

An Introduction to the Society
of
The Ablastine Empire of Sammaplar,
with
an Explanation of their History and Customs,
in Addition to
a Map of their Lands

Compiled by a Traveller
in the year 1289

On the Ablastine Religion and the History of Sammaplar

As it is difficult to talk of the history and current society of the Sammapi people without first explaining their religion, that is where this introduction to The Empire of Sammaplar shall start.

The Ablastine League or Ablastine Gods are the main gods worshipped in the Empire of Sammaplar and the faith is therefore known as Ablastism. They take their name from Ablast, a fortress that constitutes their home in the Heavenly Realm. They were each minor solitary deities, not unlike the folk cults that continue to exist in every corner of Sammaplar, until they came together to build their fortress and leave their mark upon the Earthly Realm. Here it is necessary to stop and explain that the Heavenly in Ablastism is the realm of the gods and existed first, while the Earthly Realm was created by gods who existed before the Ablastine ones. At the time, however, the Earthly realm was nought but a mix of sand and water swirling around - indeed, the "Earthly Realm" is perhaps more accurately the "Clay Realm" in the original Sammapi - so the Ablastine League created first the natural landscape of the world, then humans. For a time,



the Ablastine Gods interacted often with the Earthly Realm and with humans, whom they taught various skills, but eventually, they were called away from the Earthly Realm by a war in the Heavenly Realm. It was during this time that the first period of Sammapi history took place, the time within which it went from the home of nomads with loose tribal connection to one another to a kingdom spanning about half of the area the modern empire does.

When the Heavenly War ended and the Ablastine League turned their attention back to Sammaplar, they saw a kingdom ruled by military nobility, reliant upon the labour of slaves brought into the country as the spoils of the wars of conquest the kingdom had led to expand its borders. Wishing to once again assert their influence over Sammaplar, each of the gods had a child by a human in and instructed them to come together with their fellow Teywas ("of the heavens", what we might refer to as demigods, although this is not quite how the Sammapi conceptualise them) in the capital of Sammaplar, Marhior, upon reaching adulthood.

While the immediate area around the Ilag river has always been fertile, it is said that when the original Teywas arrived at it, that area was small and tough to farm, which accounted for the harsh treatment of the slaves working the fields. The Teywas, eager to wield their divine lineage against the warrior kings of old, first endeared themselves to the locals by turning the entire area around Marhior and all the way along Ilag fertile and easier to farm. Another way the original Teywas won favour was through their rejection of slavery – as humans were all the property of the gods, no human could legitimately own another and to make such a claim was an insult to the gods.

What followed was a lengthy and complex series of events, as the Teywas amassed a following of slaves, peasants and artisans – half army, half congregation – and went about conquering first the Kingdom of Sammaplar, then the kingdoms surrounding it, finally settling down in Marhior, declaring a republic which would be ruled by the 7 of them in common, albeit with House Sedal given the title of Emperor and given the final say in situations where great haste would be required. Where local noble families had allied themselves with the Teywas during their campaign, they were allowed to retain some sovereignty over their area. These became the Ledinan class, upon which we shall expand later.

What is important to understand is not the exact nature of this history – although any educated Sammapi will surely be able to tell you a great deal about it and it is of great interest – but that its results defined The Ablastine Empire of Sammaplar for over a thousand years. Upon the deaths of the original Teywas, their children became the new leaders of both the empire and the faith their parents had set in motion. To this day, the leaders of Sammaplar are drawn from among the Teywas class, that is, the descendants of the original Teywas.

After thus introducing the religious and historical background – the two are difficult to disentangle, where Sammaplar is concerned – a list of the Ablastine Gods and their general attributes will be provided.

The Ablastine Gods, also The Ablastine League

There are seven Ablastine gods, each associated with particular domains. These are:

- » Ailanga, The Life-Giver, the personification of the Ilag river, of which her name is a doublet;
- » Karah, The Ocean Keeper, who created the sea;
- » Reiakam, The Desert Mother, who created the desert;
- » Ouhat, The Palm King, husband of Reiakam and creator of the oases in her deserts;
- » Seela, The Lady of the Fields, who created plains and taught the Sammapli to farm;
- » Emunan, The Heavenly Mason, who created mountains and taught the Sammapli to mine
- » and Anshar, The General, who guarded Ablast when the rest of the league were in the Earthly Realm.

Of these gods, two stand out. The first is Anshar, who is the only Ablastine god who did not partake in creation, but was instead left behind to guard Ablast. That he enjoys no less worship in Sammaplar than the other Ablastine gods had long been a mystery to me and so when I in my travels encountered a holy man who was amenable to talking of such matters with a foreigner, I asked him to explain it to me. This holy man found great amusement in my ignorance and explained to me that though Anshar did not himself create, without him no creation would have been possible. This is why he is as well-beloved as the rest of the league.

The second god who stands out from the rest is Seela, though the reason she stands out is much simpler. The Lady Seela is the ancestor of House Sedal, which up until recently was the imperial house of Sammaplar. With the execution of House Sedal, the legality of worshipping Seela is greatly in question. It is entirely possible that this worship has been outlawed already and that the news has simply not made it to our shores yet.

Non-Ablastine Gods in Sammaplar

To finish this section on the religious nature of the empire, it is important to note that though the Ablastine Gods are worshipped throughout Sammaplar, many other minor gods are worshipped legally and may in many cases even be included in the same history of worship. The Ablastines do not view the worship of other gods as wholly incompatible with Ablastism, but instead tends to conclude that these gods may bear great local significance due to the creation of an important lake or the embodiment of a local concept, but can not aspire to be as great and generous in their blessings and achievements as the Ablastine League. Even where stories of their deeds contradict each other – e.g. in Ablastism, Ouhat is credited with the creation of all

Oases in the Sammapi desert, but in the South-West of the empire, a local deity is believed to have created them – the Ablastines will in most cases attempt to reconcile the two. In the case of the creation of oases, clergy in the region tend to explain that while Ouhat created a great many oases, the local deity created those within the region that worships her. Indeed, when gods are decried as false or malevolent, it is usually either because the group who worships them are troublesome to the Teywas or Ledinan in a political sense or it is because the deeds of the god in question are being described as on the level of the Ablastine League's achievements. When such a god becomes too popular, the worship of him, her or them will be declared treasonous.

The Classes of Sammaplar and their History

The Ablastine Empire of Sammaplar has been a highly class stratified society for all of its existence. Though the creation of the Ablastine Empire by the original Teywas heralded the end of slavery as a prominent element of Sammapi economy, the original Teywas had no desire to make their new empire a free and equal one, nor would this have been feasible. The classes of modern day Sammaplar are as follows:

Teywas, "of the heavens"

The descendants of the original Teywas, themselves children of the Ablastine Gods. Each of the seven families (six after recent developments, as shall be elaborated upon in a later section) trace their lineage back to a distinct god and cultivate virtues associated with that god. They are the rulers of society in every sense – they rule through government, temple, barrack, university, publishing house and theatre.

The Teywas houses are as follows

- » House Sedal, descended from Seela, the former Imperial House, now extinct;
- » House Ilnal, descended from Ailanga, formerly the closest ally of House Sedal;
- » House Karhal, descended from Karah, owns the largest merchant fleet in Sammaplar;
- » Hour Reiyal, descended from Reiakam, known for breeding the best horses and camels in Sammaplar;
- » House Ouhal, descended from Ouhat, specialised in the import and export of luxury good;
- » House Emunal, descended from Emunan, owns a great many mines
- » and House Anshal, descended from Anshar, well-known for producing great generals and the Teywas house with the closest Ledinan ties.

Ledinans, "of the land"

The descendants of nobility from lands conquered by the original Teywas who cooperated with them. Their exact privileges vary from region to region, but they are all large landowners and thus all hold a great deal of power locally. Indeed, in the areas of Sammaplar farthest from Marhior, the Ledinan rule in a great deal of practical matters. That they are still beholden to Teywas administrators and taxation, with no say in what politics on a national level, is often of great frustration to them. Furthermore, many of them are aware that as Sammaplar becomes industrialised, they become less powerful.

Orbians, "of the city"

Originally simply the city dwellers as opposed to the peasantry, the Orbians quickly became to be defined by having the right to own private property, as opposed to the Proleans, who do not have that right. Orbians range from simple artisans and local traders to lawyers and wealthy merchants. The latter part of the group has been growing in prominence in recent decades, their riches often rivalling or even exceeding that of the Ledinan. The Orbians have two great frustrations: that they are not allowed to own as much land as Ledinans and that they are not allowed to participate in governance like the Teywas. Many are funding technological development in the hopes that new power may rival the old powers they're up against.

Proleans, "with many offspring"

The vast majority of the Sammapi population is Prolean. Traditionally, they were the peasantry of Sammaplar, but as more menial labour became necessary in the cities, more Proleans moved to them. Those who work under Ledinans are often bound by ancient contract to only leave the land with Ledinan permission, which the Ledinan has only recently started occasionally granting due to advances in agricultural technology.

In the countryside, the Prolean is the peasant and in the cities, the Prolean is the worker. In the countryside, the greatest animosity is held towards the Ledinan while in the cities, the greatest animosity is held towards the richer Orbians – the Teywas are, generally speaking, beloved by the Proleans, with only a few radicals – called antitheists – harbouring great animosity towards them.

Lawspeakers

While they do not constitute a class per se, I will here explain to you the role of the type of Prolean known as a "lawspeaker." A lawspeaker is a prolean chosen by local clergy as a young adult to be educated in writing and the law and who plies his (or occasionally her) trade by mak-

ing records of the grievances of the community from which the given lawspeaker is chosen.

The position of "lawspeaker" is one that dates back to pre-imperial times, where the role was one akin to a primitive lawyer. In those days, a lawspeaker would learn the law, recite it and bring the grievances of commoners before the pre-imperial nobles (the ancestors of some Ledinans). The presence of a lawspeaker meant that the noble in question must suggest some solution to the issue presented by the commoner, whereas without the lawspeaker present, such complaints could be more easily disregarded. This active role of pursuing justice on behalf of others has completely vanished over time and the modern lawspeaker is simply a bureaucrat taken from the Prolean class rather than the Orbian one. Today, a lawspeaker is called when unrest is brewing and goes from person to person, writing down their complaints. Often, these complaints are simply filed away and never considered further, leaving the true role of the lawspeaker one of placation. Some lawspeakers will bring up select complaints that are put to them to their superiors and on occasion, such a complaint will make it all the way to local leadership or even – as has happened a handful of times – to the Assembly of Princes. Regardless, while lawspeakers occupy a class somewhat higher than their fellow Proleans and indeed enjoy more privileges than most Proleans, there is little, often no, power associated with the role in its modern context.

Yildas, "guilty ones"

If you ask a Sammapi how many classes there are in Sammaplar, he will usually answer four, but this is, in practice, incorrect. There is a fifth class, the modern slave of the empire, the Yildas. These are convicts sentenced to hard labour, often in mines and quarries. They retain this status after they complete their sentence, in effect keeping them trapped even after their release. They frequently have trouble finding housing or employment due to their class.

Cross-Class Relations

Marriage between the classes has been illegal, or at least highly regulated, for most of the empire's history. Regulations concerning intermarriage of Proleans and Orbians have almost entirely disappeared, while any marriage of a Ledinan with anyone but a Ledinan and a Teywas with anyone but a Teywas is still subject to much legal scrutiny. The latter was entirely banned up until a few decades ago, where concerns about inbreeding and the dwindling number of Teywas saw this ban repealed. Now even the Teywas can – if they follow regulations – intermarry with any other class. So far most Teywas still marry other Teywas, and those who do not have largely opted to marry foreigners with divine ancestry from foreign gods or Ledinans with ancestry from minor, local gods, rather than mixing with those with no divine lineage.

On the Execution of Emperor Aurusdi and Its Effects on Sammaplar

As alluded to, Sammaplar recently went from being ruled by seven Teywas families, one of them the royal house Sedal, to being ruled only by six after House Sedal was utterly eradicated. What can account for such a thing? Revolt or plague? Lack of heirs? No, the actions of other Teywas. It is a sad tale indeed

The last Emperor was Emperor Aurusdi and before him, Emperors, all from House Sedal, had ruled Sammaplar for hundreds of years. They did this alongside the Assembly of Princes, which derives its membership from each of the Teywas families. It is worth noting that the Assembly predates the first emperor, albeit only by a few decades; that the Assembly governs by itself in the current day is not because it replaced the emperor, but because it made itself rid of him.

For most of the history of the empire, the emperor and the assembly had coexisted and each sought to win power from the other. Sometimes the Assembly was little more than an advisory body, other times the Emperor little more than a figurehead. This battle for power eventually came to a head in the year 1288 after a series of political and social scandals involving the Emperor and his family, most notably several Imperial Acts that limited the power of the Princes and threatened the peace on the South-Eastern border, as well as the rape of a Prince's sister by Emperor Aurusdi's nephew. In their rage, the Assembly declared themselves the true governing body of the Empire, deposed the Emperor and had him executed along with every member of his family, eliminating the risk of any pretender to the throne raising an army among the Ledinan, with whom Emperor Aurusdi had been popular – indeed, the acts that threatened to bring war to the Empire were made on the urging of Ledinans, eager to regain some of their lost power through conquest of new territory.

As all members of the Teywas class can claim divine lineage, the execution of the Emperor and his family was not as problematic as it would have been in a fully monarchic system – all Teywas have a divine right to rule due to their Ablastine ancestry, as opposed to neighbouring nations such as Gavandia, where only the royal family has a divine lineage of repute and where a similar act would not have been politically feasible.

On the Important of Propriety

The culture of the Sammapi places great importance on a concept that is best translated as "propriety" but also touches on areas such as honour and virtue. To be "proper" is to know one's place in the world and strive to fulfil it as well as one is able to. It is generally believed in Sammaplar that if every person in the empire was to act "properly" there would never be hunger or strife, only meaningful labour. Now there are of course people in every class who argue against this narrative, but it is nevertheless a dominant one, and highly related to Ablastism; as the gods each has their realm, the people they created do, and they serve themselves, the Teywas and the gods

best by performing their duties well.

This concept permeates the entirety of Sammapi culture, from lowly Prolean peasant to mighty Teywas Prince, but it means different things for the different classes. It is perhaps a simplification to say that an "improper" Prolean is simply an uppity one, but this seems to often be the concrete usage of the term where they are concerned. For Teywas, doing work below their station or interacting excessively with Orbians or Proleans may be considered improper, including by said Orbians and Proleans. In modern times, accusations of impropriety have also been levelled by Teywas at other Teywas who have desired to expand Sammaplar's borders, as this is perceived as personal ambition rather than proper Teywas responsibility. Ambition is, in many cases, a highly "improper" trait. Ambitious impropriety is similarly a common accusation levelled at Ledinans, particularly those in the furthest reaches of the empire.

There are, however, "proper" ways to ascend one's status in life which are not seen as ambitious impropriety. I have attended Ablastine religious services of the nature which have Proleans as their main audience where religious dedication has been emphasised as both proper and a way to improve one's lot in life. It is technically possible for a Prolean to join the clergy and through this work eventually gain a position of some significance, but it is a rare occurrence. The pay is quite bad for Prolean initiates and they are promoted very slowly.

The other proper way for a Prolean to gain status is by becoming a lawspeaker, although this is not something one decides to become. As discussed, a lawspeaker is chosen by clergy and educated for the role from childhood. It is however worth knowing that propriety is largely what keeps lawspeakers safe. They are considered neutral by ancient tradition and an attack on them would be not just improper, but an attack on the very nature of civilisation. Even radicals such as Antitheists, who have no regard for law, whether divine, secular or natural, practically never attack lawspeakers.

Final Notes, Which Will Be Expanded upon in a Future Pamphlet

Requests were made of me before I undertook my last journey to Sammaplar that I document something of their languages and their fashions. My writings on these subjects have not yet been completed, but I will include a short introduction to each here so that the curious will have something of a taste of what is to come.

First on languages: many languages are spoken within the Sammaplar Empire, but the official language, with which a traveller can get by in any part of their lands, is the language of the original Sammaplar region around Marhior. The name of Marhior is itself of Old Sammapi origin, traditionally given as "Marhi-orb" meaning "gleaming city" but may be "Mer-hir" meaning "city on the water." When I asked two esteemed professors at the university in Marhior, they each

argued fervently for their positions, and I must admit that my own grasp of Sammapi eventually failed me during the heated discussion. The same fellows agreed on the etymology of Sammapi, however, giving it as deriving from the Old Sammapi words for sand, "Samadho" and river, "Plarh", likely a reference to the Ilag river. I also had the pleasure of discussing this matter with a Teywas historian of some renown, however, and she suggested that the area was named for the Sammapi people and not the other way around, meaning that the etymology must thus be understood as coming from the Old Sammapi word for the Sammapi themselves, "Samadi", and the Old Sammapi word for crown, "Larui." I know not whom to believe, but of the two, Crown of the Sammapi is certainly a more fitting name for such a grand empire than Sand River.

Now on the topic of fashion, this is another area where the class stratification of Sammapi is quite strong, perhaps even vulgar to our eyes. It is the fashion of Sammapi to focus on showing off rich, embellished materials, with layers and layers of such fabrics, even in places where the heat was to me quite unbearable. I have been told that the expensive fabrics available to Teywas and some Ledinans are quite light and thus do not cause them trouble in the heat. Proleans and Orbians typically only wear one or two layers, yet I also observed how fashion-minded Orbians of some means attempted to replicate this fashion. These Orbians were often seeking the shade more fervently than their countrymen. Even the richest of Orbians would not be able to fully replicate the fashion of the Teywas, however; only Teywas may wear their outermost layer at a length which goes past the shins.

I hope that these short descriptions have satisfied those who requested information on these subjects, at least until such a time as I can release my next pamphlet.