

The Mellorian Histories
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Chapter XI

A brief discourse on the rise and fall of the Cirdaecean Hegemony

Out of the ruination left behind by the Great War between the Mudali and Ancient Hthemnos, opportunities for expansion abounded to those ambitious civilizations previously held in abeyance by such titanic powers.

In the wake of the conflict, Hthemnos was no more; swallowed by the desert sands for all eternity by the irrepressible magic of their rival. However, the Hthemnites had managed to strike a fatal blow of their own: a sickness wrought by their evil science, fashioned solely for the seemingly immortal Mudali. The 'victors' of the war retreated to their gleaming cities where they wasted away from this malign contagion, seeing all that they had fought for slowly slip from between their fingers.

The balance of power was now set upon a knife's edge. Neither of the combatants could any longer claim dominion over the circles of the world. All eyes looked to the remaining elder race, to see how their actions would shape the destiny of all other races. In the extreme East, behind the unassailable walls of their fortress-cities, the Steel-Sworn made no move to claim that which their hated brothers the Mudali had laboured so long to control. Such inaction provided the inspiration for much bolder hearts...

There were those that had waited for such an eventuality, and had been poised to act upon it. The Cirdaecean's were one such race. A coldly ambitious and ingenious people; their ultimate origins now sadly lost to the histories, to be discussed only in the idle speculation of such humble scholars as this one.

From what can be discerned, they were not a populous race, but they had watched patiently and learned much from those empires that had come before. Their technologies were unmatched now that Hthemnos was destroyed, their knowledge *almost* without rival, and most importantly to a historian, they kept excellent records of their deeds. The Cirdaeceans expanded their territories rapidly, absorbing many former Mudali protectorates, and engaging in a series of wars designed to hamstring their rivals while they moved to collect the bounty of the remaining war-ravaged ancient cities.

For many long years they knew ascendancy in the period scholars call the 'first hegemony', until the shadows of Hthemnos stirred in the deserts of Far Khethelia and the forces of that continent drove the Cirdaeceans from their northern coasts under an assault of the darkest magicks.

The surviving Cirdaeceans conducted a panicked migration to the south-east, harried constantly by endless Khethelic legions that sensed a final victory to be close at hand. Here the Cirdaeceans chanced upon the 'uninhabited' continent that would, in time, come to be known as Mellorian. Though they knew it not, they had stumbled onto the answer to their relentless enemies - the magic of the World Tree.

It is written in the Cirdaecean codices that the first settlers to come upon the World Tree in the basin of Emteph immediately perceived the truth of it; they saw that they now had the power to fight off their pursuers. The Cirdaeceans fortified themselves in key locations throughout the continent whilst they studied ways to utilise the power of the Tree. To such gifted minds as theirs the secrets unfolded like the petals of a flower. Mysteries that are still inaccessible to our own industrious civilisation were a mere afternoon's distraction to the minds of the foremost thinkers of the Hegemony.

Wielding the magic of the newly-discovered Roots, the Cirdaeceans drove back the besieging Khethelic armies and then began a period of expansion known as the 'second hegemony'. It is said that other races did in fact inhabit the expanse of the Mellorian continent at

this time, but the Cirdaeceans made short work of them and so they rarely earned even a reference within any codices yet uncovered. History is not kind and is rarely attentive to the vanquished, especially those that stand in the way of greatness.

For the next three thousand years, held in check only by the foreboding Steel-Sworn to the East, the Hegemony waxed powerful. During this period it is a matter of some conjecture between scholars if the Cirdaeceans finally gained the right to be labelled as a 'great' civilization. In feats of engineering, navigation, science, and of course magic, they had few rivals. They grew powerful and plentiful, and the world was theirs for the taking. To this humble student of history, these accomplishments surely mark the Cirdaeceans as a people worthy of that epithet.

It is during the second hegemony that our own histories intersect with those of the Cirdaeceans. Our early ancestors lived many leagues from our current shores, south of the archipelago that is now home to the Empire of Ralthas. Our origins, while more definite, are far less worthy. Our ancestors were little more than slave labour for the Hegemony, and for other empires far less noble. Their lives were short and hard, and little inspiration was gained from the genius of their masters. They were an easy tool for the Cirdaeceans to command and to control. Little mention of our forebears can be found within the codices of the Hegemony, such was their import.

Though there is much to be said for this period in terms of Cirdaecean achievements, it saw a period of relative stagnation that is far less attractive for the research of scholars. Instead we must look to the end of this great civilization for momentous events to rival their rise to power. In this abrupt ending there are mysteries sufficient to keep scholars at work until the ending of our own noble civilisation, and beyond.

As suddenly as they leapt into prominence, the Cirdaeceans faded from it. When our ancestors made landfall on the continent as free men, eager to repay their long servitude with violence and torment upon their onetime masters, they found only an empire of dust before them. There were naught but bloated corpses, rotting in the very streets, on which to sate their vicious spite.

Of what defeated the mighty Cirdaeceans, nothing is known. My own long research points to the possibility that it was very likely a plague, or some such other natural phenomenon; a quirk of fate that even their great genius could not predict or adapt to. Whatever it was, it opened a gate to the vast knowledge of their race for our ancestors, and allowed for the eventual formation of our society. The spoils of a great people were laid at the feet of our ignorant distant relations, and while they spurned such greatness in their foolish wrath, those that came after had the clarity to understand and use such wisdom.

The first Mellorians tore down the works of their hated masters, burying that which they could not destroy. Fortunately for us, a more enlightened people, the Cirdaeceans built things to last, and so the treasure deposited in the soil of this continent endured. It is a treasure we are still in the process of discovering and extracting, even now. Who knows what power lies in wait, just beneath our feet...

The impact of the Cirdaecean Hegemony on the circles of the world cannot be understated. At one point their influence spread across every land, and all peoples knew of their name and of their works. Now, long after they are little more than dust, their influence lives on through our own society.

Though much of their knowledge is still hidden from us, whether by the soil or the current understanding of men, in time we shall harvest all that they knew and reap the rewards of such wisdom. Our society is young, but it is ambitious. One day, our name shall be spoken of in revered tones throughout the circles of the World. Without the Cirdaecean legacy, such a grand future would have been denied to us, and we would still be living in ignorance under the yoke of foreign tyrants.

Ours is the future; for though we shall stand upon the shoulders of giants - we shall stand taller, all the same.

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