

Dispatches in the Imperium: The Tané

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From Rúqu hiViriséka. Commandant of the Omnipotent Azure Legion in Thri'íl, to the Most Noble Lord Qorúma hiRi'inyússa, Princeps of the Legion, at Avanthár:

Know ye, Mighty One, that Didom 14, 2354 A. S. a party of lowly foreigners were commissioned in Khírgar as "eyes of the Empire" ("Spies." Translator).

Sent to the Desert of Sighs to report on and harass the movements of Yán Koryáni troops, they vanished, and were presumed lost.

Now, however, they have reappeared here escorting curious animals they identify as the fabled Bazháq; riding beasts of the ancients. Know also, Lord, the foreigners returned not from the Desert of Sighs, but traveled by means of subterranean transportation vehicle from a distant place they call the "Land of the Tané." Their story is confirmed by high level mindprobes and the presence of these animals.

Relevant portions of the interrogations of the foreigners are appended.

A complete physical description of the beasts, sketches of them, and such information the foreigners can furnish concerning their diets, mating habits, etc. is appended.

The animals have been domesticated by these people the foreigners call the Tané. And know also, Lord, that the Tané are reported to use the great Sró as beasts of war, as well as the Bazháq! The foreigners were intensively interrogated on these matters. The transcripts of their sessions are appended in full.

Priests were summoned from Lord Thumis' Hall of Many Tongues in the greatest secrecy to hear the foreigners speak the "language of the Tané." They attest it is not mere meaningless sounds. Two have been assigned to learn what the foreigners can teach. Their initial report is appended.

A low-cartographic map has been prepared based on the foreigners' travels and astronomical observations in the lands of the Tané. It indicates this place may lie to the west of the Plain of Towers, beyond Mu'ugalavyá. The initial map, with explanatory notes, is appended. A high-cartographic map is being prepared for your sublime edification.

What is your further instruction in this matter, Great One?

Appended Report: Excerpts from the interrogations of the Foreigners

"...We were captured by a band of hostile desert tribesmen about two hundred tsáns to the west of Pelesár. Before they could take us to their camp and present us to their elders we were caught in the onslaught of a desert storm. In the confusion we overpowered our guards and stumbled off into the maelstrom.

Seeking shelter, we entered an ancient tower that jutted from the sand at a twisted angle. After subsequent explorations we came to realize this tower in the middle of the desert was actually the prow of a ship of the old ages!

We moved into the deeper compartments, our flickering torches revealing all forms of odd devices and accoutrements. In the deepest chamber, near the stern, we found an old man resplendent in jeweled robes and cloak, laid on a great slab of crystal.

Before we could speak of our amazement to one another the old man sat upright and smiled! The youngest of our party gasped and scrambled for the door of the chamber. Before we could react and follow his lead the old man spoke! In an old, strange form of Tsolyáni he asked us if the typhoon had passed us and why we had left our posts!

This remark was as strange as the surroundings. I (Tsárnu hiPrádes. Translator), being a fisherman from the southlands, realized that "typhoons" were only possible over vast bodies of water. The nearest water to which he could be referring was a thousand tsáns to the northwest.

We explained the situation to the old man as clearly as possible. At first Turshánmy, as he called himself, thought us to be mad. But the angle of the tilted ship and a taste of the sand outside convinced him of our honesty. He was considerably distressed.

After several hours the howling winds abated and we went to open the outer portal. It opened only the width of two fingers with all of us prying together. The sand that poured in through the crack made us realize the same winds that had revealed this ship to us had again buried it.

Turshánmy assured us that he could get us out. He pulled from his robes a small blue orb with a red knob. He explained that this device could transport us to a predetermined point. In this case the destination was to be the magician's home city; a seaport he called "Tané."

Not knowing of this city we were at first reluctant to go, but the sand filtering through the crack by the portal made our options clear to us.

Gathering into a tight circle around the orb the old man bent and put his hand to the knob. When he stood we were in the midst of a small village of wood hats in the clearing of a great conifer forest! Either the orb had erred or the geography

had changed here also, for this place was no more a port city than was Khírgar! Turshánmy was considerably distressed.

Then, a tall shape swiftly approached us down one of the narrow lanes. As it burst into the light of our torches we saw that it was a man--sitting astride the back of a six-legged beast!!..."

Appended Report: The description of the Bazháq, and its habits

A Bazháq stands about six to seven feet tall at the shoulder. It has three pairs of legs, with the front pair being about one foot lower than the rear pair. Each foot ends in a configuration of three "toes"; small, round, and hard, flat on the bottom and sides. On some Bazháq there is a spur. The corrugated pattern which develops on the bottom of the foot gives additional traction.

The neck of the Bazháq is rather short, and is about the same length as the head, which appears rather long, flat and triangular, ending in a parrot-like beak of a gray horny substance similar to the toes. There are no visible ears. This area of the head is covered by two flaps of skin which are folded flat back against the head. The Bazháq has two forward-facing eyes, white, with black pupils, and black or gray irises. The brow ridges are not prominent. The tail is short, a foot or two in length, and is sometimes cropped, following a fashion of the Tané

The skin resembles leather for texture and strength. It has a pebbled feel, as if many small, round objects lay just below the surface of the skin. The only hair is a spine of very short, very dark fibers. The skin varies from a muddy brown in color to black. The Bazháq is always of one color, never displaying spots, stripes, or patterns of any kind.

The Bazháq is bisexual. The young are born in a leathery sac which splits soon after leaving the mother. The young Bazháq is soon moving under its own power. The colt reaches nearly adult size after one year, but does not fully mature until three or more years of age. Life expectancy is then about ten to twelve years.

The Bazháq is semi-intelligent, and can be trained to simple tasks. It will shy from carnivores, and can distinguish friends and enemies as if by instinct. The beast makes a hissing, mumbling sound when feeding or pleased. This becomes a shrieking hiss when it is angry or in pain.

The Bazháq is an herbivore, and can go ten to twelve days without food if forced, but cannot do without water for any length of time. Bazháq sleep squatting.

The Tané ride in saddles between the first two pairs of legs. A second saddle is sometimes added, but only for short periods; the animal cannot carry two men with any ease. The Bazháq is known more for endurance than speed.

Appended Report: The Language of the Tané

(The body of the linguistic report is far too technical to be of general interest. Thus, only the summary is given. Translator.)

"The language of the Tané approximates the sounds of Livyáni, yet the grammar and lexicon are different in every detail: Combinations of vowels abound; there are glottalized consonants (like those of N'lyss); and words are rather short. Grammatically, the language distinguishes nouns, verbs, and several minor classes. Nouns are grammatically simple, but verbs inflect for person, number, several tenses, and aspects, etc. Various special irregularities in the verbal system have been noted. Research continues."

Appended Report: The Military Uses of the Bazháq and the Sró

(The transcripts themselves are not quoted in full. Instead, a summary incorporating quotations is furnished. Translator.)

The Sró are raised in captivity from birth. The means of domesticating the Sró remain secret, but it is known that their wings are clipped while still young. The Bazháq riders fight in poorly organized masses which swirl to and fro uttering cries and challenges. "First one, then another rider will advance into the open area between the armies, challenging an opponent to single combat. After a time one side will pluck up courage and charge. If the enemy stand firm, the charge is likely to halt, and another round of personal challenges ensues. Finally, one army will charge, and the other will not stand for long, but will flee after a brief melee." "In the great wars of the fiefs, the lord will muster out his ten to twenty war-Sró, and intersperse these along his line. Poorly armed peasant footmen bring up a second line. In the great battles, melees are likely to be longer and harder fought, but the end still comes quickly when one side loses morale, often for no apparent reason, and flees."

"The Bazháq is often protected by a skirt of leather. The riders, too, use leather for their armor, usually sewing strips of hardened leather on suits of soft leather. Rarely, one will see a bronze helmet or breast piece. The riders use a long; slender spear and chopping ax for the most part, although javelins are often used also."

"The Sró carries a tower upon its back, and from this four to ten men will fight. They are armed as the Bazháq riders, but also often use a powerful bow which seems to be available only in their lands."

From the Most Noble Lord Qoruma hiRi'inyussa, High Princeps of the Omnipotent Azure Legion, at Avanthár, to the Lord Rúqu hiViriséka, Commandant of the Legion of Thri'il:

Know that your report has been received concerning the Bazháq. It has been submitted unto the Imperial Presence, and we await the inspiration of the Glorious Will. Until that time, continue to study this matter and report. What can be learned of these subterranean transportation devices? Organize an expedition at once to investigate this matter."

Appended Report: The Land of the Tané
(see Map, also)

The land of the Tané lies in the center of a great peninsula, or perhaps island, to the west of the Plain of Towers. It is cooler than the Empire, and the inhabitants are kept to a meager existence by the shortage of agricultural lands. The place is thickly forested by conifers, and the soil is not fertile, even where it is available to farm. Copper is mined in the mountains to the south, but otherwise there is no quantity of metals available.

As just mentioned, mountains form the southern border of Tané. They are unexplored for the most part, except for the region around the copper mines. Copper is also mined by the inhabitants of the southern port city, and there is a small amount of trade conducted where the areas of influence overlap. To the west lies an island inhabited by Black Ssu. This connects to the mainland when the sea is at low tide, exposing a causeway of natural stone. There are occasional raids, but the Ssu are quiescent for the most part.

To the north lie cannibal tribes living in greater poverty than the Tané. Their political organization is primitive, and thus, they pose no real threat. To the east of the Tané are the fiefs of the Sró riders, who are both politically organized and rich enough to support an infrequent war with the Tané. To the east of the Sró riders live other similar peoples, but these peoples we did not visit. To the east of these peoples, according to rumor, lies the Plain of Towers. The Tané, and the Sró-riding Tané both are organized along feudal lines:

The largest landowner in a fief is the lord; he can support the most Bazháq, and thus, is the most able to defend the fief (and/or bully his fellow landowners). A fief essentially consists of one of the large clearings that have developed over generations of hacking farms out of the wilderness. They are, thus, easily distinguishable from each other. This has lead to a weak or nonexistent central authority; and while normal lip service is paid to one or another larger lord as "king," each fief is independent for all practical purposes."