

KHURD

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For nearly two millennia, the ruins known as Khurd were considered cursed and remained abandoned, even though many of the structures remained intact and relatively undamaged. The word “Khurd” is a curse, an expletive, a statement of sorrow, and an expression of fear in the ancient tongue of the Sakalai living in and around the Nen Umbar. It originates from the dark times in the early Second Age, following the fall of Angbad, when a mortal servant of Mulkher fled to first to Vamag and then to Suul-Dhurnen. He wielded the power of the Kuileondo and preyed on the Sakalai until the man was slain by the Numenorean Ship-king Aldarion. Azrunarika-tarik (Ad. “Pillar of the Sea-eagles”) was named Khurd by the Sakalai people who were enslaved there and sacrificed to Mulkher (Ad. “Melkor”) by Balikkhor Bawibzagar (Ad. “Admiral Windsword”) and his followers in the years following Ar-Pharazon’s subjugation of Sauron. It was not until T.A. 1810, when Umbareans fleeing the Gondorian forces in the Nen Umbar region reclaimed the ruins, rebuilt the settlement, and restored the name to Azrunarika-tarik.

AZRUNARIKA-TARIK

Azrunarika-tarik takes its name from the finger of rock that rises over two hundred feet out of the ocean a quarter mile from the coast. Atypically for sea-eagles, up to 50 nesting pairs have been seen to roost and rear their young on this rock. The Numenoreans who first settled here named their home after this unusual sight.

A millennium of habitation by the Numenoreans turned the original, modest settlement into one of the most beautiful estates in the Umbar region. A walled central compound was surrounded by artistically arranged vineyards, orchards, fields, and grazing. The compound plan consisted of four octagons (1000’ across the flats) arranged around a raised central garden (square – 415’x415’). The estate docks, harbor and some of the estate’s warehousing were located in the western octagon. The northern and southern octagons included the remainder of the estate’s warehouses, workshops, stables and housing for non-Numenorean estate staff and their families. The eastern octagon was the residence area of the Numenoreans and their servants. Each Numenorean had a suite in one of the two residence halls. The master of the estate or his/her seneschal dwelled in the main house. Guard barracks were located next to the gates to the north and south octagons and housed the Numenorean guard captains and their troops.

The central garden was originally open to all who resided in the estate. However, in later years it was denied to all non-Numenoreans excepting the maintenance staff. With the coming of Bawibzagar and his joining of the Phazani ‘nMulkher (Ad. “Princes of Melkor”), a temple to Mulkher was constructed in the middle of the garden. It was here that the great sacrifice and burning of thousands of Sakalai and Haruze occurred to bring Melkher’s blessing on Bawibzagar and his followers as they left to join Ar-Pharazon and his Grand Armada. After the sinking of Numenor, many Phazani ‘nMulkher fled here. They were attempting to escape the purges occurring elsewhere in Umbar. It is also here that they died as the surviving Sakalai and Haruze, led by the Persereg (S. “Half-blood” - mixed Numenorean and native ancestry)) children of those sacrificed by the Numenoreans, burned them alive in the temple.

The sinking of Numenor did not affect this section of the coast or the harbor of Azrunarika-tarik due to the protection provided by the lath Gear (S. “Sea Fence”) (This long chain of islands was largely reduced to a reef system by the waves). The fighting in Azrunarika-tarik caused some damage to the estate’s main compound, but it remained largely intact and habitable. However no one among the Sakalai or Haruze people, even the Perseregath, was willing to remain in the place they now called Khurd. For two thousand years it remained abandoned, occasionally inhabited by bandits preying on coastal shipping or those traveling the Hyarmen. Shortly after the Great Plague reached Umbar, a female Sea-drake

established a nest in the moldering harbor for herself and her young. A group of hunters from Umbar slew the Sea-drake, though the harbor was significantly damaged by her death-throws.

In T.A 1810, when Gondor invaded Umbar, fleeing Umbareans rallied at the Annabrith and turned back Gondor's land forces. Umbarean ships retreated north to the Harnen and south towards Dusalan. A naval engagement within sight of the rock of Azrunarika-tarik resulted in the Gondorian ships retreating back to the Nen Umbar (legends say that every sea-eagle rose from their nesting rock and attacked the archers stationed in the topmast rigging of Gondor's ships). A second push by Gondor forced the Umbareans south of the Annabrith, however, the river was a sufficiently good defensive barrier for both sides that a stalemate resulted. Umbarean resources were initially limited. Given the large number of refugees, the distance to Dusalan, and the need to prevent Gondor from crossing the Annabrith; the ruins of Khurd were the best option for resettlement.

The ruined estate's central compound was turned into a small town. The harbor area was restored. The north and south octagons became the main trading districts and housed the poorer refugees. The eastern octagon became the residence area for the affluent and was main base for the troops patrolling the south bank of the Annabrith. The central gardens were restored as a park open to all. The ruins of the temple to Melkher had largely turned to dust over the passing millennia and a marker was erected memorializing those sacrificed and honoring those who fought the Phazani 'nMelkher in the Second Age.

Gondor was forced out of Umbar in T.A. 1940. Much to the dismay of those in Azrunarika-tarik, the Phazani 'nMulkher had returned. Few left the town for Umbar and new influx of refugees flowed out of Umbar. Many went directly to Dusalan, but sizable percentage settled in and around Azrunarika-tarik. On a moonless night, a ship cloaked in shadow appeared in the harbor. None saw it enter and none saw it leave. But armed Numenoreans Guardians wearing the regalia of Tarma Tar-Calion marched to the central garden. On the former site of the temple to Mulkher, they planted two saplings: one an Oiolaire and the other a White Tree (a descendent of a sapling planted by Earnil in Umbar in T.A. 933). Shortly thereafter, the Phazani 'nMulkher raised Earnil's tower and cut down and burned the Oioliare trees and the White Tree in the city of Umbar

For the next thousand years, the inhabitants of Azrunarika-tarik welcomed all who sought refuge from the Phazani 'nMulkher. The town continued to grow and served as a forward base for Dusalan's naval and land forces. Azrunarika-tarik was at the northern edge of the territories historically part of Dusalan's authority. Though most in Azrunarika-tarik viewed themselves as Umbareans (conversely, few if any Dusalani ever considered themselves Umbareans), Dusalan was the only local economic and military power they could ally themselves with and without Dusalani assistance the town would have fallen.

While open warfare with Umbar was rare, skirmishing along the Annabrith was common, typically occurring several times a year. Rather than open warfare, those in Umbar who sought to humble or destroy the Azrunarika-tarik-lai, such as the Phanzani 'n Mulkher, would use banditry, piracy, and assassination. Umbar attempted to capture and destroy Azrunarika-tarik seven times. Each time the Umbarean forces were repulsed, though twice they were able to besiege the town. Both times, forces from Dusalan broke the siege.