

Rulers and Nobility of Gyruff

Morwenna the Fair speaks.

So how are the Gyri governed? You might think this question one better answered by a Bard of the Old Lore, since diplomacy and leadership are their areas of expertise. However, this often makes them too involved to grasp the big picture, or at least to explain that picture in a simple enough manner. So I shall do my best to describe the intricacies of our government.

In ancient days, when the Flannae were still a nomadic tribal people, their tribes were ruled by war chiefs. Since the primary role of these chieftains was to lead their folk into battle, it made sense that the strongest and most cunning warriors, having been blessed by the tribal shaman, should rule. As the Flannae began to settle down and the tribal hunting grounds evolved into the cantrevi we have today, these war chieftains became the glywi of Gyruff. Even today, all of them, from the Brenin on down, are expected to be warlords, first and foremost.

There is an old Gyri proverb: “The Griffon Chair is a three-legged stool.” That well describes the three traditional pillars upon which the power and authority of the Brenin rests: the glywi (nobles), ffolk/trevdyn (commoners/townsmen), and the Druids of the Old Faith.

The commoners & townsmen are the backbone of Gyruff. While all land belongs to the nobility, ffolk and trevdyn may purchase life estates, which they can pass on to their children. If the glywi place too many burdens upon the commoners within their lands, the commoners have the option to move elsewhere. They are not serfs, bound to the land, though such a decision would cost them their life estate and is not lightly undertaken. Additionally, some towns have been granted charters of self-government by the Brenin, significantly limiting the authority of the glywi over them.

There are those who would say the Druids of the Old Faith are the true rulers of Gyruff. That would be an overstatement, but it is true that the Archdruid and the Circle wield great power and influence. This is done primarily via the requirement that they approve any candidate who aspires to rule a cantrev or become Brenin. Such a person must undergo a secret rite, the successful completion of which signifies the approval of the Old Faith.

Now, let us discuss the top level of Gyri society in more detail.

The Glywi (Nobles)

Just as there are three major branches of Gyric society, there are three levels of nobility. At the lowest level are the un-landed nobles, the so-called Peers of Gyruff. These are individuals whose prowess in battle and other skills have so impressed the Brenin that he has chosen to offer them a title of nobility in return for an oath of personal fealty to him

and Gyrudd. These Peers are sometimes foreigners, demi-humans or common folk. Since they are personally loyal to the Brenin, they form a useful cadre that he can assign to various sensitive missions and important tasks. Along with the Griffon Guard, the Peers represent the Brenin's most potent agents.

Ranking above the Peers are the Brehyri (Baronets) who rule their commots or fiefs. As landed nobles, the position of Brehyr is usually inherited and their first loyalty is to their own cantrev and its arglwyth or llwyr, rather than to the person of the Brenin. They tend to see questions first and foremost from the point of view of their own commot. When the rule of a cantrev comes into question, it is usually the brehyri of that cantrev who choose which of the candidates to submit to the druids. In order to effectively control his cantrev, a llwyr must have the support of his brehyri.

The highest level of the glywi consists of the rulers of the various cantrevi, the arglwythi (barons) and the llwyr (counts). Along with the Brenin, these men and women make up the true rulers of the Gyrudd. Traditionally, these nobles have been very independent, particularly the rulers of the greatest cantrevi, such as Araul Anterth, Cymeravon, or Rhychdir Rhos. Indeed, more than once in Gyric history, a powerful llwyr has made a successful bid to seize the Griffon Chair itself. The llwyr are rivals in peace and only reluctant allies in war. It takes a strong and respected Brenin to ensure they all toe the line he sets for them.

When there is no obvious heir to a cantrev, the brehyri will meet and agree upon a candidate to nominate to the druids. In the days of old, these 'meetings' sometimes took place on the battlefield, but now they are more likely to happen in a great hall. Less often, the Brenin proposed a candidate for approval by the brehyri. In whatever order it takes place, once the brehyri are in agreement, the candidate must win the approval of the Druids of the Old Faith, by undergoing a secret ritual. Only then may he or she don the torc of rulership over their cantrev. If there is a clear heir, however, they do not require the approval of either the Brenin or the brehyri, but may go straight to the Druids.

Inheritance among the glywi is usually, but not exclusively, from father to eldest son. If the prospective heir is unsuitable, perhaps because he is not a warrior, the brehyri will likely turn to someone else, perhaps a younger son or younger brother of the former ruler. Nor are women necessarily excluded from consideration, if they are both warriors and well-respected. If the eldest son is acceptable, he will usually be chosen, but in the final analysis, the brehyri will seek to do what is best for the cantrev as a whole. Also, since the brehyri represent the military might of the cantrev, having them agree on the new llwyr helps reduce the potential for internal strife. The "consensus" nature of Gyric rulership makes it very different from the inherited titles of the nobility of Keoland, for example.

Since the invasion, with so many cantrevi overrun and occupied and so many glywi dying without heirs, the traditional system has begun to break down and more power has become concentrated in the person of the Brenin. This fact was illustrated at the

Investiture following Owen's resumption of the Griffon Chair after years of exile, where all the surviving llwri and arglwythi were required to swear the following oath:

"Under the Light of Pelor, I, <name>, pledge my fealty to Owen ap Lluth, now and until the end of my days, save that he choose to release me of his own will. My lands and torc are his, and I yield them to his hand. So do I swear."

In return, the Brenin responded:

"Under the Light of Pelor, I do accept your pledge and will defend and protect your kith and kin through battle's wrack and winter's blast and all that time may bring. The lands and torc of <cantrev>, I give to you as my faithful vassal."

As you can see, the wording of the Oath would imply that the llwyr received his cantrev from Owen, as a vassal, rather than holding it in his own right, by selection of his brehyri.

This is a much more binding oath than any landed noble had ever sworn to a Brenin before. All of the nobles currently ruling cantrevi have taken the oath, save Llwyrr Melwyn Greatarm of Araul Anterth. Owen's motives for requiring this new and stronger oath are not entirely clear, though one obvious goal was to strengthen his position with regards to any potential rivals among the llwyri. In the past, it was not unknown that a weak Brenin or an overly strong llwyr was the signal for civil war. As recently as CY 497, Llwyrr Granus of Rhychdir Rhos, grown overly rich and powerful, tried to claim the Griffon Chair from Rohan III. After the deaths of both the Brenin and his challenger and four years of bloody civil war, Granus' son became Rohan IV and finally brought peace again to Gyruff. I am sure Duke Owen has not forgotten how his family came to the Griffon Chair.

And what of the future? After the Liberation, what shall the government of Gyruff be like? Will we return to our old tradition of each cantrev being almost an independent country, with llwyri and arglwythi eyeing each other as suspicious rivals? Or shall we have a new and strong central authority, a Griffon Chair which has the power to impose its will on the glywi and force them all to obey as its feudal vassals? If so, will Gyruff still be Gyruff anymore?

These are questions you will have to answer for yourselves, my good listeners. When the answers are known, then I shall sing of them.