganise the temples of the *Tlokiriqáluyal*, bringing them into the government at every level. How this pair got on together in private life is not recorded, although a contemporary text does quote an adage that may be based on the couple: "Blood and blades give death and pain; brown [*Sárku*] and gold [*Belkhánu*] give twice again!"

The armies of the Priestkings marched, fought, put down rebellions, and dispatched foreign foes. They made treaties without regard for the Emperor, established policies, and structured society as they saw fit. The Bird of Empire had risen.

7. A King Departs.

As Béy Sü decayed, Gánga throve. A new seaport was constructed at Pétris Layóda, and pottery kilns, wineries, fisheries, looms, and other crafts were encouraged with subsidies and concessions.

The last Emperor, Tarishánde XIII, lived in the cavernous palace of his ancestors in Béy Sü. One by one his courtiers deserted him, his wives and concubines departed, and his guards abandoned their posts. He had grown old in gilded exile; his days were devoted to writing poetry and composing spring songs in the *Haghákhte* style [*a musical tradition of the early Bednálljan court*]. One day in 848 A. P., a servant came to inform him that a group of priests from Gánga waited at the palace gates, and that these included one Ha'úlo Kirisáyu, the Chief Executioner. The ageing Emperor is said to have replied, "Now let us nobly end what ignobility began!"

[N. B. This is a reference to the methods used by his ancestor, Queen Nayári, to establish the First Imperium long before. -- Translator]

His chamberlains refused to allow the Emperor to go down to meet his fate, however. They took him -- with force, it is said -- and bundled him out of the city through a secret way. Travelling by night, they worked their way north, stopping at villages known to be loyal to the old dynasty, seeking food from peasant clanhouses, and adopting one disguise after another. The soldiers of the priesthoods pursued.

What follows is legend: the Emperor reached the shores of the Northern Sea. His

followers numbered about two hundred, including three faithful wives, two dozen soldiers, several children, and a contingent of servants. He found a small vessel and travelled on until he reached the low peaks of the Outer Islands [*where Ke'éer, Mákhis, Chudrák, and other cities stand today*].

The lord of the city of Mké'ath [*Mákhis?*] promised the Emperor a ship and a pilot familiar with the Pentrúrtra Deeps. This man also sent a message to the pursuing temple troops, asking one *Fshétra* [*modern Tsolyáni Psé: 1.6534 lbs.*] of gold for the monarch's head. His pursuers agreed, though they lacked the authority -- or the gold -- to make such a commitment.

Plays, epic poems, and songs describe the mournful scene: the last Emperor, muffled in his ebon cloak, seated upon a boulder at the edge of the misty northern sea, surrounded by bales, bundles, family members, soldiers, and servitors. The Yán Koryáni ship did not appear. It had never been sent.

Coincidence saved the Emperor. One of the tall, black ships belonging to the inhabitants of the unknown lands across the ocean beyond the North Pole happened to pass by. These aloof and rather unfriendly wanderers occasionally come to trade, even to this day. Thinking this was the vessel sent for his party, the Emperor and his officers hailed it. Its captain seems to have been a man of noble -- or perhaps humorous? -- character. He did not explain the error but took the party aboard and put out to sea just as the enemy clambered over the headland and swept down onto the beach.

What transpired thereafter is known from the tale of Nekkúma Dhalásh, the Captain of the Emperor's bodyguard. This man

managed to return to Béy Sü after many years, where the Priests of Thúmis took down his account and subsequently published it. *[This book is lost, although an abridgement in Yán Koryáni survives.]* According to this, the Emperor was taken to a dark, cold city situated on a deep fjord beneath frowning mountains, where he was treated with civility. The city was attacked, however, by local foes, and the Emperor and some of his people were carried off as prizes. They languished as prisoners for several years and were then offered as "gifts" to a race of beings with transparent, glassy carapaces *[doubtless the Hokún]*, who paraded them as curiosities in golden cages. The Emperor's wives and daughters were forcibly "married" to human mercenaries who served these creatures. At length the Emperor offered to gamble for his freedom with his captors. He won the series of wagers and was set free, together with most of his party and much treasure. At this point Nekkúma Dhalásh left his comrades and began to work his way back north towards home. It is said -- though there is no proof-- that the Emperor elected to continue on southward, reaching the tropical ocean homeland of the nonhuman Chíma, where he endured further vicissitudes. He is said to have travelled, then, along the Naqsái coasts, through Livyánu, and so back to the Empire. There is indeed a record of a tall, sun-blackened old man who appeared in Ja'akáth and surprised everyone by employing the "high" speech and manners of the old court, some thirty years before.

8. The Bird Soars High.

By the end of the first millennium after Pavár, the Priestkings had established their rule throughout what is now Tsolyánu.

Mu'aghátl *[Mu'ugalavyá]* fell to the Engsvanyáli through the slowness of its rulers to perceive the threat. The priesthood of Vaomáhl *[Vimúhla]* in Khá Khekkár *[Khéiris]* opened the city gates, and Engsvanyáli troops swiftly secured the palace of the Cha'nálísh Governors, then marched on to take Ssu'útakh *[modern Ssa'átis, which was not the capital or even a large city in those days]*. Greater resistance was overcome at Nálche *[Chi'í Mu'úgha]* and at Syethóru *[probably Trahlú]*. The Priestkings' forces could not capture the ancient metropolis of Shóshche *[Ch'óchi]* but besieged it for over twenty years. The place had been a powerful military base before the Time of Darkness, and the Lords of the Latter Times had stockpiled further weapons and magical devices there. The Dragon Warriors reduced it to ruin, and in Bednálljan times only the temples of the One Other and the Goddess of the Pale Bone continued to attract pilgrims. Shóshche *[Ch'óchi]* was still impregnable, however; its labyrinths and caverns were well defended, and sorcerous power -- energy from the Planes Beyond -- was so strong that it was said that a child could snap its fingers and cause magical sparks! The Priestkings perform had to wait.

Llurusé *[Livyánu]* was another fortress the Engsvanyáli could not breach. They did the next best thing: they sent teachers, scholars, merchants, and trade emissaries. Some of these prospered; others were slain or sent home in chains. One poor fellow who tried to enter the sealed city of Dhél Shé *[Dlásh]* was transformed by magic into a hairy ape-woman with a beetle's head. He could not speak and so lived for a number of years in the Governor's zoo in Ja'akáth before anyone thought to check for ensorcelment.

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The Livyáni believed they could maintain their independence, but in fact their culture, their language, and their society were undergoing unnoticeable yet radical changes.

[N. B. The Duruób language that succeeded Llyáni became increasingly filled with Engsvanyáli phonological, lexical, and morphological borrowings.]

The names of the first Priestkings are not recorded. They are referred to in the records only as "First Priest of Nallál," "Lord High Priest of Kerék," "Chief Priestess of Evuén," etc. Their identities were vested in the temples. The histories record that there were some "thirty to forty" Ecclesiarchs of Gánga during this period.

*[N. B. The very name of the island came to signify "(the) Religion," and the modern Tsolyáni verb **gadál** "to worship" comes from **gánga dlèè** "Mighty Gánga." In later times a folk-etymology grew up to the effect that **Éngsvan hla Gánga** meant "Empire of the Gods"; this is linguistically incorrect, however.; it really signifies "Island of Gánga." -- Translator]*

The Priestkings continued the work of the Bednálljan Emperors, adding to the network of *Sákbe*-roads that criss-crosses the Five Empires today: monumental, three-tiered thoroughfares, the topmost level of which is reserved for Imperial messengers and officials, the second for nobles and important persons, and the lowest and broadest for cargo, slaves, and common traffic. Guard towers were constructed at intervals, and the approaches to each city were heavily fortified. Roads had been built before but never on this scale. The Engsvanyáli also continued the Bednálljan custom of Pashátl [*modern Tsolyáni*

Ditlána: the razing and rebuilding of decaying cities at regular intervals]. Subterranean shrines were buried, too, but were left with access tunnels, while most surface buildings were torn down, filled in, and re-erected according to comprehensive city plans. *Ditlána* remains an important practice during the current Second Imperium.

Still another feature of Engsvanyáli administration has survived into modern times: the network of telepaths, who transmit short, important messages across great distances -- not always successfully. The Priestkings needed to maintain contact between places thousands of *Tsán* apart; the aircars and underground tubeway vehicles of the Great Ancients from before the Time of Darkness were rare, expensive, and untrustworthy. Interplanar "nexus points," a method developed during the Latter Times when technology had faltered, were also undependable: who knew whether a given Plane was really one's own, or whether it was a close look-alike? Not even a great scholar like Wába of Ká Kokóth [*a city now unknown*] could be entirely certain. His "Almanac," whose full title was "The Periplus of Farther Voyaging," was the best guide, but even it was fallible.

[N. B. This invaluable treatise is now largely lost, although two or three leaves are known to exist. -- Translator]

Portions of Tsavrátl [*Salarvyá*], large tracts of what is now Hekkhé [*Yán Kór*], Ssédh Eléq [*Saá Allaqí*], and even Vá Dhepéya [*Háida Pakála*], across the southern ocean, sent emissaries to offer submission and allegiance. These additions seem to have been motivated by greed, rather than by fear of Engsvanyáli military power. There was

little likelihood of invasion by Engsvanyáli troops. At most, a "Prefect" might be sent, with orders to develop trade, discover useful local products, and establish friendly relations. Trade made for prosperity; happiness was a heap of golden *Suór*; and the goal of diplomacy was a stream of goods entering one's land. As the poet says:

"Now the bird of gold and white has flown.
Now it soars up unto the sun.
But even the sun is not as bright as its proud
beauty."

Pantínu of Pecháno

9. Faltering...

History is a series of cycles, ups and downs, rises and falls, but few things ever really die. During the first century of the second millennium, heretics and rebels rose against the Priestkings. One after another, the temples of Sárku, Grugánu, and Vimúhla sounded the trumpets of revolt.

[N. B. By this time, many of the modern names of the Gods, cities, etc. were coming into common usage. Pavár's language must have sounded archaic and stilted, and ordinary folk employed the "new dialects," which were still Engsvanyáli but different from the old "High Tongue." -- Translator]

Sárku's quarrel was with the Twenty-Second Priestking of Gánga, who seems to have been poorly advised of the intrigues obtaining between the temples of Change. On the advice of the temple of Vimúhla, this Emperor promulgated a decree commanding that an inventory of all ancient devices and

weapons be made, checked by Imperial inspectors, and submitted to Gánga. The grim masters of Sru'úm [*the City of Sárku*] refused. Further envoys were sent, but came back empty-handed. Fearful of the rising power of localised governments, the Priestking then sent an army. When this did not return, he sent a larger force. This, too, disappeared. At length the High Adept of Sárku appeared in Ja'akál [*"Middle Engsvanyáli" for old Ja'akáth -- modern Jakállá*] where the Priestking had come to hold court.

"Your soldiers," said the Adept, "fill the halls of grim Srúkárúm, the Lord of the Despairing Dead. No more can be sent without overcrowding that puissant Lord's facilities. I beg you to find some other assignment for your troops."

"That cannot be," the Priestking replied. "Disobedience cannot be brooked."

"Then I must speak to skull-visaged Lord Gereshmá'a and see if he can accommodate your folk."

"This impudence also cannot be borne!"

The Adept shrugged and replied, "As you will. Then do you join them!"

The Priestking vanished, only to reappear a moment later, his hair white, his features wrinkled and sagging. His limbs trembled.

"Alas, that you could only stay for lunch!" remarked the Adept gently.

-- Jaruén the Historian

A treaty was subsequently signed that gave the City of Sárku most of the autonomy it had demanded.

Grugánu's clergy in Poróth [*Púrdimal*] complained of oppression by the priests of Qón. The latter felt it their duty to root out

demons, restore tombs and sepulchres to their proper occupants, and combat Change wherever it might be found. This ran counter to Grugánu's tenets, and the Concordat had no force in the Underworlds. Again, soldiers had to be sent -- this time to both temples -- and the Priestkings again managed to avoid open revolt.

Fa'ásal [*Fasíltum*] was different. The Verídh [*Vríddi*] clan had long sought independence. The Bednálljans had sacked the city twice, and a few Verídh hostages still occupied "guestrooms" in the dismal Tólek Kána Pits south of Béy Sü. The Priestkings were able to work with the Vimúhla-worshipping clans of Thá'mis [*Tumíssa*] and elsewhere, but the proud Verídh were not to be persuaded by a little gold or a few concessions. In the year 1,212 A. P. they closed their gates and refused to send taxes or troops to Gánga.

One of the first named Priestkings, Ssirandár I [*distinct, of course from the Bednálljan Ssirandár I, whose name and titles the Priestkings freely re-used*], who ruled from 1,254 to 1,309 A. P., crossed the Vales of Ninár [*the Desert of Eyági, then apparently quite fertile*] and laid siege to Fa'ásal, destroying the water supply and canals so that the city suffers from a shortage of water to this day. The Verídh capitulated, and the Priestkings had the good sense to pardon their leaders, increase investment, establish temples to other deities besides the Flame Lord (e.g. the architect Pirundáyu was dispatched to build the great shrine to Belkhánu in Fasíltum), and offer high posts in the government to those who would cooperate. This did not entirely succeed -- those who still rebelled were quietly killed or sent into exile -- but it did pacify some of the hotheads and give the Priestkings breathing space. The problem was to return again, of course, and even today it remains a

thorn in the side of the Seal Emperor of Tsolyánu.

10. And Rising Again...

The trend toward stagnation and rebellion slowly reversed itself, and decay was transformed into political expansion, construction, literary and artistic achievement, and the stabilisation of social mores. This is called the First Epoch. The list of its Emperors is as follows:

Ssirandár I: 1,254 - 1,309; founder of the first hereditary dynasty; a strong and intelligent ruler.

Báshdis Mssá I: 1,315 (?) - 1,376. "A wonderful and kind man" (?).

Ssirandár II: 1,376 - 1,413; "the Fool.."

Feleshka'án: 1,413, - 1,444; a nephew descended from a collateral line; known as "the Glutton."

Ssirandár III: 1,445 - 1,447; nothing is known of him.

Báshdis Mssá II: 1,448 - 1,501; ordered the keeping of records in "The Great Book of the Priestkings" at Gánga.

Dhárumesh Mssá I: 1,501 - 1,543; founded the great Library at Tumíssa. Also ordered an academy of devices and sciences to be erected there as well; there is no trace of this today.

Ssirandár IV: 1,543 - 1,609; called a "ninny" by his contemporaries.

Ssirandár V: 1,609 - 1,666; titled "The Victorious over the Foes of Humankind"; conquered Pecháno and the east.

Ssirandár VI: 1,666 - 1,669; built the "City of the Nine Walls," now lost.

Báshdis Mssá III: 1,669 - 1,712; "The Great": established the "Circles" [*the system of ranked levels*] of the priesthoods; he also restored ancient Bednálljan titles and fiefs.

Dharumésh Mssá II: 1,712 - 1,723; poisoned by his own chamberlains after the discovery of "ignobilities."

Choléyn Mssá I: 1,723 - 1,735; First Engsvanyáli Queen; worshipped Avánthe and patronised agriculture.

Choléyn Mssá II: 1,735 - 1,800; daughter of the above; worshipped Dilinála; had "237 female lovers."

Nemáandu I: 1,800 - 1,829; cousin of the foregoing; founder of a new line.

Báshdis Mssá IV: 1,825 - 1,838; co-ruled with the preceding; in his reign the Plague of the White Hand decimated Urmish, which lay desolate and empty for nearly a century afterward.

Arkhúan Mssá: 1,838 - 1,838; died of the horrible plague named after him; fortunately, this disease does not occur often.

[Gap. No cause is known.]

Báshdis Mssá V: 1,851 - 1,905; restored government, built roads and fortresses.

Nemáandu II: 1,905 - 1,941; old when he took the throne; ruled through advisors. Lived on nothing but bread and *Hmélu*-milk.

Nemáandu III: 1,941 - 1,979; weak and venal; sold the temple of Sárku in Jakálla to an enterprising merchant who tore it down and traded the stone for *Chlén*-hides and a shipment of wine! He subsequently vanished.

Ssirandár VI: 1,979; died within a month after accession.

Dhárumesh Mssá III: 1,979 - 2,010; excellent administrator; reformed the currency; developed the use of "writs" that could be cashed in distant cities.

Báshdis Mssá VI: 2,010 - 2,017; "crushed by a demon" (?).

Dhárumesh Mssá IV: 2,017 - 2,026; "the Singer of Gentle Songs" (?). Devised the "picture books," in which Other-Planar sorcery is used to cause miniature pictures to move and act out portions of the text when one touches them; a few are said to "draw in" the reader, letting him experience certain scenes of the story!

Mísa Tanío: 2,019 - 2,027; Saá Allaqiyáni Queen and co-ruler with the above; executed as a "traitress" when the next Emperor seized power.

Ssirandár VII: 2,027 - 2,071; "He Who Lived Too Long" (?). "Nothing more is known of him. It is better that way."

Báshdis Mssá VII: 2,071 - 2,096; violent revolution, civil war, the destruction of temples, and the rise of Arkhúan Milénde, "He Who Hates the Gods"; the Legion of the Seekers of Indelible Victory" was sent east, through Mihállu, into the barren Plains of Glass, where it disappeared.

[Gap. ???]

Nemáandu IV: 2,099 - 2,111; general from another lineage who restored the empire, ousted greedy priests, and favoured the army.

Dhárumesh Mssá V: 2,111 - 2,161; "ruled in darkness." He may have been blind.

Kakkónen Chré: 2,161 - 2,173; usurper from Jakálla who seized Gánga with a fleet of pirate ships.

Ssirandár VIII: 2,173 - 2,190; cousin of Báshdis Mssá VII; returned from a "voyage around the world" to retake Gánga and slay the usurper.

Báshdis Mssá VIII: 2,190 - 2,232; the "Builder of Tombs" and "Restorer of Catacombs"; worshipped Belkhánu.

Dhárumesh Mssá VI: 2,232 - 2,341; loved fashion and etiquette; devised the "Twenty-Four Forms" of formal dress worn at affairs of state.

Ssirandár IX: 2,341 - 2,364; mild, vacillating, and pleasant; too weak to maintain his grip upon the Empire.

Tettukánu Dlèè I: 2,364 - 2,370; the "Slaughterer of Children"; a cruel and ambitious usurper who seized power but could not hold it.

Báshdis Mssá IX: 2,364 - 2,369; ruled only in Béy Sü; died in battle against the preceding.

Báshdis Mssá X: 2,369 - ?; a twelve-year-old child; disappeared from Béy Sü; thought to have been abducted by priests of the One Other, who wished to use him against Tettukánu Dlèè.

[Civil war, and the end of the Age.]

The First Epoch was indeed a time of burgeoning artistry, crafts, music, and much more. Márya, the greatest Engsvanyáli

sculptor, lived during the reign of Báshtdis Mssá I (1,315 - 1,376 A. P.). He employed one Nía Alél, a Livyáni serving maid, as the model for his renowned work: "Woman of Tsámra." Nía is now considered the paragon of female beauty throughout the Five empires. Another of Márya's masterpieces, "Thúmis Ascending to the Sun," is one of the prized possessions of the Governor of Tumíssa.

The story of Ksárul's battle with his fellow Gods is told in several epics. One of the oldest is the "Lament [*or: 'Song'*] of the Reaper of Sighs," which consists of nearly 3,700 verses. It speaks of the legendary hero, Hrúgga, who battled the servitors of the Demon Origób and sought the treasure of the Black Pit of Nekkuthané beneath the city of Lù-Ishátur. This poem is probably Engsvanyáli in origin, although its Engsvanyáli recension is more popular. Another major epic poem of this period is "The Lament to the Wheel of Black," which dates to the reign of Ssirandár IV (1,543 - 1,609 A. P.). The longest versions of this poem include about 250,000 verses! It is probably a translation from Bednálljan or still older texts of the Fishermen Kings and the Empire of Llyán of Tsámra. No Engsvanyáli author or translator is attested, and there are several recensions in Engsvanyáli from various parts of the Priestkings' Empire.. The poem narrates the story of the Battle of Dórmoron Plain, and the subsequent imprisonment of Ksárul in the Blue Room. Pavár, too, gives a version of this legend in his "Scrolls." This is summarised below:

Mighty Lord Ksárul, the youngest of the Gods, gazed about him and saw none who were his match for knowledge, cleverness,

and power. Then did he speak to Lord Hnálla:

"Lord of Light, know that I grow weary of Stability and the peaceful cycles of time: transition from dawn to dusk, and dusk back to dawn. Verily, I yearn for Change."

"Your desire is your own glory," responded great Hnálla, dazzling of countenance. "Naught but your own aggrandisement."

Ksárul became wroth. He summoned the Demons of the Dark, the Dwellers in Shadow, the Spirits of the Aerial Realm of Tu'unkélmú, and many of the little races, including the Mihálli, the Ragáth, and those humans who loved him. He then marched forth against the Lords of Stability: Hnálla, Thúmis, Avánthe, Karakán, and Belkhánu, together with their Cohorts and their allies. Battle was joined, and the struggle continued on from age to age, world to world, and Plane to Plane, from the pinnacle of Thénu Thendráya Peak to the Pylons that loom at the Farthest Limits of Time, those Gates that guard the Barriers of the Many Planes from the Incursion of the Null.

Lord Ksárul's creatures warred mightily, as did his foes. The other Lords of Change joined on Lord Ksárul's side, and conflict flared all across the Worlds. At length, the four *Tlokiriqáluyl* perceived that Ksárul's arrogance and impatience were not to be borne, and they left him. Vimúhla and Dlamélish withdrew and became neutral first, while Hrü'ü and Sárku continued to support him. Aeons passed in bitter warfare, so it is said, but in the end Ksárul's last allies abandoned him, making a compact with Lord Hnálla: Ksárul was to be contained and kept from further activity, but he was not to be destroyed, humiliated, or even greatly weakened since this would upset the balance.

The Deities then marshalled their forces on Dórmoron Plain: "The Armageddon of the Gods." Where or what this is, is not known [*it is not the place of this name located in Mu'ugalavyá today.*] Ksárul's forces were eventually defeated and driven from this

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Plane, and he himself was taken prisoner. He was then imprisoned in the "Blue Room," a secret, pocket dimension hidden among the greater Planes. There, the Doomed Prince sleeps, lit by sconces of indigo flame, attired in a robe of black velvet, with an ebon staff tipped with a gleaming azure gem shaped like a great beetle in his hands.

The nine Gods erected walls all around the Blue Room to prevent their prisoner from escaping and to keep his followers from rescuing him. Each wall has a gate, to which there is a Key. Each Key in turn has two Wards, which must first be used to pass the Guardians and activate the Key. By agreement, each Plane must have a complete set of the Keys and Wards.

[N. B. It is said that at least three of Tékumel's Keys are known; if so, they are among the most secret and carefully protected of all treasures. -- Translator]

The walls which hold Lord Ksárul in his prison were erected, in order, by Hnálla, Hrü'ü, Karakán, Vimúhla, Thúmis, Sárku, Avánthe, Dlamélish, and Belkhánu. It is said, moreover, that there are actually TEN walls, the tenth and outermost being the work of the One Other, who co-operated with the nine Gods, fearing the overweening ambition of the Blue Lord. The One Who Is and the Goddess of the Pale Bone alone took no part.

So mighty is Lord Ksárul that even asleep and in bondage, he controls great powers throughout the many universes. Were he to be freed and awake, he would once more challenge the Gods for suzerainty. This time, his servants claim, he would be victorious. *Scroll IX, Stanzas 17-54.*

The "Paeon of Psankothóth of Nirukkái," various recensions of the "Epic of Hrugga," and many other epics were also composed during this period.

The romantic poet, Yetíl of Gánga, is also a product of this age. Some sources claim he

was Bednálljan, and that his "Odes" are no more than a translation into Engsvanyáli. Others assert the opposite. It is also possible that there were two -- or more -- poets who used the pen-name "Yetíl." The clear, lyric beauty of the odes of his "Second Bouquet" identifies his work, however, as surely as Pavár's simple prose stands above that of his many imitators. Yetíl's "Odes" have been translated into all of the major languages of the Five Empires today.

The armies of the Priestkings were large and complex. Legion titles, standards, and strengths were entered into "The Book of the Priestkings" on Gánga. The First Legion, which goes back to the Bednálljan "Legion of the Foremost," is frequently mentioned in Engsvanyáli sources. Another great Legion, "The Heroes of the Lord of Wisdom," served as sentinels for Pavár's tomb on Gánga. These troops wore steel-grey armour and collars set with grey-blue star sapphires. When Gánga sank, centuries later, this same Legion still stood guard over the shrine and elected to go down with the island. At the Empire's height, the Engsvanyáli armies consisted of 111 numbered Legions, plus quartermaster units, light infantry, skirmishers, slingers, and archers [*who were not considered as "legions" by the Engsvanyáli*]. These were not all active at any one time, of course.

Many clans came to prominence during the First Epoch: the Might of Gánga, Golden Bough (whose members often served as Governors of the South), Golden Sunburst, etc. The high clans of the Bednálljans were at first eclipsed but were later returned to power: the Clan of Sea Blue, the Cloak of Azure Gems, the High Clan of Ke'ér, the Sweet Singers of Nakomé, the Sword of Fire, and countless others.

The concept of a priestly council that elected its leaders was abandoned in the reign of Ssirandár V (1,609 - 1,666 A. P.) Succession to the throne of Gánga was then made hereditary, as were the posts of High Priest and Adept in many of the temples. Membership on the subsequent "advisory" council was based upon ancestry, prestige, favours, and money.

The Empire strengthened its grasp upon what are now Yán Kór, Mu'ugalavyá, and Milumanayá. Saá Allaqí took the strange step of deposing its indigenous ruler and putting an Engsvanyáli governor in his place. The armies of the Empire pushed east, through what is now Mihállu. Along the southern coast, the Priestkings' generals encountered little resistance from the inhabitants of eastern Salarvyá. Indeed, the priestesses of the goddess Shiringgáyi helped, using powerful weapons of the great Ancients, to subdue the worshippers of Hichéggeth Qúrgha [*modern Black Qárqa*] in the City of Líü-Sánmü [*Tsa'avtúlgu?*].

The kidnapping of the boy-king, Báshdis Mssá X, had unforeseen consequences: the clergy of several temples warred against the temples of the Pariah Gods, and then rose up against Gánga herself. Religious strife added a new dimension to the ongoing secular civil war. The Vríddi declared Fasíltum independent; Teshéngtu Tlekólmü, "the Hammer of the West," did likewise in Tumíssa; the northern regions of what is now Yán Kór slipped away, led by a clever, venal Governor named Arumél; he, in turn, was followed by a man of even less amicable disposition: Kriyór "the Unraveller of Skeins." Salarvyá, Mihállu, and the east also left the empire. All that remained were the western province of Mu'ugalavyá. The

only conquests recorded during this long period of dissolution were the Tsoléi Archipelago and the southern regions of cold, northern N'lüss.

11. A Plethora of Birds...

The Second Epoch of Engsvanyáli history is muddled and complex. There are dozens of competing "dynasties," some of which preceded other, later dynasties, while others must have been contemporary, ruling simultaneously in different locales, with different capitals. Scholars do not agree on which of these "dynasties" succeeded one another, and which were contemporary, however. Depending upon the historian, Engsvanyáli history may thus be a thousand years longer or a thousand years shorter! All of these semi-autonomous states are called "Engsvanyáli," however, because they employed the Engsvanyáli language, all professed the same pantheon, and all traced their origins and right to rule to the Priestkings of the First Epoch. Some scholars believe the Second Epoch lasted as long as 4,000 years; others think it endured for no more than 2,500, and a few argue that was shorter still.

Some of the smaller dynasties were interesting and colourful: e.g. the Blue Faience Dynasty of Kharigár [*Khirgár*] was ruled by Norómbe Sékha, a woman of "such surpassing ugliness that even the *Ghár*-beasts of the river and the *Chlén*-beasts of the fields shut their eyes when she passed." The Priestking Shekkéndu Ssá of Zhekkát [*Sokátis*] so loved his dogs and cats that he deified them, causing his people to revolt and throw him into a pit to be eaten by his own animals, who had been starved for the purpose. It is recorded that the beasts loyally

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refused, and eventually he was freed and restored to his throne in triumph! Nashkólen Mssá of the Dynasty of Eternal Victory, who dwelt in Chrél [*Thri'íl?*], sold his lands, people, and all his goods to pay the fee of a street prostitute with whom he had become enamoured. Pantínu the Poet, who lived at the court of "King" Homunéndu, the Satrap of Pecháno, left volumes of legends, poetry, and love songs. Fortunately, he also left his master's court just before the King failed in casting a powerful spell; the entire city and its environs were "eaten," it is said, by the Demon Ge'é. Pantínu fled to Gánga, where he married the great-granddaughter of Báshdis Mssá VIII [*or possibly IX -- the sources are not clear*].

Gánga itself continued as a major centre. Repeated demands upon other "Imperial capitals" sometimes brought submission and tribute; just as often, an upstart state might haughtily return the messenger with his message sewed into his mouth!

The Second Epoch was a period of great artistic, military, and scientific production. The Munificent Municipality of Zru'ó, the Singing Tower of Cháimu, the Pale Jade Pavilion in Tsatsayágga, the Fortress of Ten Thousand Gleaming Spears, and many other edifices, monuments, and cities were constructed, and some are still considered wonders of the world.

The calligrapher Aruchùè's work on "The Book of the Priestkings" was the envy of the Gods themselves. A dozen schools of painting arose, including the delicate Hrunusántle style. Books with magical "moving" pictures were produced; these contained stories, poems, legends, and history.

Lady Nettukirés Ssönmarán composed her "Sixty-three Treatises on the Exquisite Nuances of Music," as well as her "Musical Modes," in certain of which are written hymns and odes to the Gods and the Races Beyond.

Khuoláz of Laigás "the Strategist," Liyuráin of Tsámra, and Hirkkulméshru the Dwarf, the founders of modern military science, date from this period, as does Mshurúish, "the Killer of Akhó," the greatest authority on naval tactics.

The priestesses of Avánthe at Tumíssa produced thirty volumes of "The Scroll of Knowing Those Things Which Rejoice in the Soil"; Pa'akhán of Khéiris compiled "The Book of Presences," now mostly lost, which described every known demon and interplanar race; "The Book of the Fourteenth Gate," by Chiyuváz of Náth Sùnù [*perhaps a city in Livyánu?*], a copy of which exists in the Oval Palace at Tsámra, also deals with other-planar travel and the geography of the Many Planes. In "The Redaction of the Orange-Red Flame," Chúvan Khalúmis Vríddi discussed Vimúhla's eighty-seven Aspects. He was the leading expert on the Aspects of the Gods generally, and dozens of students came to study under him in Fasíltum. "The Scrolls of the Paths of Burning," kept in the secret temple of Vimúhla in Dó Cháka, are also attributed to this author. The demons of Hrü'ü, Sáрку, and their Cohorts were detailed by Vu'é of Nofér [*Nuférsh in Livyánu?*], but this tome disappeared when the wizard himself vanished. The dramatist, Ressúma Tlángtu, also dates from this period, as does the mime, Nénu Bashántla, and Cholu'é Vindétha, the virtuoso of the *Ténturen*, the favoured stringed instrument of the classical courts. Many genres of both

prose and poetry were created, including the Zhurúllan Odes, the Style of Hakosénde, the Lyric of the Singing Bird, the Standard of Mi'iltesh Khéssa of Khéiris, etc.

[N. B. The fragmentation of the empire was also responsible for the emergence of local dialects of the Engsvanyáli language. The Engsvanyáli of western Mu'ugalavyá developed two series of aspirated and glottalised consonants, masculine-feminine gender distinctions, post-verbal clitics denoting tenses and aspects, and other features. The dialects of Yán Kór dropped medial vowels in favour of tongue-twisting consonant clusters, and borrowed morphological distinctions and lexemes from the underlying Lorún tongues. The speech of Salarvyá retained more Bednálljan phonology and grammar than other dialects. In time, many of these speech forms became mutually unintelligible, developing into the languages of modern Téकुmel. Scripts, too, grew out of local calligraphic styles. One can still perceive resemblances, but it is no longer possible for a Mu'ugalavyáni to read Salarvyáni, Tsolyáni, or Livyáni without special study. The Yán Koryáni used ancient Llyáni as a model for their angular script, and their language, too, is very different from the other descendants of Pavár's language. -- Translator]

A further important phenomenon is the "Hero of the Age." According to texts dating back to the Llyáni Age, in each epoch the Gods select five (sometimes six) persons to make up a composite "Hero," whose duty it is to defend the Plane against the incursion of the Pariah Deities, particularly the Goddess of the Pale Bone. Using sorcery, physical combat, knowledge, guile, and whatever else, the Hero must combat her

minions and drive them back into the Outer Darkness. In the Second Epoch, it is said, this task fell to one Kaijumá Vürüdhámé, a soldier, skilled archer, and nobleman of Purdánim *[which was little more than a ruined shell by this time]*. He found four others: the Wise Maiden Melénde, the Trickster Erjúon of Thá'mis, the Dealer in Magics Khorkhónu of Te'éró [Trú, in Saá Allaqí?], and "Thick" Chóggu, nicknamed "He Who Crushes Sró," a truly monolithic warrior. Together, the Hero defeated the Goddess' servants and sent them scrambling away, out of Téकुmel's Plane until they could regain their strength and try again. When this happened, millennia later, it was the end of Éngsvan hla Gánga, as shall be related below.

The Second Epoch was not a period of barbarism or stagnation, as some have alleged. Much was accomplished, but not under the aegis of a single, unified government.

12. The Bird Flies Again.

In the year 336 of "The Ever-Reliable Calendar of Jnathár Véra" -- which cannot be reconciled with other calendars before or after it -- the much shrunken Empire of Gánga was ruled by one Hemánche Farkhénu. This monarch overcame local foes, won battles against enemies on the mainland, built diplomatic alliances, and streamlined the hoary bureaucracy. "I shall provide you with boats," he is quoted as announcing to his assembled ministers. "From every hundred of your chamberlains, scribes, and stewards, keep ten and send the rest out to fish. Those who disobey will themselves join the fish."

When Hemánche Farkhénu died in 357, his son, Giráнду Farkhénu, came to the throne. This man became known as Giráнду I. His reign opens the Third Epoch of the history of Éngsvan hla Gánga.

Giráнду's armies first engaged the "traitors" of the splinter-dynasties. "The Book of the Priestkings" records that the forerunner of the Legion of the Lord of Red Devastation [*most of whose troops were devotees of Vimúhla*] was sent against the powerful citadel of Harkóntio Thámis [*a place near modern Tumíssa*], whose major clans also served the Flame. The Priestking risked much by this step, but he eventually won out. Another Legion devoted to Vimúhla and Chiténg, that of the Searing Flame, won the Battle of the Seven-Pointed Star near Jekáral [*Jaikalór, in south-eastern Tsolyánu*] and drove the nonhuman Hlutrú back into the jungles of Layódu and the Shikél Swamps. Another, later victory was won by the slingers of the Legion of the Joyful Clan of the Noble Vrayáni; the Emperor rewarded each soldier with slingstones of rubies and diamonds.

Giráнду I was followed by twenty-nine more kings named Giráнду, interspersed with a few other names, who ruled for a total of about a thousand years. The reigns of these rulers are repetitious and so can be passed over. The last Giráнду is said to have had no issue or relatives close enough to claim the throne. The ancient priestly Council was then summoned into session, and Chalánesh Váikash, the High Priest of Hrü'ü [*the ranking member*], called seven candidates to the dais. Each of the three men, three women, and one Pé Chói spoke briefly, and then the High Priest asked for a vote, a procedure that had not been used since the earliest days of the Empire.

Murudlánte Vürözhéka of Béy Sü is said to have won, but his election was challenged. Chalánesh Váikash then commanded that the two candidates who agreed to support Murudlánte should stand on his left, while the four who did not accept him should stand on his right hand. Murudlánte had crossbowmen concealed high up in the hall, and when he raised his right hand, they fired. Three of his rivals fell dead, including the Pé Chói. One of the shots missed, however, and a priestess of Ksáru named Chayetlésa Tlalésu escaped, perhaps forewarned or protected by sorcery. Chalánesh Váikash himself was slain by one of Chayetlésa's partisans, and only thirty-five of the two hundred in the hall survived the ensuing battle.

This, at least, is the story enshrined in Darákka Manggél's long narrative poem., *Me'etlárati* ("The Goddess"). Another school of historians tells it differently: the Council did hold an election; those voting for Chalánesh Váikash' candidate, Murudlánte, were to raise their right hands; dissenters were to remain motionless. The right hand is considered "clean" in many Tekumeláni societies: one eats, greets people, offers food or gifts, etc. with the right hand, reserving the left for less pleasant, personal tasks. Hence, by connotation, a vote for Murudlánte was a vote for one who was pure and beneficial. His opponents objected, but Chalánesh Váikash held firm. Those who favoured other candidates then all simultaneously raised their right hands and stalked out of the chamber. The dissenting party was led by the Priestess Chayetlésa Tlalésu.

Whatever the truth of this incident, it sparked the empire-wide civil war known as

"The Rebellion of the Right Hand." Armies marched, battles were fought, and the land was given over to savagery for more than five years. When the conflict finally subsided, Chayetlésa stood alone as Empress, ruling from 1,386 to 1,395. With her began "The Long Peace": a period of expansion and consolidation that imperceptibly turned into one of slow decay. Chayetlésa Tlalésu was succeeded by twenty-seven Priestkings. The first eleven of these are:

- Ménkoru I, son of Chayetlésa: 1,395 - 1,417 [*according to "The Calendar of Jnathár Véra"*]; reconquered Salarvyá and Saá Allaquí, which had seceded; built the Dome of Eminent Delight in Jakálla, established trade with the Naqsáí of the Southern Continent, and sent emissaries into Mihállu and the eastern regions of Salarvyá.
- Girándu XV: 1,417 - 1,486; excellent administrator; studied prices and commodities, and wrote a treatise on economics; had 117 children by a busy harem of over 50 wives and concubines.
- Ménkoru II: 1,466 - 1,502; built the Great Hall of the Priestkings on Gánga Isle, filled it with treasures, and surrounded himself with the most glittering court in history; had 35 children -- including two who are listed as "of the Pé Chói" -- a genetic improbability!
- Ménkoru III: 1,502 - 1,799 (!); said to have prolonged his life by sorcery, a practice immediately declared illegal; laid down laws, build more *Sákbe*-roads, strengthened the mighty fortress of Ngála near modern Jakálla, set up monuments, stelae, and inscriptions at the boundaries of the empire; constructed ports and harbours around the Sea of Milumanayá [*now the Desert of Sighs and the central plain of Yán Kór*].
- Atlkólum I: 1,800 - 1,809; "The Mediator"; fought the Shén but eventually made a treaty of peace with them; destroyed the Temple of the Goddess of the Pale Bone

- near what is now Pelesár [*a low island at that time*]; restored the Shrines of the Gods on Gánga, which had fallen into decay; much beloved by his people.
- Ménkoru IV: 1,809 - 1,850; increased the formal etiquette of the court, introduced new bureaucratic titles, pageantry, and innovations in costume and manners.
- Chayetlésa II: 1,855 (?) - 1,879; "She Who Rules Gently"; a priestess of Avánthe who rejected her ancestors' affiliation with Ksárul; had 17 children, of whom one became "The Monster of Burrú Isle": a psychotic who murdered over 360 persons, ate portions of their bodies, and ordered the torture of dozens of victims; his mother exiled him to a tower on Burrú Isle, where he died. Legend has it that his ghost -- and those of his captives -- still haunt the place.
- Atlkólum II: 1,879 - 1,999; "The Omniscient"; developed the secret police and a system of informants that were the forerunners of the Omnipotent Azure Legion, the Yán Koryáni Surgéth, the Mu'ugalavyáni Mourners in Sable, and the Livyáni Vnúneb today; refurbished the Tólek Kána Pits and built prisons all across the land; "stern but fair," his subjects said.
- Girándu XVI: 1,999 - 2,035; "The One Who Is Tired"; famous for his boredom and fatigue, from which neither medicine nor magic could rouse him for long; his last words were, "It is a relief that now I die."
- Chayetlésa IV: 2,035 - 2,071; devoted herself to Dilinála, women's causes, building orphanages, and establishing schools and academies within the temples. Her Chief Minister, Numinátlu Veshkúma, was a priest of Keténgku, who set up hospitals and facilities for the mentally ill.
- Alinéya I: 2,071 - 2,081; beautiful niece of the preceding; formed liaisons with officers of her guard; eventually lost her beauty and was reduced to bringing beggars, peasants, and foreigners into the palace, where she forced them into unnatural acts, then had them slain; died from a dose of the deadly drug, *Zu'úr*.

Sixteen more rulers are listed for this period, but these did little more than occupy the throne, ruling for about 250 years. Their reigns are detailed in Tlékku Beshyéne's "*Chikèkkólumelyal hiYagáishan*" ("Inept Emperors of Antiquity"), a copy of which is preserved in Prince Rereshqála's Library.

13. And Higher Still.

The Empire seemed to pause for breath before making its final dizzying ascent. After Mettukánatl VIII, the last of the sixteen "Inept" Emperors mentioned above, nearly a thousand years were to pass before the scholar, Mézhmü Odhón Bezhmöllü of Ramüş [*Úrmish*] took up the thread again. He was not interested in dynastic history *per se*, but rather in events of the period of the Flower Wars in which the Third Epoch culminated. He begins in the year 3,119 of the Ever-Reliable Calendar of Jnathár Véra, with the first member of the Chalcháí Dynasty: Meluénde Ssá, who brought in troops of the Legion of Sérqu, Sword of the Empire, and seized the Halls of Eternal Glory from Ntés Ktík, the Pé Chóí Chamberlain who had become *de facto* Emperor. The list of Chalcháí Priestkings is given below:

Meluénde Ssá: 3,119 - 3,127; "The Perfect"; served by efficient officers: e.g. Rekmílish I of Jakálla (3,127 - 3,162); Arudlákha Mnál "the General" of Koylúga (3,105 - 3,142); Saléya Dlékku, High Priestess of Avánthe (3,110 - 3,137), and many others.

Ssesmúga I: 3,127 - 3,160; Rekmílish II governed Jakálla, following in his father's footsteps. This reign is called "The Smiting of Little *Epéng*-worms": i. e. the suppression of many small revolts and intrigues.; erected the Stela of Scarlet Glory at Navái Village near

Tumíssa, recording the deeds of the Legion of the Givers of Sorrow.

Ssesmúga II: 3,160 - 3,162; died of a kidney ailment, but possibly poisoned.

Wiyúl Bási: 3,162 - 3,169; concubine from Nmartúsha, who seized the throne with the aid of her five lovers; attempted to introduce a state religion based on the Pariah Gods; killed by an angry mob.

Neshkólu I: 3,169 - 3,203; son of the above; mentally ill: hid in a secret room most of his life and never emerged in daylight; was fortunate to have Rekmílish III as his governor of the southern provinces.

[Interregnum: 3,203 - 3,222; the Empire was ruled by a coalition of High Priests from the temples of Vimúhla, Karakán, and Hrsh; war with the followers of the One Other; great earthquake of 3,212 in Úrmish and Katalál: the "Harbinger of Worse to Come"]

Tratikánte I: 3,222 - 3,269 and then 3,269 - 3,356 (!); "the Greatest Empress"; founded the "Many-Hued Garden" at the palace on Gánga; she herself enjoyed cooking and produced excellent pastries; kind and generous; so beloved that when she died, her courtiers demanded that she be revived in spite of the ancient prohibition against this; she then ruled for another 87 years; eventually she declared herself "too tired" and demanded death.

Tratikánte II: 3,356 - 3,557; a sickly girl; married her own brother, who became Ssesmúga III; the empire prospered under the Viceroys of the South, who were descendants of Rekmílish III..

Tratikánte III: 3,357 - 3,357; infant daughter crowned as Empress but died soon after birth; Viceroys began a long internecine quarrel.

Ssesmúga III: 3,357 - 3,402; brilliant scholar; sent out expeditions to find the Unstraightened City, to the Isle of Eyes, and to the Southern Continent. Some of these returned, and many items were added to the museum of curios in the High Chancery in Avanthár.

Ssesmúga IV: 3,402 - 3,460; excellent ruler; Gánga reached its height of glory; an invasion of Livyánu failed, however,

due to powerful sorcery; "Great Compendium of All Knowledge" compiled by a committee of scholars at Gánga; a priest of Grugánu, Furlánte Qolámu of Bény Sü, completed the "Tome of Unoccupied Darkness," also called "The Book of Tenebrous Places," an important text on demonology and the Planes Beyond; "The Singer of Epics Beyond Compare," Misuénde Fe'é, became chief court entertainer; composition of the epics "The Windsong Canticle," "The Hymn to the Scarlet Moon," in honour of Vimúhla, "The Tortured Melody," devoted to Hrü'ü, and many more.

Tratikánte IV: 3,460 - 3,465; rivalries between the powerful Viceroys of the provinces and the start of the "Flower Wars" in 3,464; this Empress was assassinated by the troops of the Archon of the Red (see below).

Ssesmúga V: 3,465 - ?; arrested and slain by persons unknown.

[The Flower Wars: lasted from 3,464 through 3,490.]



Engsvanyáli Officer of the Reign of Ssesmúga IV

From a vase painting in the Museum of Prince Rereshqála

14. The Flower Wars.

The conflicts called "The Flower Wars" were a series of struggles for power between the Viceroys of the Empire. Empress Tratikánte I had ordered the construction of "The Many-Hued Garden" at the palace on Gánga. Each area of this garden contained flowers of only one colour: there were thus seven separate sectors, devoted to red, yellow, blue, white, green, lavender, and orange blooms, respectively. When the Empress walked in one of these walled bowers, she and all those with her wore garments of only that colour. She appointed each of her chief ministers a *Kelém* ["Archon" or "Ruler"] of one segment of this Garden. After her death these titles were continued, and political parties grew up around them.

The Archons eventually came to open warfare. Almost immediately, the Archon of the White lost the city of Sokátis to the Archon of the Green; the former committed suicide, but his impaled corpse was displayed anyway. The Archon of the Yellow, who ruled Khirgár and the northwest, married the Lady Tirisánte Melél, the lovely Archon of the Blue and Viceroy of Vrá. The couple retired from the fray and gave all of their forces over to the Archon of the Orange, Lord Vikkumékyar of Chame'él in Salarvyá. The Archon of the Lavender fled to his own region in Yán Kór and was not seen again. It is said that he sought refuge in Nuru'ún in the far north-east. The Archons of the Green and the White (the son of the original Archon) fought a vast, confused, bloody battle near Fasíltum against the Archon of the Red, where the latter had his major strongholds; Red won,

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White perished on the field, and Green was imprisoned and exhibited in a cage for years thereafter. The last act of this mad civil war was the battle and siege of Mmélökh [*Mmilláka, in western Salarvyá*] between the Archons of the Red and the Orange. The Vimúhla-worshipping soldiers of the Vríddi won out after months of fighting; Koylúga and other cities were sacked, and the Archon of the Red, Lord Amukánatl Vríddi, assumed the throne. The last act of the war was the unnecessary exile of the Archons of Yellow and Blue to the Southern Continent, where nothing more was heard of them.

The Flower Wars were destructive not only to life and property but also to the concept of Imperial unity. Several regions declared local autonomy: Yán Kór and the Lorún lands of the north were lost first, followed by N'lüss [*which had never been happy under Engsvanyáli rule in any case*]. Mu'ugalavyá never wavered from its fealty to Éngsvan hla Gánga, however. Salarvyá was divided into a conquered zone adjacent to Tsolyánu, and a jumble of independent eastern states beginning at the city of Chgáth [*modern Jéggeth*] and running all the way to the eastern ocean. The western region soon fell away and became independent as well. Outlying areas, such as the Tsoléi Archipelago, Ghatón, Chayákkú, and Saá Allaqí, were also lost, but Mihállu remained loyal -- and, it is said, still regularly sends tribute to vanished Gánga and expects a new Viceroy to arrive daily!

Lord Amukánatl took up residence in the Palace of the Priestkings on Gánga. He does not seem to have enjoyed the south, and several poems and compilations of his letters survive in which he bitterly criticises his surroundings.

[N. B. The Engsvanyáli language underwent considerable changes: the names of cities, provinces, clans, deities, etc. assumed near-modern forms; older grammatical structures were replaced by others more like the modern tongues; "Classical" Tsolyáni and "Classical" Mu'ugalavyáni became separate linguistic forms, as did "Ancient Yán Koryáni," called Tsáq̄w. In Livyánu, the Duruób tongue underwent many permutations before becoming the Livyáni of today. Various minor languages either became extinct or else developed into argots used by secret temple societies; this was the fate of Thu'úsa, a language once spoken in the Kúrt Hills of Tsolyánu. Another case is the Tongue of the Lord of Worms, used by the temples of Sárku and Durritlámish for ritual purposes. The Secret Tongue of the Priests of Ksárul does not date from this period but is much earlier, having been devised (it is hypothesised) in the Age of the Fishermen Kings. -- Translator]

Pavár's ancient religion was given new life: the Priestess Teshkorúsa Boródlýa of Jakállá wrote a treatise describing the ninety-three Aspects of Avánthe. The division of the human self (i.e. the soul) into five parts was the subject of three volumes by Nethándu Ssanyússa of Tumíssa. Lord Virudái Vrázhimü of Katalál wrote on the inner doctrines of the temple of Ksárul [*this tome is still kept secret by the clergy of the Doomed Prince.*], and numberless commentaries on commentaries were added to the libraries of the temples.

Secret societies sprang up soon after the Flower Wars: e.g. the Scarlet Brotherhood, which served Vimúhla and Chiténg, the Brethren of the Scarlet Nail (which, oddly enough, was devoted to Sárku), the Incandescent Blaze Society (again, Vimúhla

and Chiténg), the Ndálu Clan (Ksáru), etc. Keshkúru Gama'án founded the Scroll of the Blaze Revealed, another sect of zealots who served the Flame Lord. Some of these societies are extinct, while others survive into modern society.

The theology of Pavár did not deal with human ethics. It was left to a priest of Thúmis, Yahéshu Sarél of Tsurú in Tsolyánu, to compile an encyclopaedia of ethical beliefs and customs of the many nations. In 3,470, he then produced a second work on the concept of "nobility and ignobility" as basic ethical principles. These are still standard today.

15. The Last Fluttering.

The Priestking Amukánatl Vrídidi strove to restore the Empire to its former grandeur but was only partially successful. As soon as he turned his attention to one trouble spot, others sprang up. He spent most of his years on the throne marching from one battle to another, usually winning, but never really eliminating any one foe or solving any one problem. The Priestkings listed for this last Epoch of Engsvanyáli history include the following:

Amukánatl Vrídidi I: 3,490 - 3,517; described above.

Amukánatl Vrídidi II: 3,517 - 3,550; regained western Salarvyá but spent much of his time marching and countermarching in what are now Milumanayá and Saá Allaqí; married Sáima Dlakotánte, an heiress of the house of the Archon of the Green; the Empress later went mad. It is said she was devoted to demons.

Kazhilo'ób I: 3,550 - 3,598; sophisticated in music, art, literature, science, and philosophy; devised the Calendar which bears his name; see below. The wizard,

Mriyántla Chomúa, served at his court; this man is said to have foreseen the dreadful cataclysm that would overtake Gánga but was kept from warning anyone of it by the Demons of the Pariah Deities. All that he could manage was a permanently mournful expression. His awful death is the subject of a long poem by Géleth Mriyudlákte of Mrelú.

Mesunénde: 3,598 - 3,612; architect and renewer; ordered twelve cities to undergo *Ditlána*; had ancient Imperial records burned and new files started (to the dismay of historians); revised the tax laws and criminal procedures.

Kazhilo'ób II: 3,612 - 3,669; "Ruler of All"; collected more tribute from more places than any other ruler in history, even, it is said, from Lost Bayársha, from Rannálu, from M'mórcha (3 cages of puff-spiders!), and the Nyémesel Isles; held pageants that cost many thousands of *Suór* and lasted for days or even weeks; units from thirty-three Legions marched in one military parade in Jakállá, including 8,000 black and white Pé Chói, 3,000 Páchi Léi, and 2,000 Ahoggyá -- the city reeked of rank fur for days! He attracted great scholars, poets, artists, and musicians to his court on Gánga.

Horusánde Ngá I: 3,670 - 3,683; continued his father's practices; forcibly married off the priestesses of Dilinála in Mekú to members of his court because "they did not produce offspring to serve the Empire." Died of an *Epéng*-bite.

Amukánatl Vrídidi III: 3,683 - 3,700 (or 3,705?); said to have "smelled bad" even after repeated baths (?).

Niluén Dhiyá: 3,700 - 3,782; stout, powerful woman; said to have beaten many male champions in wrestling, duelling, and loud shouting (?); turned the court into an athletic arena; ordered a pogrom of Pé Chói because she suspected they were "traitors"; died of over-eating.

Kazhilo'ób III: 3,782 - 3,833; nephew of the preceding; no interest in government; devoted himself to his books; held public debates on theology with priests of various temples, including the One Other and the One Who Is.

Horusánde Ngá II: 3,830 - 3,859; co-ruler with the preceding for the first three years of his reign; said to have "descended into the Darkness" and become a servitor of the One Other.

Kazhilo'ób IV: 3,860 - 3,897; excellent general and strategist; defeated Hagháktish Lélo, a Mu'ugalavyáni renegade, at Tu'unké in 3,885; married his foe's widow, who then later had Kazhilo'ób assassinated.

[Gap: about 1,500 years by some accounts, during which records were destroyed, the Empire became fragmented, and wars and rebellions raged. The actual length of this period may be as much as a thousand years shorter, depending upon which historian one prefers.]

Amukánatl Vríddi IV: 5,400 - 5,459; his dates are doubtful; restored the unity of the central Empire, but without Salarvyá or Mu'ugalavyá; Páchi Léi revolt in which many perished; epidemic of the Mottled Plague in south-western Tsolyánu and Pán Cháka; the Emperor himself made a pilgrimage to Pavár's shrine on Gánga to plead for his people; he perished, however, and the plague lasted six more years.

Shejjánekh I: 5,459 - 5,468; Yán Koryáni Viceroy and distant cousin of the foregoing; inherited the throne, though he did not want it; ruled well.

[Gap: further civil wars; further minor Priestkings who managed to hold Gánga but little else; several dynastic changes; duration unknown.]

Balamasén I: 6,988 - 7,007; dates uncertain; restored central unity and the crumbling shrines and palaces of Gánga Isle; held a great fête to celebrate "the Coming of Pavár" at which he choked on a piece of meat and died.

Balamasén II: 7,007 - 7,008; retarded boy-king; his ministers handled all of the Empire's affairs; loss of Tumíssa to the Mu'ugalavyáni and independence of port cities in Milumanayá.

Tlimastlíkén: 7,008 - 7,039; the last Priestking of Gánga.

N. B. The great Calendar of Kazhilo'ób I is somewhat of a puzzle. It is thought that this ruler used a starting date of 3,590 according to the calendar of Jnathár Véra,. It is now 10,047 A. K. -- 2,366 in the Tsolyáni era -- but the Salarvyáni add 3,250 years to the "Time of No Kings," the period after the sinking of Gánga. According to their "Era of Tsatsayágga," it is thus 13,297 A. E. T. This chronology is rather dubious, due to the length of "gaps" and the uncertainty of the regnal years of several Priestkings. Kazhilo'ób's calendar is still employed in Livyánu and Mu'ugalavyá, but the Tsolyáni begin the Second Imperium from the accession of the first Tlakotáni Seal Emperor. A few places, notably old Mihállu, still prefer the "old" Engsvanyáli calendar, devised, it is said, by the priests of the Pariah Gods and written in the Sunúz language.. By this, the present year is 21,784. There is no historical justification for this calculation, however. -- Translator]

16. The Fall of Gánga.

The ancient palaces and shrines on Gánga Isle dreamed on, slowly crumbling away in the hot, southern sun. The Emperor still held lavish functions, so encrusted with hoary decorum that several servants were required to support and move a person attired in formal costume. The Priestking Tlimastlíkén seems to have been a pleasant, vacuous man, dominated by his wife, Tlèkumasén, and his eldest daughter, Misumiyén. (He had four other, younger children.) His interests lay in collecting statuary, listening to music (not the great epics, it is written, but the simple folksongs of the southern Empire), and playing at *Dén-den*, which his courtiers always contrived for him to win.

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It was at this juncture that the Gods saw fit to call for another "Hero of the Age." An Imperial General, Lord Kokún Vriyón of Khirgár, who worshipped Karakán and was a member of the Golden Sunburst clan, was to be the "head," while four other persons, whose names are variously given by the historians, were to form the rest of the composite identity.

[N. B. The Mu'ugalavyáni historian Sanílish Chitéyu of Ssa'átis states that the other four were: Harmúnish Dlekkúra, a scholar and sorcerer of Khéiris; Dísið Murúshu, High Priestess of Kírrineb at Hráis in Livyánu; Mettukén Fershéna, Priest of the Inner Doctrines of Ksáruł at Hmakuyál; and Pték Ktík, a Pé Chói warrior from Kúrdis in Mu'ugalavyá. Sanílish Chitéyu accuses the Tsolyáni historians of concealing these persons' identities because three of the four are non-Tsolyáni. -- Translator]

Years of struggle against the minions of the dread Goddess seemed about to culminate in victory for the Hero when Kokún was betrayed by the woman he loved, Niyunéth Tlatoyél of Gánga. *[Neither the name "Niyunéth" nor the Tlatoyél lineage are ever used today.]* A jealous rival, Murettén Nüminú, an officer in Kokún's legion, used Niyunéth to get at him. As Kokún walked in a wooded garden on his estate, he was warned by "a voice from the Gods" not to leave the path, but when he saw Niyunéth lying on the ground, apparently injured, he rushed to her side. He was then set upon by the Demons of the Planes Beyond and so was slain.

[N. B. The historian, Messíliu Badárian has doubts about the "demons," theorising instead that Kokún's rival might have employed either mercenaries or common

thugs. As it stands, however, this legend is part of every schoolchild's upbringing, however, and few would dare to change it. -- Translator]

The immediate result of Kokún's death was the dissolution of the "Hero" and a partial victory for the Goddess. She could not enter Tékumel's Plane completely because of the remaining four parts of the "Hero," but her efforts triggered the horrendous earthquake that caused the Isle of Gánga to sink beneath the waves.

"On an afternoon in the summer of the year, the earth rumbled and shook itself once, twice, thrice, like a mighty Sró-beast rising from its lair." -- *Ashmúnu Dné.*

The seas roiled, and the waters poured over Gánga's riven flanks, tilting the western half of the island up and the eastern half down beneath the waves. The entire coast of what is now southern Tsolyánu sank, while the great Inland Sea of the North -- where the Desert of Sighs is today -- rose, frothing with dying fish and sea-life. The beautiful Lake of Lord Aridzó became the Dry Bay of Ssu'úm, where nothing now grows. Walls of water rushed out into the Pentrúrtra Deeps, carrying all before them. Lesser subsidences occurred in Mu'ugalavyá, in Salarvyá, and along the coasts. None can calculate the losses occasioned by the calamity. Tidal waves swept inland into Livyánu, and up the Missúma River as far as Usenánu. Great *Akhó*-beasts lay beached and gasping in the fields near Pála Jakálla; hulls of ships were found interred upside down in alluvial mud in the swampy Flats of Tsechhélnu north of Penóm; and tangled tree trunks and branches obstructed shipping as far south-east as the Sharúna Lowlands of Salarvyá. The sky was filled with clouds of dust for years, and the

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sun shone through like the maleficent red Eye of Lord Vimúhla.

The Spouting Mountains of the Shén lands erupted, spewing lava, ash, and clouds of poisonous gas across the region. Many of the great reptiles fled into Mmátugual, where they dwell today. Only the Sealed City of Dlášh in southern Livyánu was spared, it is said, by a "Shield of the Great Ancients" that rose to cover it. Dríchte Peak, "The Hag of Flame," erupted in the Plains of Glass, as recorded by the priestly caretakers of the Temple of the Eye of the World, who then had the good sense to flee. A new continent rose up from the ocean south of Ssórmu in eastern Salarvyá, only to sink back again a hundred years later with much shrieking and groaning, leaving only the shallows of the White Water Shoals to mark its passing.

[The catastrophe spread, as the tectonic plates of the planet readjusted themselves. It is thought that the gravity engines of the Great Ancients finally managed to re-establish a balance. -- Translator]

The tragedy brought down political and economic structures as easily as it destroyed Gánga. Breaches in the Sákke-roads kept shipments of food from reaching their destinations; the telepathic networks ceased to operate, as their members perished or fled; crops failed; dead fish and rotting ocean vegetation filled the air with the stench of death. Famine and pestilence bestrode the land.

Of all the damage done by the Goddess' Demons from Beyond, perhaps the worst was the loss of Gánga herself. Her proud towers lay tumbled and broken; her libraries and museums were homes to fish; her palaces lay stricken beneath the turgid

brown waters; her people, her soldiers, her courtiers and chattering officials were silent. Today green seaweed drifts through the empty eye-sockets of her nobles and her poor alike. The Shrine of Pavár is lost. The Priestkings themselves are gone.

The wings of the Dark covered the eyes of
Light;
The Gods turn away Their countenances
And seek solace only in memory...
-- *Malué of Púrdimal*

It took less than two centuries for the sprawling Empire to dissolve beyond repair. As communication ceased, commerce faltered. Local quarrels erupted; Change fought Stability, and both battled against the minions of the Goddess and the One Other. Those who had perceived themselves as one nation now saw each other as foreigners and foes. Creatures of the Underworlds, brought to the surface by flooding and continued seismic temblors, prowled the littered streets of Tléku, Vrá, and Pétris Layóda. Ferocious Zrné-beasts were reported in the suburbs of Jakálla, and packs of wild dogs brought down the weak and the elderly in Katalál and Úrmish. The "Enemies of Man," the Hlüss and the Ssú, made joyous inroads into what had been human territory for millennia. The bestial Hlutrgú swarmed over the shores of Msúmtel Bay and parts of Káija. The Pé Chói, the Páchi Léi, the Ahoggyá, and even the Swamp Folk along the Putuhénu River in Mu'ugalavyá expanded their domains. There were no Priestkings and no human armies to oppose them.

The brave statues of the Lords of Old,
The Heroes of the Gods,
The tomes of their heroic deeds,
once vaunted across all the worlds,
are awash today in the cold, black water;
Gánga is gone, O Gods,
Gánga is gone!

-- *Malué of Púrdimal*

17. Thereafter ...

A later poet has written a fictional account of the last moments of Gánga. The Priestking Tlimastlikén elected to die with his island, his wife and children around him.

"The marble throne room grew cold, shuddered, and trembled. Thunderous cracking sounds filled the air. A wind rose from nowhere, moaned, and caressed the pallid lips of the God-Emperor and his brood. The guardsmen of the Legion of the Heroes of the Lord of Wisdom stared, stony-eyed, as flames from the lamps blew this way and that. Outside, there was a rising, moaning, roar. Then a carved block fell thunderously from the ceiling, then another. The Empress embraced her daughters, touched her husband's wrist, and would have spoken, but the noise swept her words away. The mighty columns of lapis and silver and gold swayed and toppled drunkenly.

Oh, the night, the wild night!
The rising of the Demon Lords!
Eyes that now see
The gloomy majesty of
Lord Srükarúm,
The Master of the Mournful Dead."
Mikúnu Feyár of Vrá

The central lynch-pin of the Empire was broken and gone. What followed was more chaos than had been experienced for millennia, more confusion, more conflict and collapse. The period after the sinking of Gánga is called "The Time of No Kings." Some say this interregnum lasted for six thousand years; others say ten, using as evidence the fragmentary archives of the Priests of Khirgár. Most cities can produce no records at all, although statues, coins, and pottery attest to the existence of petty little

kings and potentates. Most of these are no more than shadows.

What is now Tsolyánu was divided among over twenty principalities. There were as many again in neighbouring Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Yán Kór. Some of these places continued to use the Engsvanyáli language, while others chose Classical Tsolyáni, Classical Mu'ugalavyáni, Old Salarvyáni, and Tsáqw. Other languages seem to have become extinct: e.g. Aí Chè, one of the tongues of the far north-east. The Sunúz language was preserved as a ritual vehicle for the rites of the Pariah Gods, but, aside from manuscripts in the Temple of Shiringgáyi in Jgrésh, it is mainly found in the Naqsái lands south-west of Livyánu. Thu'úsa was taken over by the temples of the Lords of Stability as a secret argot for their texts.

The Time of No Kings produced many of the rich legends that are still cherished by the folk of Tékmel. These are the Undying Wizards: mighty Thomár, whose mysterious towers appear here and there across the Many Planes; Metállja of Salarvyá, who went to dwell in the Unstraightened City and founded the Blasphemous Accelerators; the wanderer, Hagárr of Paránta; Súbadim the Sorcerer, who sought the Egg of the World; Qiyór the Many-Tongued, fierce Pendárte of Khéiris -- and a dozen more. These are the stuff of legend, the fabric of poetry, the glory of the later epics. There is little that is theological or philosophical in these tales; they tell of the bravery and wisdom of human beings like oneself. They are individual and personal. They are intelligible. They attract not our awe but our admiration and our sympathy.

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The Time of No Kings passed, as all things do. By the time scholars had begun to write again, four "Seal Emperors" of Tsolyánu had come and gone: the "First Tlakotáni," a second whose name is unknown, then Hórukel N'lén, and a fourth whose name is only partially recorded as "To... Miúna." The first Seal Emperor whose records have largely survived is Trákonel I "The Blazing Light," who ruled from 139 to 195 A. S. The Tlakotáni Dynasty based its power upon a great Seal -- actually, it is said, a carved metal disc of the Great Ancients. The founders of the dynasty also had procured a magnificent "throne" -- really a screen of jade-like substance carved in tiny arabesques, behind which there was indeed an elaborate seat of the same material. This, the Petal Throne, is a major symbol of imperial Tsolyáni power. The Seal and the Petal Throne together *ARE* Tsolyánu.

[N. B. Lexicographers believe that the name "Tlakotáni" is a Late Engsvanyáli term denoting "brethren (of a secret society -- not blood relations)." -- Translator]

It has now been over 2,366 years since the founding of our glorious Second Imperium, the Tlakotáni Dynasty. The lessons learned - - and not learned -- from great Gánga are still fresh in the hearts and minds of our folk today. It is not my intention to speak of Tsolyánu, however, or of the states that currently surround it; that I leave for others who will come after me, as I have followed in the footsteps of the historians of Gánga.

I have completed my task in health and glory. Now I lay down my pen ...

-- Baréka hiShanyál