

# Tal-Elmar and the Drughu tongue

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A fair voice he had, which even made the rough  
tongue of his people more sweet to hear.

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PM:423

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## Introduction

The unfinished story of Tal-Elmar (PM:422-438), written c. 1955, grants us some brief glimpses into the language of a Mannish tribe in the Second Age. These half-savage Wild Men lived either at the mouths of the Isen or of the Morthond (what would later be southern Gondor) – Tolkien was not sure about the location. According to the descriptions of their mode of life and appearance they must be Drúedain and their possible living location at the mouths of Isen would be part of Drúwaith Iaur.

With only a few translations given, hardly a word of their language can be interpreted at all, but nevertheless I will try to make the best of it.

## 1 Persons

At first, some personal names are given:

'**Tal-argan** Longbeard' (PM:437) – it is not clear whether 'Longbeard' is a translation of **Tal-argan** or an additional surname. This has been changed to **Hazad** 'Longbeard' (PM:423), which could be related to the stem \*HAZ'D-, occurring in Adunaic with derivatives **hazad**, **hazid** 'seven' (SD:247) and Khuzdul **Khazâd** 'Dwarves' – there were originally Seven Fathers of the Dwarves in the beginning. We get to know that **Hazad** took great pride in his five-feet long beard – perhaps a result of an influence by Dwarvish culture and language? Has **Hazad** perhaps even the meaning 'dwarf/dwarf-like'?

Another name is **Tal-Buldar**, changed to **Buldar** only (PM:437). If interpretable at all, it could be related to \*BUR'D with Adunaic **burōda** 'very heavy'. A third untranslated name is **Mogru** (PM:429).

There is finally a woman of the Edain called **Elmar**, who was captured by Buldar and taken as wife. Their son Hazad calls his youngest child, who becomes similar to his grand-mother in appearance and behaviour, by the name **Tal-Elmar**. Interestingly it is not only a female name which is adapted, but also a foreign one, maybe of Elvish origin. The first outline of this family (**Tal-Buldar** – **Tal-argan** – **Tal-Elmar**) shows **Tal-** as a kind of prefixed family name, while the in the revision (**Buldar** – **Hazad** – **Tal-Elmar**) **Tal-Elmar** could mean '\*scion of Elmar' or maybe '\*like Elmar / face of Elmar / eyes of Elmar' or something similar.

We also get to know the patronymic formations **Hazad uBuldar** and **Tal-Elmar uHazad** (PM:429) where **u** may be a genitive inflection '\*of', perhaps related to Khuzdul genitive(?) **-u** as in **Khazaddūmu** 'of Moria' (PE17:47) or **-ul**, an *adj. or genitive ending used as a patronymic* in **Fundinul** 'son of Fundin' (ibid.).

The Wild Men call the Númenóreans by the word **Go-hilleg** (PM:427), not translated. In The Lord of the Rings a Dunlending word **forgoil** 'Strawheads' occurs as a term for the Rohirrim. The speech of the Wild Men of Drúadan Forest (located to the other side of the Ered Nimrais) was remotely akin to the language of

the Dunlendings (LotR App.F). Do we see a common element **#go** \*'head' here? **Hilleg** would then be some adjective classifying the Númenóreans.

Alternatively **Go-hilleg** could mean \*'Worshippers of Death' or \*'Men of the Dark' – these paraphrases occur several times. Perhaps **-hil-** is even related to the Elvish stem **KHIL-** 'follow' we find in *The Etymologies* and **hilleg** means \*'followers' (pl.)?

A Drúedanic word from another source – **gorgûn** \*'orcs' has a completely different plural formation, however – with the suffix **-n**, as this word is likely to be an elaboration of the root **(g)uruku-** (compare WJ:391).

## 2 Places

Two village names are mentioned: **Agar** and **Udul** (PM:433). Apart from the apparent vocalic colouring of the radicals G-R and D-L by **a** and **u** respectively, nothing can be stated about them.

A valley named **Rishmalog** >> **Ishmalog** is mentioned as a battle-place where a host of the Edain suffered a defeat by the Wild Men. This could be **Mornan**, the valley whence the river **Morthond** 'Black-root' flows; with **#\*ishma** (**#\*ish?**) \*'black' and **#\*log** (**#\*malog?**) 'valley' – but this is extremely speculative, of course. It could be as well any other valley (**Imloth Melui** for example). But **Mornan** lies near the Gate of the Dead Men – the Wild Men of the Mountains – those who broke their oath given to Isildur.

**Gorbelgod** (<< **Dur nor-Belgoth**) is a place of great swans, about which legends tell (PM:426,437). One can isolate a common element **belgod(-th)**, so that the revised name must be analyzed as **gor** + **belgod**.

If this is **Nîm-in-Eilph** (Swanfleet, lit. 'water-lands of the Swans'), a region farther in the north where this tribe of the Wild Men could have had their ancient home (Dunland lies close to it), the word might consist out of **gor** \*'water' or something similar and **belgod** \*'swan', possibly inflected. In the rejected form **Dur** could mean 'land, dwelling-place', compare S. **dor** with the same meaning (UT:428), so maybe in the revised form **gor** means \*'land' as well; **nor** must be a genitive particle then.

**Belfalas**, the coast region south of the mouth of **Morthond**, contains the element **bel**, which possibly had a meaning similar to **falas** 'shore' in an alien tongue (VT42:15). Many names in southern Gondor are derived from one of the languages spoken in the region before the occupation of Gondor by the Númenóreans, which began long before the Downfall (VT42:15). The beginning of this occupation, a fleet of three Númenórean ships, is described in the story of Tal-Elmar. So maybe we see a trace of **bel** in **#belgod** \*'swan'.

Other pre-Númenórean places in southern Gondor are the river **Adorn**, the beacons **Eilenach**, **Eilenaer**, **Erelas**, the regions **Arnach**, **Lamedon**, the stone of **Erech**. However, none of these words can be put into relation with those above – their structure is more Sindarin-like and does not remind of the rough Drughu tongue at all.

## References

- [1] Andreas Möhn (Lalaith) *Etymologies of the Atani languages* [http://lalaith.vpsurf.de/Tolkien/Fr\\_Atani.html](http://lalaith.vpsurf.de/Tolkien/Fr_Atani.html)
- [2] Helge Fauskanger *Various Mannish Tongues* <http://www.uib.no/People/hnohf/mannish.htm>