

A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE

THE MYTHOS OF WESTEROS & ESSOS



The Map of Westeros

Westeros is a great continent located in the far west of the known world. It is separated from the continent of Essos by the Narrow Sea. The continent is bordered by the frozen Lands of Always Winter to the north, the Sunset Sea to the west, the Summer Sea to the south and the Shivering Sea to the north-east. Most of the continent of Westeros is controlled by a single political entity known as the Seven Kingdoms.

The continent is also known as “the sunset lands” amongst the people of Essos. The Dothraki call it Rhaesh Andahli, the land of the Andals.

Westeros is divided into ten distinct geographic and culture regions. The northern-most region is known colloquially as the Beyond the Wall, the territory of the wildlings. This area lies in the far north of the continent. Beyond this region is a frozen, uninhabitable wasteland known as the Lands of Always Winter. The lands beyond the Wall contain the towering mountain range known as the Frostfangs and the vast woodland known as the Haunted Forest, as well as the hazardous Frozen Shore and the remote, small mountain kingdom of Thenn. Giants and the few remaining Children of the Forest dwell in these lands as well as humans. There are no cities in these lands. The wildlings do maintain some villages, such as Whitetree.

The Wall marks the northern edge of the Seven Kingdoms. Spanning the continent for some three hundred miles, the Wall is the largest artificial structure in the world and one of the tallest. It is held by the Sworn Brotherhood of the Night's Watch.

Immediately south of the Wall lies the region known simply as the North. This region contains all the lands between the Wall and the Neck. It is a vast but lightly-populated region of immense forests (such as the Wolf'swood), craggy shorelines, cold rivers, low mountains and hills. The only city in the North is the port of White Harbor. It is ruled from Winterfell by House Stark.

The Riverlands are located south of the Neck. They are so-named as they are dominated by numerous rivers. The huge lake of Gods Eye also lies in the Riverlands. There are no major cities in the

Riverlands.

The Vale of Arryn is located to the south-east of the Neck and the north-east of the Riverlands. The Vale itself is a valley between mountains and hills running from the feet of the mountain known as the Giant's Lance all the way to the Narrow Sea. This region is dominated by the Mountains of the Moon and several lesser ranges, with castles and villages located in the numerous valleys between them.

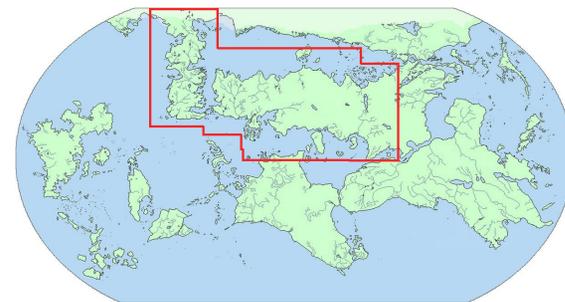
The Iron Islands are located to the west of the Riverlands, separating Ironman's Bay from the Sunset Sea. They consist of eight large and numerous smaller islands, inhabited by a hardy folk known as the Ironborn.

The Westerlands lie south-west of the Riverlands and south of the Iron Islands, along the coast of the Sunset Sea and extending inland to hills and low mountains. These mountains are known for their rich veins of gold and silver.

The Crownlands lie south-east of the Riverlands, along the coast of the Narrow Sea and Blackwater Bay and extending inland to Gods Eye. They also included some offshore islands, most notably Dragonstone and Driftmark. The Crownlands include notable towns such as Duskendale and Rosby, but are dominated by King's Landing, the capital city of the Seven Kingdoms and the largest city on the continent.

The Reach lies in the central-southern area of Westeros and is considered the entire regions bread basket with rich fertile lands for growing crops.

And finally Dorne, a fiercely independent people who were the last to fall to the Seven Kingdoms. Dorne has no major cities.



Westeros & Essos are really a small part of the world.

The Map of Essos

Essos is the name of the great continent lying to the east of Westeros, across the Narrow Sea. It is the largest of the known world's four continents, extending for many thousands of miles into the distant east. No map yet exists of the entire continent. The continent is bordered by the Shivering Sea to the north and the Summer Sea and the Jade Sea to the south.

Unlike Westeros, Essos is not controlled by a single political entity. Instead its different regions are controlled by a mixture of city-states, nomadic tribes and a few small kingdoms.

Essos is divided into several distinct cultural and geographic regions.

The western-most part of the continent is held by the nine Free Cities, namely Braavos, Lorath, Pentos, Norvos, Qohor, Myr, Tyrosh, Lys and Volantis. Each is a powerful mercantile city-state, many of them controlling wide swathes of territory around them. Lying between the southern cities are the Disputed Lands (which have been fought over by Lys, Myr, Tyrosh and Volantis for almost four centuries). In the north-west of this region is Andalos, the ancestral homeland of the Andals which is now mostly uninhabited wasteland. The north of this region is mountainous and home to rich mines, particularly in the Axe and the Hills of Norvos. These mountains are the sources for several rivers which come together to form the immense Rhoyné, which flows south for hundreds of miles before emptying into the Summer Sea at Volantis.

East of the Free Cities, beyond the Forest of Qohor, lies the vast Dothraki Sea, the home of the nomadic Dothraki people. Living in large clans known as khalasars, the Dothraki are a feared race of horse-riding warriors who frequently raid surrounding lands. The Dothraki Sea extends for over two and a half thousand miles into the east, before ending at the immense chain known as the Bone Mountains.

South-east of the Free Cities lies the peninsula of Valyria. Formerly a warm and pleasant land, this region was shattered in a titanic volcanic cataclysm known as the Doom of Valyria some four centuries ago. The city of Valyria itself now lies on an offshore

island, separated from the mainland by the forbidding Smoking Sea. Volcanic activity has continued unabated in Valyria for the past four centuries, preventing any attempts at resettlement. Only in the north of this region do permanent cities exist, most notably at ill-omened Mantarys and the coastal cities of Elyria and Tolos. To the east of the Valyrian Peninsula lies Slaver's Bay, with the great slave-cities of Meereen, Yunkai and Astapor clinging to its eastern shores. These rich cities serve as the center of the world's slave trade for all Essosi cultures.

South of Slaver's Bay lies the nation of Ghiscar, which claims to have inherited the mantle of the ancient Ghiscari Empire. So far the Ghiscari have claimed a few small settlements along the coast of the Gulf of Grief and the offshore island of Ghaen.

East of Slaver's Bay, separated from the Dothraki Sea by the Skahazadhan River, lies the peaceful kingdom of Lhazar. The Lhazareen are a notably un-

warlike people, preferring a peaceful life raising sheep. The Dothraki call them the Lamb-Men and frequently raid them to steal cattle and take slaves.

East of Lhazar lies the Red Waste, a harsh desert dotted with ruined cities and few sources of water. The Red Waste extends east to the Bone Mountains and south to the Summer Sea. South-east of the waste lies the great city of Qarth, which sits on the Straits of Qarth (or Jade Gates). The straits separate the mainland from the large island of Great Moraq, and join the Summer Sea to the Jade Sea.

North of the Dothraki Sea lies the large island of Ib, or Ibben. The Ibbenese are noted sailors whose ships can be found in many ports of the world. They mostly survive by whaling. The Ibbenese also have small colonies on the north coast of Essos.

East of Ibben, the Bone Mountains and Qarth, hard facts give way to lands of rumor and song.



The Song of Ice and Fire

In the “modern day” era of the *Song of Ice and Fire* there are quite a few different religions, but figuring out how many “gods” there are is a bit tricky.

On Westeros (the continent where most of the non-Danaerys scenes take place) the primary religion is the Faith of the Seven; this is the official religion of the Seven Kingdoms as a whole, though not all of the seven former kingdoms follow it. The Faith of the Seven, not surprisingly, worships seven gods: Father, Mother, Warrior, Maiden, Smith, Crone and Stranger. They believe that the Seven are seven aspects of a single god, who once walked among the Andals (the ancestors of most of the people in southern Westeros). Whenever you hear about a “septon” talking, or people visiting a “sept”, they are talking about the Faith.

In the North, people still largely follow the religion of the First Men (the ancestors of the Northerners), who worship the old gods. Here’s where trying to count the gods starts to fall apart, because worship of the old gods is what we would call an “animistic” religion: they believe in lots and lots of nameless gods, inhabiting the elements of nature. In particular, followers of the old gods pray to specially formed weirwoods trees; the Children of the Forest believed that each tree was a god, and part of a vast collective of godhood that spanned all of nature.

On the Iron Islands, the Iron Men also still follow their ancestors’ old religion; not surprisingly, theirs is based on the ocean. They follow a dual theology: they worship the Drowned God, but also believe in his enemy the Storm God. Priests of the Drowned God are baptized in water by literally being drowned and resuscitated.

A new religion that is starting to spread in Westeros is the worship

of R’hllor, the Lord of Light. This is a religion that was imported from Essos (one of the other continents, across the Narrow Sea from Westeros) but has started to take hold in Westeros. Melisandre, the Red Woman traveling with Stannis Baratheon, is a priestess of R’hllor, and is spreading the religion among Stannis’ army. Worshipers of R’hllor also believe there are two gods: R’hllor, the Lord of Light, and his arch enemy The Other.

Across the sea, there are dozens of small, isolated religions of varying sizes. On the television show, I believe we’ve seen the Many-Faced God of the Faceless Men, the Great Stallion of the Dothraki, and the worship of Mother Rhoyme along the Rhoyme River in Volantis. In the novels, there are brief mentions of at least a dozen more.

The Great Shepherd or lamb god is the deity of the peaceful Lhazareen. They are taught that all men are one flock.

The Old Man of the River is a lesser god of the Rhoynar. He is the son of Mother Rhoyme and his form is that of a giant turtle. He fights the Crab King for dominion of all life below the flowing water. (In “A Dance with Dragons” when the Shy Maid sails down the Rhoyme at Ny Sar they see a huge horned turtle, which Yandry claims is the Old Man of the River).

The great goddess of the Unsullied is called by many names, including the Lady of Spears, the Bride of Battle, and the Mother of Hosts. According to Gray Worm, her true name belongs only to the ones who have burned their manhoods upon her altar. The Unsullied purify themselves according to the laws of their great goddess; one way is to bathe in the salt sea. The Unsullied may not speak of the great goddess to others.

Author George R. R. Martin gives us a rich and layered world that offers many faiths and fascination with many personalities, magical, political or religious. Its one of the best written and well loved fantasy series in modern history.



A Political Map of the Westeros Continent

The Timeline of Westeros

(from various Wikis)

The recorded history of Westeros extends back over 12,000 years, according to tradition, though the accuracy of the legends and myths that recount much of this history is openly questioned by the masters of the Citadel, amongst others.

As with real-life medieval cultures, the people who inhabit the known world in which the continents of Westeros, Essos, and Sothoryos are located do not possess objective knowledge about how their world was created. This is in contrast with J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth legendarium, in which characters actually did meet their gods or angelic beings and knew the full history of their world. In the fantasy world in which Westeros is set, civilization just gradually coalesced from the hunter-gatherer level, as in real-life. Many different cultures have their own theories about how the world began and how the human race came to be, usually tied to which religion they practice. Different religions offer drastically different theories on how the world was created. Even more simple "cultural traditions" and oral histories have much to say on the subject but no hard evidence. Some of these oral traditions are known to be simply inaccurate: the Dothraki believe that the first man came into being one thousand years ago, when even the written histories of other continuous civilizations stretch back five to six thousand years.

The earliest written histories date back to about 6,000 years ago, when the Andals first introduced writing to Westeros. The First Men had no writing system more advanced than runes for marking graves, thus all history before 6,000 years ago relies on oral tradition. Many of the events before 6,000 years ago in Westeros, during the Age of Heroes, are half-legendary, and some of the more fanciful tales of these times probably have little basis in reality. Still, all legends and oral histories may have some kernel of truth behind them. Written histories in Essos from the great civilizations of Valyria and Ghis also date back roughly five to six

thousand years. Even so, this is about twice as long as the continuous written historical record that exist in our real-life world, our equivalent being if written history were extended unbroken back to the construction of the first ziggurat in ancient Sumeria. Oral tradition extends back twice that long.

A major issue, pointed out by author George R.R. Martin himself, is that as the saying goes, history tends to be written by the victors. Just as in real life, the inhabitants of Westeros during the time frame of the TV series

do not possess an objective record of history. History tends to be more accurate the closer it is to the present, but largely in the sense that fables and half-myths tend no longer to be included. All history books display the biases of their authors to some degree. The oldest written histories in Westeros were made by the Andal invaders, and they depicted themselves in a positive light as they killed or conquered the First Men of the south. The Northerners, descended from the First Men who were never conquered by the Andals, have a decidedly negative view of the Andal invasions.

Note: The dating system is based on the Targaryen Conquest. Thus all dates are "BC" for "Before Conquest" or "AC" for "After Conquest".



The First Men Meet the Children of the Forest

The Dawn Age

"In the Dawn Age of Westeros, before the coming of man, and the raising of castles and cities, there were only the Children of the Forest." - Bran Stark

The Dawn Age is an epoch in the history of the Known World. It was the first historical epoch, ending roughly 8,000 years ago and extending backwards into the mists of time before the age of mankind. Little information about it has survived, even in legends.

Humans did not live in the Westeros at all for much of the Dawn Age. For centuries beyond count, the continent was only inhabited by two non-human races: the Children of the Forest and the giants. The Children were a small people skilled in magic, wielding weapons made of wood, bone,

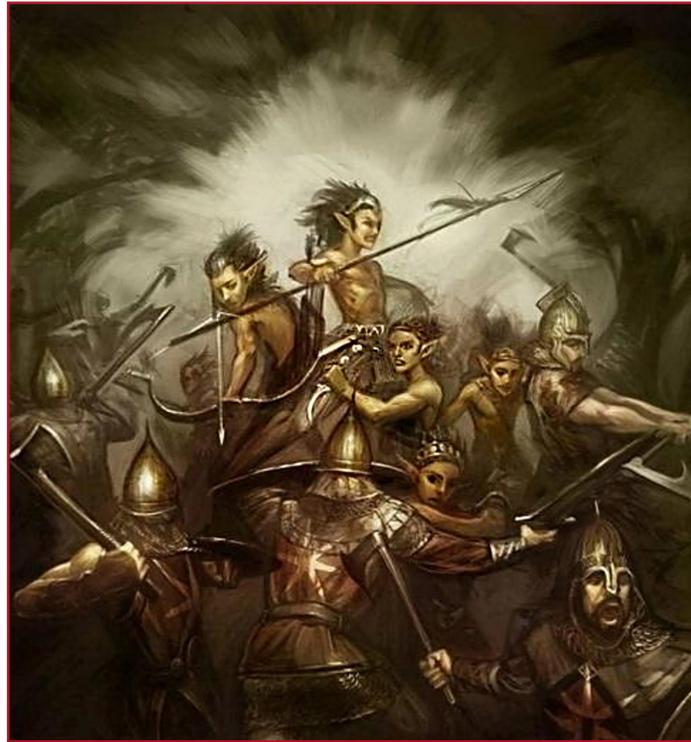
and dragonglass (obsidian) - which they used to make razor-sharp arrowheads and daggers. They were later called the “Children of the Forest” by humans, because when full-grown they were no taller than a human child in height, and they preferred to live in the deep forests and caves, building hidden villages in the trees. The Children worshiped deities known as the Old Gods of the Forest - the countless and unnamed spirits of every tree, rock, and stream.

According to legend, about 12,000 years ago the First Men migrated to Westeros - so-called because they were the first humans to settle in the continent. The First Men crossed over from Essos using a land-bridge, known as the Arm of Dorne, in the southeastern corner of Westeros. They settled the plains and cut down forests for timber and to clear new land. This led them into conflict with the indigenous Children of the Forest, particularly when they cut down the Weirwood trees that the Children carved faces into, known as heart trees, which were sacred to the Old Gods.

The Wars of the First Men and the Children of the Forest lasted for millennia. The Children were very woodcrafty, fierce fighters, and skilled in magical powers, but the First Men were more numerous, physically larger and stronger, possessed warriors mounted on horses, and introduced weapons made of bronze (which, while not as sharp as dragonglass, is much sturdier for longswords and armor). In desperation, the wise men of the Children (known as Greenseers) used their magical powers to call up the hammer of the waters; the oceans rose up and broke the Arm of Dorne, destroying the land bridge between Westeros and Essos, leaving an island chain in which the later eras is known as the Stepstones. It was too late, however, as the First Men already had a firm foothold in southern Westeros. Later, the Children attempted to call up the hammer of the waters again to keep the First Men from passing into the North, but they were only partially successful, managing to flood the narrow isthmus leading into the North known as the Neck and turning it into a near-impassable swampland.

Even so, while the Children were gradually losing, at this display of

their powers wiser leaders prevailed among both sides, who were tired of the bloodshed. About 10,000 years ago, the leaders of the First Men and the Children of the Forest came together at the Isle of Faces in the center of Gods Eye Lake to make a lasting peace between the two races, subsequently known as “The Pact”. In following centuries, the First Men and the Children often became staunch allies, and the First Men even adopted the religion of the Children, worshiping the Old Gods at the faces carved in Weirwood trees. To show an alliance, every Weirwood tree on the Isle of Faces was carved with a face.



Children of the Forest are Struck Down by the Andals

The signing of the Pact signified the end of the Dawn Age in Westeros. The new era that began after it was known as the Age of Heroes, during which - about 8,000 years ago, and 2,000 years after the signing of the Pact - the Long Night fell upon the world, and the White Walkers rode out of the unmapped Lands of Always Winter in the far north, raising an army of the dead to wage war upon the living.

Practically nothing is known about the events surrounding the Dawn Age. Even the events from the Age of Heroes - including the Long Night, defeat of the White Walkers, and the raising of the Wall - are considered to be mostly the stuff of legends, and the Dawn Age is thousands of years older than even that era. The Age of Heroes later ended 6,000 years ago with the Andal Invasion of Westeros, and the Andals introduced the first true writing system to Westeros. Everything that came before that was primarily dependent on oral tradition. Even so, the First Men in the Age of Heroes had at least possessed a basic rune system for marking graves, and produced ruins of castles and settlements which give some validation of the oral traditions and folklore. In contrast, there is virtually no evidence regarding the histories from the Dawn Age, even the oral tradition is often vague and cursory at best - much knowledge regarding the cultures or civilizations that existed during these “lost eras of before” was destroyed during the cataclysm of the Long Night.

The peoples living in Essos and other lands don't exactly use the same reckoning of historical epochs and eras, though they also loosely speak of “the Dawn Age” as the earliest period of human history. Because Es-

essos did not have a corresponding Pact with the Children of the Forest from Westeros or an Andal Invasion, they didn't have a corresponding "Age of Heroes". The "Dawn Age" in Essos is generally taken to mean everything before the Long Night 8,000 years ago - which was a global cataclysm and also affected Essos, from the region of the modern Free Cities to Yi Ti in the distant east. Rhoynar legend says that the Rhoynre River froze as far south as its tributary the Selhoru River (about as far south as the Stepstones). These were generally followed by the period when the Ghiscari Empire was the dominant power in Essos (west of the Bone Mountains and not including Yi Ti, about 8,000 to 5,000 years ago), and then the period when the Valyrian Freehold used its dragons to conquer most of Essos, half the known world (5,000 to about 400 years ago), and finally the current era after the Doom of Valyria four centuries ago.

Humans seem to have come to Westeros from Essos, but where humans came from before that is pure speculation, fading into various religious or legendary explanations. Several different known civilizations in Essos have rival claims to be the eldest, though if they were they must have been in their infancy during the Dawn Age, before the Long Night 8,000 years ago. The Valyrians were comparatively young, a society of simple shepherds until they discovered dragons in the volcanoes around their homeland about 6,000-5,000 years ago, so they did not originate as far back as the Dawn Age. Those with particular claims to extending back to the Dawn Age are Yi Ti, Qarth, and the Ghiscari Empire.

Of these, only the Ghiscari Empire possessed a written record extending far back enough to serve as reliable proof that it was eldest, and that originated in the Dawn Age. Nonetheless it was still "young" when the disaster struck. Yi Ti claims that it had an even older empire for many thousands of years before that, but which was destroyed during the Long Night and had to be rebuilt (the tales of this Dawn Empire are fabulous and apparently mostly legend, filled with emperors who lived for centuries and warred with gods). Still, only a few generations separated the confirmed founding of both, Old Ghis slightly before the Long Night and Yi Ti slightly after. Ultimately the Ghiscari Empire was wiped out by the Valyrian Freehold 5,000 years ago, however, while the Golden Empire of Yi Ti has had a continuous run of

civilization for the past 8,000 years since the Long Night.

The World of Ice and Fire source book (2014) revealed only a little more of the Dawn Age, as most knowledge about it is simply forgotten or was never recorded, and only exists as a scrap of legend here or there. In ancient times, the sea level used to be much higher than it is now: the years-long winters seem to have trapped enough water as ice that it led to severe desertification in certain areas, and expanding coastlines. The Sea of Dorne that separates Dorne itself from the Stormlands used to be a large region of low-lying salt marshes, but they were later completely flooded by the ocean. The large kingdom known as the Patrimony of Hyrkoon once flourished in plains northwest of Yi Ti, but situated on the eastern leeward side of the bones, in later eras the lands dried out and turned into the Great Sand Sea; all

that remains of Hyrkoon are its colony-cities to the west, founded as fortresses to guard the mountain passes.

Civilization as the world knows it first began in the vast plains and flat river valleys of central Essos, in the western portion of what would later become known as the Dothraki Sea - though the Dothraki themselves are a younger race that only crossed west over the Bone Mountains thousands of years after the Dawn Age. The few legends of this time say that there was once a vast inland sea in the heart of the grasslands, known as the Silver Sea. The coasts and river

valleys around this inland sea are where the first known humans shifted from being hunter-gatherers to practicing agriculture. They came to be ruled by the legendary (if not mythical) "Fisher Queens", a matrilineal line who ruled from a large floating palace of wood that gradually made its way around the coasts of the Silver Sea. After many generations the Fisher Queens eventually died out, but their domains were surrounded by other tribes and peoples, including quite probably the ancestors of the First Men, the Andals, and the Rhoynar. Other peoples nearby included the Hairy Men, the lost city of Lyber, the Cymmeri, the Gipps, the Zoqora, the Qaathi, and the Sarnori. At least some of them were in contact with the Fisher Queens and may have been under their hegemony, or at least their sphere of influence.

Over the eons, the great inland Silver Sea which had once seen the dawn of civilization with the Fisher Queens mostly dried up. Today all that is left is a very small body of water directly north from Meereen, across



The Golden Empire of Yi Ti

hundreds of miles of plains. The Fisher Queens and these other early peoples that settled around the inland sea may have been the first who were “civilized” in the sense that they built towns and cities and carried out agriculture, though they were not apparently not full “civilizations” in the sense of the Ghiscari Empire or Yi Ti: unlike these others, they do not seem to have developed a writing system yet to record histories (i.e. like the real-life very earliest Bronze Age cultures) - assuming that the Fisher Queens ever really existed.

These ancient peoples were very diverse in culture and also ethnicity, migrating from whatever unknown lands they used to live in during the countless centuries before. The Hairy Men were apparently the ancestors of the Ibbenese. The people of Lyber had two cults, one which worshiped a spider goddess and another that worshiped a serpent god, whose followers constantly fought each other. The Cymmeri were long-legged and are believed to have been the first known people to forge iron (though the Rhoynar were also one of the earliest to discover iron forging). The Cymmeri lived in hill kingdoms, perhaps the southern foothills of the Painted Mountains. The Gipps carried wicker shields made out of the tall grass, and stiffened their hair with lime. The Zoqora were a brown-skinned and white-haired people who rode to war in chariots. The Qaathi were the ancestors of the Qartheen, and lived in city-states to the southeast. These were the most significant of the peoples from the Dawn Age, though there may have been many dozens more, in their own corners of the lands, who are no longer remembered.

The greatest of the peoples around the Silver Sea in the Dawn Age, however, were the Sarnori. In their own language they called themselves the Tagaez Fen, which means “Tall Men”. The Sarnori were brown-skinned and dark haired, tall in stature and long-limbed, and they rode chariots into battle (they may have been akin to the Zoqora, who also rode chariots and were brown-skinned, though the Zoqora had white hair). In the aftermath of the collapse of the Fisher Queens, the Sarnori conquered and assimilated the Cymmeri, the Gipps, and the Zoqora. According to legend the Sarnori were led by their hero-king Huzhor Amai the Amazing, son of the last of the Fisher Queens, who took to wife the daughters of the greatest kings and

lords of the Cymmeri, Gipps, and Zoqora, and had descendants by each of them (it isn’t clear if Huzhor Amai was a real person, or a conglomeration by oral tradition of several kings, and his harem of wives a metaphor for how the Sarnori absorbed these other peoples). Meanwhile, the expansion and consolidation of the Sarnori caused the other peoples living on the fringes of the plains to spiral outwards: this may have been what caused the First Men to migrate to Westeros, while the ancestors of the Andals and Rhoynar

were pushed west, into the region of the later Free Cities (the Andals in the north, the Rhoynar in the south). The remnants of the Hairy Men were wiped out, or apparently later moved to the westernmost coast which later became Andalos - centuries later to be wiped out by the Andals when they migrated to Andalos from the Axe peninsula to the north, until in the present day their descendants the Ibbenese only live on the large frozen island Ib, to the northeast of the Dothraki Sea. Thousands of years later, the rise of Valyria made the wary Andals start migrating to Westeros 6,000 years ago, and when later the Valyrians at their height defeated the Rhoynar, their refugees fled to Dorne 1,000 years ago.

The Qaathi to the southeast also fought extensively with the Sarnori in ancient times, but their city-states tended to lose more than they won, and were gradually pushed further and further southeast into increasingly poor lands. The overall drying out of the lands in subsequent millennia led to desertification in this region as well as time went on, furthering their decline. They did their best to make new colony-cities there but even with extensive irrigation projects they were already well on the way to internal collapse when the Doom of Valyria struck four centuries ago: their

weakened city-states east of Slaver’s Bay had no chance of withstanding the Dothraki hordes, who wiped them out. Without their irrigation projects what little life the region could sustain evaporated, truly turning that region into the Red Waste. One colony city survived, however, on the coast on the opposite side of the deserts, which the Dothraki would not cross: Qarth. Oddly, while the other Qaathi colonies were all wiped out after the Doom, the loss of Valyrian fleets patrolling the Summer Sea led to a resurgence for Qarth: with a stranglehold on the narrow straits commanding all west-east traffic into the Jade Sea and to the riches of Yi Ti, the Qartheen dominated the west-east maritime trade, and became fabulously wealthy - though they



Early Lybins Worshiped a Spider Goddess

are still an odd remnant of what the much larger Qaathi people used to be.

After the Long Night and the end of the Dawn Age in Essos eight thousand years ago, civilization flowered across the continent. The Sarnori established a loose confederation of city-states known as the “Kingdom of Sarnor”, even though they had their own kings, loosely under one high-king. Their power balanced out with other rising empires such as the mighty Ghiscari Empire which had arisen to the southeast, but which was spreading northwards from the coast. Long afterwards, the Valyrian Freehold rose about 5,000 years ago. Sarnor extended from north of the Valyrians in the west to north of the Ghiscari in the east, and became drawn into the series of five great wars between them.

Other more far-flung regions developed sophisticated civilizations at their own pace. The Summer Islands, separated from both Westeros and Essos by vast stretches of the Summer Sea, developed large cities and trading fleets without outside contact. Indeed, they had no knowledge of the outside world for many millennia: ancient maps from their temples show only the Summer Islands, surrounded by a world-encompassing ocean, assuming they were the only people in existence. During the height of the Ghiscari Empire (between 8,000 and 5,000 years ago), a Ghiscari trade ship blown off course by a storm landed on one of the islands, making them aware of the outside world.

The Age of Heroes

“Singers call those times the Age of Heroes. A mask for a savage world that bred savage men.” - Lord Roose Bolton

The Age of Heroes is an epoch in the history of Westeros. It began approximately 10,000 years ago with the sealing of the Pact, which brought about peace between the First Men and the Children of the Forest at the end of the preceding era, known as the Dawn Age. The Age of Heroes lasted for about four millennia, from the signing of the Pact until the Andal Invasion 6,000 years ago.

This age is so-named for the great heroes who were said to live at this time and perform immense deeds. Some of these heroes were ancestors and founders of later noble Houses and institutions. The history of the Age of Heroes are only remembered through myths and songs and weren't canonized in books.

The major historical event of this age was the Long Night and the war against the White Walkers, which occurred about 8,000 years ago.

During that Age, Westeros was divided in seven major regions/kingdoms. Although their names roughly correspond with what would later become the official Seven Kingdoms, their actual territory was likely quite different:

1. **Kingdom of the North:** Its major figure was Bran the Builder, first King in the North and ancestor of the House Stark; he built The Wall and Winterfell.
2. **Kingdom of the Mountain and the Vale**
3. **Kingdom of the Iron Islands:** Its major figure was the Gray King, slayer of Nagga and ancestor of House Greyjoy.
4. **Kingdom of the Rock:** The ancestral lands of House Casterly who ruled The Westerlands; this is associated with the legendary trickster Lann the Clever, ancestor of House Lannister, who swindled Casterly Rock from that House.
5. **Kingdom of the Reach:** It contains Highgarden, built by Garth Greenhand, first King of the Reach, founder of House Gardener and ancestor of many nobles of other Houses.
6. **Kingdom of the Stormlands:** Associated with Durran Godsgrief, the first Storm King. He married the immortal Elenei and built seven castles to defy the wrath of her divine parents, the final one being Storm's End.
7. **Dorne:** Although Dorne was the first place that First Men touched upon when they migrated to Westeros, and the region has remained peopled the longest, it was never unified in any sense until Princess Nymeria of the Rhoynar arrived 1,000 years ago, long after the Age of Heroes.

During this period, many petty-kingdoms rose and fell across the continent, their rulers laying the foundations for what would later become the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. A number of cultural traditions were also established during this time, many of which live on in the customs of the present-day Northmen: the laws of hospitality, guest right, and the notion that “the man who passes the sentence should swing the sword” all date from the Age of Heroes.

The most notable event that took place during the Age of Heroes was the Long Night, the generation-long winter that descended upon Westeros and brought the First Men and the Children of the Forest in conflict with the White Walkers. The following war claimed many lives, and the Children never truly recovered from it, but the Walkers were driven back to the far north, and the Wall was raised to bar against their potential return.

Westeros was very different during the Age of Heroes, especially when compared to the War of the Five Kings thousands of years later. Many familiar traditions and technologies currently associated with Westeros

were absent during the Age of Heroes, only arriving with the Andals:

1. The Faith of the Seven is specifically an Andal religion, and was not present in Westeros during the Age of Heroes.
2. Similarly, the tradition of Knighthood is specific to the Andals, so there were no “knights” as such during this time period. Later histories, written after the Andal Invasion, inaccurately apply the title “knight” to several legendary figures from this era.
3. The Age of Heroes was essentially the Bronze Age of Westeros: The weapons and armor of the First Men were made of bronze, as stronger iron and steel weapons were only introduced later by the Andals.
4. The kings who ruled during the Age of Heroes may not have really been “kings” in the contemporary sense of the word: They were not nearly as powerful, as the lands that would later comprise the “Seven Kingdoms” each consisted a patchwork of many different petty kingdoms, all struggling for dominance.

Some theorize that “kings” in the Age of Heroes were more like the leaders of war-bands, who rallied other noble Houses in times of external threat. A “first among equals”, and not really comparable to the monarchies of later eras. Even in more recent times, such during the Andal invasions 6,000 years ago, the Starks called themselves “King of Winter” (a more local title), as their hold on the North at the time was still more of a loose hegemony; their greatest rivals, the Boltons, had only recently joined the fold. Centuries afterwards, as their hold on the North tightened, the Starks shifted to calling themselves “King in the North” to emphasize their sovereign status over the entire region.

The Andals possessed better architectural technology than the First Men, and constructed many of the larger castles now standing in Westeros. Fortifications during the Age of Heroes were generally basic ring-forts, in the style of the Fist of the First Men. A few castle sites were founded by the First Men and have been continuously inhabited and improved upon over

the millennia - Winterfell, Storm’s End, Casterly Rock, Pyke, Oldtown, and Highgarden - but during the Age of Heroes itself they were much smaller and humbler. Moat Cailin, strategically located at a vital choke point in the swamps of The Neck, has allegedly existed since the wars between the First Men and the Children of the Forest.

Several major locations from the time of the War of the Five Kings did not exist during the Age of Heroes: Most critically, King’s Landing was just three barren hills in the middle of an empty field at the mouth of the Blackwater River. The city was only built by the Targaryens 300 years ago after they conquered and unified the Seven Kingdoms. Similarly, the Targaryens’ ancestral fortress on Dragonstone didn’t exist yet either, as the island was only settled about 500 years ago. The construction of Harrenhal only began a generation before the Targaryen Conquest, with the final stone reportedly put in place on the very day the Targaryens first landed in Westeros. The Freys only built The Twins and became a noble House about 600 years before the present, and The Eyrie and Riverrun were built only after the Andal invasions. Also, none of the major highways, such as the Kingsroad, existed yet, as they were constructed by the Targaryens to ease travel and trade across their newly unified realm.

Westeros has five settlements large enough to be called “cities” in the present-day: in descending order of size these are King’s Landing, Oldtown, Lannisport, Gulltown in the Vale, and White Harbor in the North. Even by the end of the Age of Heroes, when the Andals first invaded, only Oldtown and Lannisport were large enough to be called “cities”: King’s Landing didn’t exist at all, and White Harbor was just a coastal fortification called the Wolf’s Den, while Gulltown was a reasonably sized and prosperous port town. When exactly Oldtown and Lannisport grew into “cities” is also unclear: Lannisport was founded many centuries after Lann the Clever died, by younger branches of the Lannister family from Casterly Rock.

It isn’t clear how much long-distance trade the First Men conducted with lands beyond Westeros, as they were not known for having a strong presence at sea (one of the reasons why they initially crossed to Westeros)



Casterly Rock from the Age of Heroes

via the Arm of Dorne). Also, most of the other great powers of the world either did not exist yet themselves, or were too far away for easy trade.

The Valyrian Freehold first rose only about 5,000 years ago, when the humble shepherds of Valyria discovered and tamed dragons, then used them to conquer the rest of Essos. The Valyrians later settled colonies to their west which became the Free Cities, none of which existed yet during the Age of Heroes either. During this time period, the western end of Essos where the Free Cities were later located was divided between the Andals (to the north) and the Rhoynar (to the south, along the river network).

The Dothraki hadn't yet settled in the Dothraki Sea, as they only migrated west of the Bone Mountains thousands of years later (accounts differ).

After the Long Night, merchant ships from the Summer Islands began exploring the surrounding oceans, and it is said that they were visiting Oldtown since it was first settled (some even theorize that Oldtown began as a resupply post for Summer Islander ships).

The civilizations of the Ghiscari Empire (based Slaver's Bay), Qarth, and Yi Ti did exist around the time of the Long Night, but they were in their infancy. The shadowbinders of Asshai, meanwhile, claim that their dark city has existed since the beginning of time, and none can prove otherwise.

At the time leading up to the Long Night, of course, the Wall and the Night's Watch didn't exist yet.

The Order of Maesters did exist during the Age of Heroes - at least in some form. It originated as a guild of scholars in Oldtown, but not much is remembered about its origins beyond legends. It only developed gradually from a loose guild of court scholars into a university-like organization, and only after that developed the continent-spanning messenger-raven network.

Very little is known about the attitudes of the First Men regarding Gender and Sexuality. In the present day, The North still follows the Old Gods of the Forest, but through cultural osmosis seems to have adopted the standards of southern Westeros, from the Faith of the Seven - daughters only inherit power after their younger brothers, and homosexuality seems

to be frowned upon. Therefore, the present-day North in the time of Ned Stark probably isn't a good measure of what the ancient First Men were like. Some of the other groups that descend from the First Men, however, prominently feature female political leaders and warriors: the wildlings beyond the Wall, the Hill Tribes of the Vale, and the Crannogmen of the Neck. Counter-evidence is that the Ironborn also descend from the First Men, but are a very misogynistic culture which (barring very rare exceptions) doesn't normally have female warriors or political leaders. Whether the ancient First

Men were more like the wildlings or the Ironborn, or something else entirely, is unclear. Legends about the Age of Heroes don't mention female warriors or political leaders, though given that they're 8,000 years removed from the present-day, the stories might have just been distorted over the millennia. Nonetheless, the fact remains that no prominent female characters from this era have been described in any of George R.R. Martin's writings.

Legendary Figures

The Age of Heroes takes its name from the many legendary figures that lived during this time. Each of these figures performed great feats that are still talked about in the present-day, and many of the noble houses of Westeros claim descent from them:

1. **Bran the Builder:** said to be the mastermind behind the Wall and to have raised the ancient keep of Winterfell. Allegedly, he built the Wall with the aid of the Children of the Forest and their magical powers. His name is also connected with other notable constructs, such as Storm's End and the Hightower. House Stark claims descent from him.



Brandon (Bran the Builder) Stark

2. **Durrin Godsgrief:** Durrin is credited with raising the mighty castle of Storm's End as a defense against the powerful winds and rains that blow up and down the coast of the Stormlands. House Durrandon, the rulers of the Stormlands before the Targaryen Conquest, claimed descent from him. In turn, House Baratheon claims descent from Durrin, as Orys Baratheon married the daughter of the last Storm King after the Conquest. According to some legends, Durrin was actually helped by a young Bran the Builder, before Bran went north to create Winterfell

and found House Stark. Of course, many maesters doubt either of them ever existed, and even among those who do believe they were historical figures (albeit embellished by later legends), many suspect that the part about Durran knowing Bran the Builder was just an invention of later storytellers.

3. **Lann the Clever:** a famous, golden-haired trickster who was able to swindle House Casterly out of their ancestral stronghold, Casterly Rock, though the stories of how he accomplished this feat vary widely. The stories also say that he lived for over 300 years and sired a hundred children. House Lannister claims descent from him.
4. **The Gray King:** the first ruler of the Ironborn, he slew the great sea dragon Nagga, took a mermaid as his wife and ruled for a thousand years. He also taught men how to weave nets and sails, and carved the very first longship from the wood of a demon tree. Nearly all the noble houses of the Iron Islands claim descent from him.
5. **Garth Greenhand:** stories told of Garth say that he first taught men how to farm the land, was able to influence human fertility and reproductive cycles, and that he sired children beyond count. All the noble houses of the Reach claim descent from him in some form.

6. House Gardener claimed to be descended from Garth's eldest son, known as **Garth the Gardener**. Eventually they unified all of the Reach under their rule and remained in power for thousands of years, but were completely wiped out during the Targaryen Conquest. House Tyrell does not claim direct male descent from the Gardeners, as they were an Andal family that came to the Reach thousands of years later - but the Tyrells did intermarry with local First Men families over the centuries, so that they claim descent from the Gardeners through the female line, and thus in turn from Garth Greenhand.



The Gray King on his Nagga Throne (credit: Arthur Bozonnet)

7. **Ellyn Ever-Sweet:** The first beekeeper, she loved honey so much that she made a pact with the King of the Bees to care for all of his children. House Beesbury claims descent from her.

8. **Florys the Fox:** A daughter of Garth Greenhand who was so cunning that she was able to keep three husbands at once, with none knowing of the others' existence. House Florent of Brightwater Keep claims descent from one of the husbands.

9. **Gilbert of the Vines:** According to legend, it was Gilbert who first taught the men of the Arbor to make wine from the grapes that grew on the island. House Redwyne claims descent from him.

10. **Harlon the Hunter and Herndon of the Horn:** Twin sons of Garth Greenhand. They are said to have raised the castle of Horn Hill and shared a woods witch as a wife for a hundred years, never aging as long as they bedded her every full moon. House Tarly claims descent from them.

11. **The Winged Knight:** this ancient ruler of the Vale is said to have warred with giants, rode on the back of a giant falcon, and commanded armies of birds, among other exploits. Later histories conflated him with Artys Arryn, an Andal adventurer also known as the Falcon Knight

(because of the winged helm he wore), who conquered the Vale thousands of years later. Maesters know they cannot possibly be the same person, because House Arryn wasn't even living in Westeros at the former time. For that matter, there were no "knights" in the Vale during the Age of Heroes, because Knighthood is specifically an Andal tradition that they introduced to Westeros in later ages (compare with how legends about King Arthur in Britain started out as one set of Welsh legends, but were then combined with various other legends about English and French

knights over the centuries, with multiple and often conflicting versions of the narrative). Nonetheless, many legends and songs still refer to the Winged Knight as “Artys Arryn”.

The Riverlands, The Crownlands, and Dorne do not have legendary found-

ers on the scale of a Bran the Builder or Lann the Clever. While every local noble House has legends about its ancestors, these are typically small scale legends and not nearly as prominent across entire geographical regions. During the Age of Heroes, the Riverlands rarely existed as a unified kingdom, so it has no unified founder myth; the Crownlands didn't even exist until the Targaryen Conquest, when it was carved out of land that had changed ownership between many kingdoms over the centuries; and Dorne was also not unified during the Age of Heroes, but divided up into petty kingdoms for most of its history. It was only unified about one thousand years ago when the Rhoynar under Nymeria came from Essos and forged the many kingdoms into a single principality.

Historical Accuracy

While the Age of Heroes occupies a significant place in the collective culture and history of Westeros, very little about this period can, in fact, be confirmed with any accuracy. As Samwell Tarly points out to Jon Snow, Westeros did not possess a comprehensive written language until the arrival of the Andals. The First Men did possess a system of runic script (as seen on the sigil of House Royce), and surviving examples of this script can sometimes corroborate parts of stories from the Age of Heroes. For the most part, however, these stories were passed down orally through songs and poems, which can easily change depending on circumstances, especially over a long period of time. Therefore, nearly all the information known about the Age of Heroes was written down thousands of years after the events supposedly

occurred, and many of those writers were Septons whose accounts were likely influenced by their religious beliefs.

In such circumstances, the existence the legendary progenitors of various noble houses, or the occurrence of cataclysmic events such as the Long Night, cannot be conclusively proven, despite the importance they hold

in the collective psyche of Westeros. By the same token, this lack of first-hand evidence (or simply the many thousands of years that have passed since) is one reason why some Westerosi believe the Long Night never occurred in the first place.

The legendary figures from the Age of Heroes share many of their traits with real-life culture heroes. Appearing in mythologies and histories from around the world, these archetypal figures - such as the Greek Prometheus, the West African Ananse, and the Polynesian Maui - usually contribute highly important technologies or traditions to a particular group, often very early in that group's

history. Everything from agricultural techniques to the invention of language and writing have been attributed to culture heroes.

Andal Invasion

“They attacked with fire and weapons of steel, slaughtering the Children of the Forest wherever they could find them, burning out their Weirwood groves, hacking away at the faces of the old gods, and spreading their own religion through the land.” – Bran Stark

The Andal Invasion was the migration of the Andals to the continent of Westeros from their homeland of Andalos on the eastern continent of Essos, six thousand years before the War of the Five Kings. The migratory invasions of the Andals occurred in waves over many centuries, but by the end they had killed or conquered all of the First Men south of the Neck. By the



The Andals Invade the Stormlands (credit: Jordi Gonzalez Escamilla)

end of the invasions, the Andals had displaced the First Men as the major ethnic and cultural group of Westeros, to the point that peoples living in Essos frequently refer to Westeros as the Land of the Andals.

The Andals were a tall, fair-haired race whose original homeland was located across the Narrow Sea on the western coast of the continent of Essos, in a region known as Andalos. According to Andal legend, the God of Seven revealed itself to them in the Hills of Andalos, and from this they developed a new religion, the Faith of the Seven. Not long afterward, spurred on by the zeal of their new faith, the Andals set sail across the Narrow Sea to conquer Westeros. Many Andal warriors displayed their devotion by carving the symbol of their faith, the Seven-Pointed Star, into their foreheads.

The Andals first came ashore in the Fingers, in what would later be known as the Vale of Arryn. According to legend, Ser Artys Arryn, dubbed “the Winged Knight”, flew atop a giant falcon to the topmost mountain of the Vale and defeated the Griffin King, the last member of the First Men dynasty of the Mountain Kings.

From their initial landing in the Vale, the Andal migrations spread out in waves across Westeros, in a process lasting many centuries. At the time of the Andal Invasion, Westeros was a patchwork of hundreds of small kingdoms of the First Men. Therefore, they did not present a united front of resistance against the Andals, easing their conquest.

The First Men were armed with weapons made of bronze, but the Andals introduced iron and steel weapons to the continent for the first time. Andal military tactics focused on concepts of “knighthood”, producing elite warriors known as “knights” who wore full suits of iron armor while riding into battle on heavy horse. The related concept of “chivalry” spurred on the knights, a code of knightly devotion tied to the Faith of the Seven. The First Men could not withstand the armored shock cavalry assaults of the Andals’ knights. As the Andals conquered the kingdoms of southern Westeros, they aggressively stamped out the worship of the Old Gods of the Forest by the First Men they conquered, and forced them to convert to their worship of the Seven-faced God.

Over the centuries, the Andals conquered all of Westeros except for

the North, where the Kings of Winter from the line of House Stark were able to resist their advance, as such, the North continues many traditions brought by the First Men. Any approach to the North has to go through the Neck, a narrow isthmus of land filled with swamps. The ancient fortress of Moat Cailin commands the only major road coming up from the south, making it an ideal choke point for the First Men of the North. For centuries, Andal armies smashed against Moat Cailin like water on rock, but to no avail, and the North remained unconquered.

The Andals viewed the magic of the Children of the Forest as an abomination before the God of Seven. They slaughtered the Children of the Forest wherever they encountered them, and burned the sacred Weirwood trees throughout southern Westeros. The Children of the Forest were never very numerous to begin with, and during the Long Night fighting against the White Walkers they took heavy losses from which they never truly recovered. The Andal Invasion exterminated all but a handful of the few Children of the Forest that remained in Westeros, and after this point they dropped out of history, to the point that six thousand years later many believed they never existed at all. However, the very few survivors fled North of the Wall, into the Cave of the Three-Eyed Raven, out of sight for thousands of years until Bran arrives.

Due to their extra-legal status, the Night’s Watch on the Wall never became directly involved in the Andal Invasion. Partially this was also due to simple geography, as the Andals never reached that far north, but neither did the forces of the Night’s Watch march south to aid the First Men in fighting off the Andals trying to invade from the Neck. For their part, the Andals saw the value in supporting the Night’s Watch and its extra-legal status, to defend against the occasional Wildling attack, but also as an outlet for their own younger sons, criminals, or the defeated soldiers in their own wars. The Night’s Watch is sworn to take no part in the petty politics occurring in the realms of men, and eagerly welcomed Andals who volunteered to join their order. Overall, the Night’s Watch was not significantly affected by the Andal Invasion, and the transition of power in the castles of the South troubled them little.



An Andal Beheads a First Man (credit: HBO DVD content)

Aftermath

After many centuries the “invasions” ceased as the new Andal kingdoms carved out of southern Westeros stopped acting in a unified manner and began fighting each other. While wars between the North and southern kingdoms did sporadically take place for thousands of years after this, they were not “invasions” so much as “politics” as usual. The Andal-held Kingdom of the Rock in the Westerlands was just as likely to go to war against the First Men of the North, as they were to go to war against their fellow Andals in the Kingdom of the Reach. As for the South, the exact length of the invasions varied by region, based on how long it took the Andals to subdue an area. In most regions the invasions lasted at least several centuries. The Iron Islands are something of an exception, as they were conquered by the Andal House Hoare some two thousand years after the initial Andal invasion of the Vale of Arryn began. Owing to their isolated position off the western coast of the mainland of the continent, the Iron Islands were probably one of the last regions of the South to be conquered by the Andals.

After many thousands of years, the religions of the Old Gods and of the New Gods (the Seven) settled into a grudging co-existence. Wars of religion between the followers of the Old Gods and those of the Faith of the Seven have thus not occurred in thousands of years.

While the First Men of the North successfully resisted the Andals, in all other areas the Andals became the dominant ethnic and cultural group of Westeros.

The effect of the Andal Invasions upon the indigenous First Men populations varied from region to region. In the Vale of Arryn, where the invasions began, the First Men were practically exterminated (though there are a few exceptions, such as House Royce, which claim descent from the First Men). For thousands of years afterwards, the inhabitants of the Vale would be held to have the purest Andal bloodlines. In the North, of course, the First Men remained independent and the dominant ethnic group, though thousands of years of dynastic marriages with Andal noble Houses from the South blurred this to a degree.

In most other regions, the Andals conquered the First Men instead of completely exterminating them, and the Andal nobility ruled over a peasantry of First Men. Over the course of six thousand years of ethnic intermingling these class lines have heavily blurred. Moreover, over thousands of years various Andal noblemen have fallen on hard times and become peasants, while “lowborn” First Men families have worked their way up the social ladder to become noble Houses in their own right (either by being wealthy merchants, success in war, etc.). Indeed, many of the original Andal invaders intermarried with the local First Men nobility when they conquered new re-

gions to solidify their claims, so the intermingling was going on from the start. Such was the case in the Westerlands, the Riverlands, the Stormlands, the Reach, and in Dorne. Even Great Houses such as House Lannister possess some First Men blood, through the female line, as the Andal invaders married the descendants of the legendary Lann the Clever. Major noble Houses such as House Tully and House Tyrell possess some First Men blood, though they are largely thought of as Andal Houses, particularly because they follow the culture and religion of the Andals.

The Iron Islands are somewhat of an odd case, in that the Andals who conquered it “went native” and just assimilated into the distinctive “Ironborn” culture of the First Men who were already living there, which is centered on seafaring and piracy. They even abandoned worship of the Seven and adopted the local religion of the Drowned God. Thus the Ironborn are ethnically similar to the Andal/First Men mix that the rest of the South possesses, but they are culturally distinct. For practical purposes, the Andal Invasion didn’t greatly affect the harsh lifestyle of the Iron Islands, though this did lead to them adopting a few cultural influences from the Andals - such as their language, if not their religion.

Dorne was also conquered by the Andals and they intermingled with the First Men there, but they remained as numerous petty fiefdoms and didn’t unify.

Regardless of some local variation and the successful resistance of the First Men in the North, the Andals became the overwhelmingly dominant ethnic and cultural group living in Westeros. Even the independent First Men living in the North eventually abandoned using their original language, the Old Tongue, and adopted the language of their Andal neighbors, which became used so pervasively throughout Westeros that it is now known simply as the “Common Tongue”. Andal ethnic and cultural influence is so pervasive in Westeros that people living on the eastern continent of Essos now refer to it generically as “The Land of the Andals”.

In the Books

When the Andals arrived in the Riverlands, they were divided up into several local kingdoms of the First Men, including ones ruled by House Blackwood, House Bracken, and House Mudd. House Tully also dates back to the time of the First Men, though they did not rule as kings. When the Andals arrived, House Mudd fought against them but in the end was completely destroyed, and their castle left a ruin. Meanwhile, the Blackwoods, Brackens, and Tullys intermarried with the Andal invaders. Indeed, this only served to further the Blackwood-Bracken feud: the Blackwoods tenaciously clung to their worship of the Old Gods, but the Brackens converted to the religion of

the Andal invaders.

The Andals did conquer the region of Dorne, but they did not unify it. Dorne remained a patchwork of dozens of small independent fiefdoms for thousands of years. As in many other regions of Westeros, in Dorne petty Andal kings ruled over First Men populations, with whom they intermingled and merged ethnically. Five thousand years later the Rhoynar invasion radically reshaped Dorne's ethnic and cultural makeup, but the Dornishmen inhabiting the inner mountains of Dorne are still primarily descended from the Andal invaders and the First Men.

The Andals introduced the first writing system to Westeros, as the First Men only had oral tradition and a simple set of runes for marking graves. The result is that written history in Westeros only dates back to the Andal Invasion six thousand years ago, and accounts of everything before that - the Age of Heroes, the Long Night - comes from less reliable, half-legendary oral tradition. Of course, "history is written by the winners", and the history books that the Andals wrote of their "migration" to Westeros make the Andals the heroes of their own story. For example, Ser Artys Arryn is considered a folk hero by the Andals of the Vale, for valiantly killing the last king of the First Men that used to live there. The accounts of the First Men who survived in the independent North tell a decidedly different story, emphasizing that the Andal invaders slaughtered many of the First Men in their path, conquered the survivors, and crushed their culture by imposing the Andals' religion of the Seven.

Given that author George R.R. Martin has said that the story loosely parallels the War of the Roses in fifteenth century Britain, the Andal Invasion is loosely comparable to the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain. Just as the First Men were able to stop the Andals from expanding to the North in Westeros, the Celtic people living in Scotland were able to repulse Anglo-Saxon expansion from the south. However, the real-life Anglo-Saxon invaders followed a polytheistic religion and destroyed the Christianized Romano-British society that existed in Britain up to that time. In an inversion, the Andal Invasion introduced the pseudo-Catholic Christian "Faith of the Seven" which sup-

planted the polytheistic, nature-worshiping religion of the Old Gods.

The Rise and Fall of Valyria

"At its height, the Valyrian Freehold ruled over half the known world, not bad for former shepherds . . ." – Jorah Mormont

The term Valyrian Freehold refers to the area of land controlled by the Valyrians on the continent of Essos. Centered around the city of Valyria in the eponymous peninsula, the Freehold was the greatest civilization of its time, and at the height of its power covered over half the known world.



The Capital of Old Valyria (credit: Tommy Scott)

The Rise of Valyria

Thought to initially be a modest community of shepherds, the Valyrians rose to prominence five thousand years ago after they discovered dragons living in the Fourteen Fires, a string of volcanoes in the mountains of their homeland. After taming the mighty beasts, the Valyrians used them to conquer surrounding lands of the Valyrian Peninsula, and began expanding outwards.

The Ghiscari Empire, located on the opposite shore of Slaver's Bay from the Valyrians, was the first major power to face them in battle.

Seeking to halt Valyrian expansion, the Ghiscari declared war on their neighbors. Massive legions of Ghiscari slave-soldiers marched against Valyria in a series of five major wars, but each time they were defeated. The Freehold's forces then marched on the Ghiscari capital of Ghis and laid waste to it, leaving little more than a smoldering ruin behind and nearly erasing Ghiscari people and culture from history.

Afterward, the Valyrian Freehold became the dominant civilization in the known world, with its own language, religion and customs. The Freehold founded a number of colony cities, connected by a network of roads all of which led back to the capital city. Several of these colonies in the west became the Free Cities. They eventually came into conflict with the Rhoynar city-states along the Rhoynar River, leading to the Rhoynish Wars. The fight-

ing culminated about one thousand years ago with the defeat of the Rhoynar and destruction of their cities, with the survivors fleeing in a mass migration led by Nymeria, whose refugee fleet eventually settled in Dorne in south-eastern Westeros.

The Doom and Aftermath

For nearly five thousand years, Valyrian supremacy remained uncontested. However, a cataclysmic event known as “The Doom” - a massive volcanic eruption of the Fourteen Fires - laid waste to the Valyrian capital, its people, and the surrounding lands. The Valyrian peninsula itself was shattered and the ocean came sweeping in, becoming the Smoking Sea. Dragons, as well as Valyrian recorded history, spells, and knowledge were lost. With its center of power destroyed, the empire collapsed. Of the mighty families of dragonlords who ruled the Freehold, only House Targaryen survived, as it had established Dragonstone far across the Narrow Sea years before the Doom.

The surviving colonies of the Valyrian Freehold split up into rival independent city-states. In the west, they became the Free Cities. In the east, the conquered Ghiscari cities of Slaver’s Bay reasserted their independence, but five thousand years of Valyrian domination had swept away most of their original culture.

With the heartland of the Freehold destroyed, its surviving colonies to the west and east re-asserted their independence, politically fracturing the continent and initiating a series of savage wars for dominance known as the “Century of Blood”, during which Volantis attempted to reform the Valyrian empire under their rule, but ultimately failed. Several of these colonies formed into the Free Cities in the west, and the cities of Slaver’s Bay in the east. The Valyrian Peninsula itself in the center remained devastated and largely deserted.

Meanwhile, without the Valyrians and their dragons to keep them in check, the Dothraki mounted hordes swept across the continent from the central plains of the Dothraki Sea, plundering and carving out new domains from surrounding areas - from the Dothraki point of view, the Doom started

their own golden age of conquest and expansion. In the far northwest of Essos, the hidden city of Braavos, founded by escaped slaves who fled Valyria, now revealed itself to the world. While the other Valyrian colonies were left in chaos, Braavos was an island of stability because it had no political or economic ties with the Freehold, and quickly rose to become the most powerful of the Free Cities.

The ruins of Valyria in the Smoking Sea remain and are considered to be cursed by other civilizations. Some believe that ‘the Doom still rules Valyria’, inhabiting it with demons and preventing anyone from ever entering the ruins and emerging alive. In response to the disease known as greyscale,

the cities of the east send those most affected by the plague, known as the Stone Men, to the ruins of Valyria to die. The advanced disease means that few, if any, of the Stone Men retain any lucid thought, becoming monstrous creatures who attack any who wander through Valyria.



The Doom of Valyria (credit: Max Borenstein)

Westeros

People or things from Westeros are referred to as “Westerosi”.

Westeros is a continent located in the far west of the known world. It is separated from the continent of Essos by a strip of water known as the Narrow Sea. Most of the action in Game of Thrones takes place in Westeros.

Author of the series George R.R. Martin has stated that the continent of Westeros is roughly the same size as the real-life continent of South America.

The continent is home to two sovereign states: the Kingdom of the North, which regained independence following the civil war in 305 AC, and the Six Kingdoms, which covers the southern half of the continent, holds fealty to the King of the Andals and the First Men, who ancestrally sat on the Iron Throne in the city of King’s Landing before its destruction. The terms “Seven Kingdoms” and “Westeros” were normally used interchangeably before the northern succession.

Geography

Westeros is bordered to the west by the Sunset Sea, to the south by the Summer Sea and to the east by the Narrow Sea and Shivering Sea. The northern edges of the continent have not been charted, but are believed to extend to the northern polar ice cap. The continent shares similar geography and geometry to the real-life isle of Great Britain, and is narrow, about 900 miles wide at its widest point, but long, extending for almost 2,000 miles from the Summer Sea to the Wall that marks the northern border of the Seven Kingdoms. The extent of the wildling lands beyond the Wall are unknown.

The continent's terrain varies immensely. There are significant mountain ranges, such as the Mountains of the Moon in the Vale of Arryn, the Red Mountains of Dorne and the Frostfangs. There are also several extensive river networks, most notably the River Trident and its numerous tributaries, but also the Blackwater Rush, the White Knife, the Mander, and the Greenblood.

The climate varies between extremes of heat and cold across the large continent. The North is the only region in which snowfall is common, even in the middle of the years-long "summers". Beyond the Wall the temperature becomes even lower and hostile, forming the taiga woodlands of the Haunted Forest, reaching into the truly polar regions of the "Lands of Always Winter", in the unmapped farthest north. In the far south, the terrain becomes hotter and more arid, and Dorne contains the continent's only deserts. Notable offshore islands include Bear Island, Skagos, the Iron Islands, Tarth, Dragonstone and the Arbor.

The continent is also home to immense woodlands, such as the Haunted Forest beyond the Wall. South of the Wall, within the Seven Kingdoms, there are three major forested regions: the Wolfswood around Winterfell, the Kingswood south of King's Landing and straddling the northern border of the Stormlands, and the Rainwood in the southern half of the same

region. Numerous smaller wooded areas dot the continent.

Westeros is separated from the eastern continent of Essos by the Narrow Sea and also by the island chain known as the Stepstones. According to myth, the Stepstones are a remnant of an ancestral land-bridge linking Westeros and Essos together, destroyed in a cataclysm more than ten thousand years ago.

As well as the vast eastern continent of Essos, other lands are known to exist. The Summer Islands lie to the south of Westeros and there is regular trade between the islands and the Seven Kingdoms. A forbidding, mostly-unexplored continent called Sothoryos is also known to exist to the south-east across the Summer Sea, but there is little contact between it and

Westeros. Some islands are known to exist in the Sunset Sea to the west of Westeros, but the true extent of this ocean is unknown. To the east of northern Westeros lies the island of Ibben, home to traders and whalers, who occasionally trade with the Seven Kingdoms and the Free Cities of Essos.



Images of Westeros (credit: Sven Sauer)

Climate & Seasons

Westeros's climate shifts from a subarctic wasteland in the furthest north, beyond the Wall, to a desert climate in the furthest south, along the peninsula of Dorne. In the normal course of events, the furthest north still has light snowfalls

even in the longest summers while Dorne almost never sees snow, even in the most severe winters.

Westeros and Essos both experience seasons of varying length, usually lasting at least a couple of years each. The length of the seasons is completely unpredictable and varies randomly. The maesters of the Citadel keep a close eye on the length of the days in order to try to predict how long the current season will last, but this is an inexact science at best.

At the time the series opens, the world has been experiencing a summer that has lasted for nine years, which is unusually long, and the maesters fear that an equally long winter will follow. Westeros extends much further

north than Essos, so is much more adversely affected by long winters, while Essos, which extends into equatorial regions, is typically warmer.

In the North, the winters are extremely cruel. Lords set aside non-perishable food items for storage against the next winter, while many of the North's most notable strongholds are built in favorable areas, such as Winterfell on hot springs or the Dreadfort of House Bolton on volcanic vents. Some castles, like Winterfell, have elaborate greenhouses which permit the growing of vegetables even in the harshest winters. Despite these precautions, famine and starvation is common during Northern winters, and is one of the reasons the North has a small population despite its vast size.

There is a suggestion that the long seasons are not natural in origin, but may have stemmed from a near-mythical event called the Long Night 8,000 years ago, when it is said that the White Walkers used the cover of a winter that lasted a generation and a night to invade Westeros. They were defeated in the War for the Dawn, thrown back into the furthest north and prevented from returning by the raising of the Wall, but the seasons never recovered. Maesters are highly skeptical of this story, dismissing it as folklore, despite the inarguable presence of the Wall.

History

Twelve thousand years ago, Westeros was inhabited by the diminutive Children of the Forest, a nonhuman race who lived in peace and harmony with nature, worshiping the Old Gods of the Forest. The First Men, a human ethnic group, invaded Westeros across the Arm of Dorne, armed with weapons of bronze. In a significant military conflict, in which the Children allegedly destroyed the Arm of Dorne with magic (resulting in the Stepstone islands) and flooded the Neck, the two sides fought to a standstill and made a pact of friendship and alliance. The First Men adopted the worship of the old gods at this time.

Two thousand years after the Pact, Westeros was invaded by the White Walkers during a winter that lasted for a generation. In the War for the Dawn, they were defeated by an alliance of the First Men and the Children, though only at grievous cost. The Children disappeared from Westeros at this time. Brandon Stark, known as Bran the Builder, raised the Wall to bar the White Walkers from returning and founded the Night's Watch to guard it. He also built the castle of Winterfell and established House Stark as the ruling house of the Kingdom of the North with himself as the first King in the North. Two thousand years later, the Andals invaded Westeros from across the Narrow Sea, landing in the Vale and sweeping across the continent. The Andals conquered the southern half of the continent but failed to seize the North, being thrown back several times at the defensive choke-

point of Moat Cailin. A patchwork of numerous small Andal kingdoms took shape across the south, eventually coalescing into several larger nations.

A thousand years ago, the Rhoynar, the warrior-people of the upper Rhoyme (a river network on Essos), fell into warfare with the mighty Valyrian Freehold. The Valyrians destroyed the Rhoynar cities using dragons. Nymeria, warrior-princess of the Rhoynar, led her people across the Summer Sea in ten thousand ships to land in Dorne. Making an alliance with King Mors Martell of Sunspear, Nymeria conquered the myriad small kingdoms and lordships of Dorne to establish a powerful, proud and independent principality (though a kingdom in all but name).

Four centuries ago, Valyria was destroyed in a volcanic cataclysm, the Doom. A century later, the scions of House Targaryen, the last Valyrian noble family and the last with dragons, who ruled the Valyrian trading outpost on the island of Dragonstone, invaded Westeros with a small army and three dragons. Aegon Targaryen accepted the fealty of six kingdoms and forged the Iron Throne, while several generations later his descendants were able to bring Dorne into the union through a peaceful alliance, hence the term "Seven Kingdoms".

For centuries the Seven Kingdoms have been shaped by rebellion and war. However, through civil wars and the loss of their dragons to time and conflict, the Targaryens ruled the entire continent (bar the lands beyond the Wall) for over 280 years with relative peace and stability (bar the aforementioned rebellions and wars that would occasionally break out) until the actions of the Mad King, Aerys II Targaryen, triggered the civil war known as Robert's Rebellion. At the end of this civil war, Aerys II and most of his family were slain and his surviving children, Viserys and Daenerys, fled into exile in the Free Cities. Robert Baratheon took the throne and at the start of the series has ruled for seventeen years.

Regions of Westeros

The Seven Kingdoms are divided into nine administrative regions, seven of which were independent kingdoms before the Targaryen Conquest. Each region, except the Crownlands, is ruled by a Great House, who in turn are commanded by the King on the Iron Throne. These regions are:

1. **The North** - Ruled by House Stark from the castle of Winterfell. Bastards of noble birth born in the North take the surname "Snow". The principal port and city of the North is White Harbor. The North is the largest of the regions of Westeros but also the most sparsely-populated, due the harshness of the long winter. The North also includes the Wall and the lands administered by the Night's Watch, which are technically

independent but are almost always thought of in conjunction with the North. The North is the only region in Westeros to govern itself independently of the King of the Andals and First Men.

2. **The Vale of Arryn** - Ruled by House Arryn from the castle of the Eyrie. Bastards of noble birth born in the Vale take the surname "Stone". The principal port and city of the Vale is Gulltown. The Vale is dominated and mostly covered by the Mountains of the Moon and its offshoot chains. Its borders are prowled by hostile hill tribes.

3. **The Riverlands** - Ruled by House Tully from the castle of Riverrun. Bastards of noble birth born in the Riverlands take the surname "Rivers". The principal ports of the Riverlands are Seagard, Salt pans and Maidenpool. Notable towns include Stoney Sept. The Riverlands are dominated by the mighty River Trident and its numerous tributaries, including the Tumblestone. The Riverlands, lying close to the center of the continent, have been the site for battles and conflicts throughout the history of Westeros. Once an independent kingdom, they were overrun by the Ironborn a century before Aegon's invasion and are thus not counted as an eighth kingdom, despite their significant size and population. The Riverlands are, as their name suggests, one of the most fertile and populous regions in Westeros, which is in many ways the only reason they have been consistently able to recover from the frequent wars that cross their borders.

4. **The Westerlands** - Ruled by House Lannister from the castle of Casterly Rock. Bastards of noble birth born in the Westerlands take the surname "Hill". The principal city and port of the Westerlands is Lannisport. The Westerlands are noted for their hills and low mountains which are rich in silver and gold, providing House Lannister and their vassals with immense wealth.

5. **The Iron Islands** - Ruled by House Greyjoy from the castle of Pyke on the island of the same name. Bastards of noble birth born on the Iron Islands take the surname "Pyke". The major islands of the chain are Great

Wyk, Old Wyk, Harlaw, Blacktyde, Orkmont, Saltcliffe and Pyke itself. The Iron Islands are rain-lashed and cold, home to a hardy, warrior race known as the Ironborn. They live for warfare and reaving, and are the most troublesome and rebellious of the Iron Throne's subjects.

6. **The Crownlands** - Ruled directly by the King on the Iron Throne from the city of King's Landing in the Red Keep, the largest city in Westeros and the capital of the Seven Kingdoms. Bastards of noble birth born in the Crownlands take the surname "Waters". Other notable townships of the Crownlands include Duskendale and Rosby. The Crownlands stretch along the shores of Blackwater Bay and across several islands in the Narrow Sea, such as Dragonstone, Driftmark and Claw Isle. The islands are separately administered from Dragonstone. The Crownlands were never a kingdom before the Conquest; control of the region fluctuated between various neighboring kingdoms throughout history.

7. **The Stormlands** - Ruled by House Baratheon from Storm's End. Bastards of noble birth born in the Stormlands take the surname "Storm". The Stormlands include several offshore islands, most notably Estermont and Tarth. It ranks moderately among the other regions in terms of population and wealth. The Stormlands are wracked by frequent storms off the Narrow Sea, and experience significant rainfall. The Stormlands are also one of the most densely wooded areas in Westeros, particularly south of the Neck. It contains not only the Rainwood (which covers the southern half of the Stormlands), but also shares much of the Kingswood (spilling across the northern border with the Crownlands). As a result, its climate is, in general, that of a temperate rainforest.

8. **The Reach** - Ruled by House Tyrell from the castle of Highgarden. Bastards of noble birth born in the Reach take the surname "Flowers". The principal city and port of the Reach is Oldtown, the second-largest city of Westeros. The Reach is the second-largest region of Westeros and by far the most fertile and populous, allowing the Tyrells to field vast armies and also results in them being wealthier than any other family but the Lannisters. The Reach also includes several offshore islands, such as the Shield Islands and the Arbor.



Some of the Emblems of the Great Houses

9. **Dorne** - Ruled by House Martell from the castle of Sunspear. Bastards of noble birth born in Dorne take the surname "Sand". The principal ports of Dorne are Sunspear itself and the Planky Town at the mouth of the Greenblood. The people of Dorne are isolated from the rest of Westeros by the Sea of Dorne and the Red Mountains, giving them a greater sense of national identity than most of the other peoples of the Seven Kingdoms, even more than the Ironborn and the Northmen. Since Robert's Rebellion and the murder of several prominent Dornish nobles during the Sack of King's Landing, the Dornish have pursued a more isolationist path.

Beyond the Wall - A vast, snow-covered wilderness independent from the Iron Throne and separated from the Seven Kingdoms by the Wall. It is inhabited by tribes of people known as wildlings, who often attempt to raid along the Bay of Seals or the Bay of Ice or climb over the Wall for the same purposes.

Population

The population of Westeros extends into many millions, though a precise count has never been attempted. The major cities of the continent have populations in the hundreds of thousands, and each of the Great Houses can field a reasonably-well-equipped army in the tens of thousands. Due to its desert climate, Dorne has the smallest overall population. Due to their extremely small size, the Iron Islands are also among the least populated. The North has one of the smallest overall populations, and is the most sparsely-populated region, with huge regions of deserted wilderness extending between the major towns and holdfasts. Meanwhile, the prosperous and fertile Reach is the most heavily-populated, followed closely by the Riverlands.

Westeros is overwhelmingly populated by humans, to the point that non-human sapient races are considered mythical. Nonetheless, the existence of such races are believed by many of the uneducated smallfolk, and even some Westerosi literati such as the Maesters acknowledge that races such as the Giants and the Children of the Forest might have once existed, although they are gone now. Unknown to most, the most dangerous of these mythical races are on the march once again.

There are several notable human ethnic groups currently extant in Westeros and beyond:

1. **Andals** - The majority of the population of Westeros are descended

from the Andals who invaded the continent some six thousand years ago. The Andals consider themselves more civilized and cultured than the other peoples of Westeros.

2. **First Men** - The First Men were the original human inhabitants of Westeros, who crossed the Arm of Dorne and fought with the Children of the Forest before making peace with them. Thousands of years later, the Andals invaded Westeros and displaced or conquered the First Men everywhere south of the Neck. As a result, the First Men are still the predominant ethnic group in the North, though six thousand years of intermarriage with Andal lords has blurred this somewhat.
3. **Free Folk** - The people who live beyond the Wall call themselves the free folk (called wildlings by people south of the wall) and are not held to be subject to the Iron Throne. They are descended from those First Men who lived north of the Wall when it was constructed. The free folk are not a homogeneous single group, but consist of numerous different tribes, townsfolk, farmers, fisher-folk, and warriors, who mostly spend more time fighting one another than the forces of the Seven Kingdoms. Occasionally, they are united under an over-chief known as the King-Beyond-the-Wall.
4. **Ironborn** - The Ironborn are a grouping resulting from the intermarriages between the First Men inhabitants of the Iron Islands and the Andals who invaded them. While ethnically similar to other regions in the south of Westeros, which also have mixed First Men and Andal ancestry, their isolated geography on a harsh and rocky group of islands separate from the mainland resulted in their culture developing very differently, even after the arrival of the Andals. Rejecting the worship of both the old gods and the Seven, they developed their own faith-based around the Drowned God and their own culture which favors piracy, martial prowess, and fighting over farming and trading.
5. **Rhoynar** - The people of Dorne are descended from the Rhoynar, the hardy warrior-folk of the eastern continent who settled in Dorne after being driven out of their homeland by the Valyrians, and then intermarried with the local Andals and First Men. The blood of the Rhoynar is thus intermingled in the Dornishmen; Rhoynar ethnicity is most strongly represented in those who live near the coasts and rivers, and weakest in Dornishmen who live in the interior mountains. They tend to be olive-skinned with dark curly hair. They have a reputation for being

hot-headed and sexually liberal. Unlike the other Seven Kingdoms, they practice equal primogeniture.

6. Children of the Forest - The Children of the Forest are a legendary race who ruled Westeros for untold millennia before the arrival of the First Men. According to myth, they were diminutive, long-lived, and few in number, but were protected by the powerful magic of the Greenseers and the martial prowess of their elite warriors, the wood dancers. They helped the First Men defeat the White Walkers and raise the Wall, but disappeared from Westeros after the Andal Invasion. Maesters of the Citadel today claim that the Children were myths and never truly existed.

7. The Dothraki - A race of nomadic horse-mounted warriors in Essos, the continent to the east of Westeros across the Narrow Sea. They inhabit the vast central plains of Essos, known as the Dothraki sea. Their bond with horses is such that Dothraki are said to be born, fight, and die in the saddle. Dothraki warriors are commonly referred to as "horselords". They are also often (and half-derisively) called "Dothraki screamers", because of their fierce war cries as they charge into battle and raids.[1]



The Great City of King's Landing - Credit: HBO

8. Giants - According to the wildlings, giants still exist north of the Wall and have some contact with the wildling communities.

9. Thenns - also known as the Thenn, are a clan of Free Folk, from very far north of the Wall. They speak the Old Tongue. The Thenn people are the most advanced and best equipped of the wildling tribes, as well as the most disciplined. Thenns also shave their heads bald and engage in self-scarification as well as cannibalism, feasting on the flesh of their enemies.

10. Valyrians - The Valyrians, also known as the Blood of Old Valyria or Blood of the Dragon, are a people and culture native to the Valyrian Peninsula, on the continent of Essos. For thousands of years, their empire, known as the Valyrian Freehold, was the dominant civilization on

the continent. Roughly four hundred years prior to the War of the Five Kings, a cataclysmic event known as "the Doom" shattered the Valyrians' capital city and all but obliterated them.

11. White Walkers - The White Walkers are, according to legend, a race of ice-based creatures hailing from the extreme north. Eight thousand years ago, they invaded Westeros and brought cold, terror and death to both the First Men and the Children before they were defeated in the War for the Dawn. According to some, they were not destroyed, only defeated and have spent millennia since this time asleep. Again, these claims are met with extreme skepticism.

Settlements

Westeros is home to several distinct types of settlement:

1. Cities - Westeros has a primarily agrarian population, with few major cities relative to its size. The five major cities of the continent are, in descending order of population:

2. King's Landing - The capital of the Seven Kingdoms with a population of half a million. The largest city of Westeros, founded by Aegon the Conqueror on the site where he first set foot on the

continent. Originally ruled by House Targaryen, then by House Baratheon, now by House Lannister.

3. Oldtown - The oldest major city on the continent, located in the Reach. Ruled by House Hightower, the most powerful bannerman of House Tyrell. Its population is slightly less than that of King's Landing.

4. Lannisport - The largest city on Westeros's west coast, approximately half the size of King's Landing. Ruled by House Lannister of Lannisport, a cadet branch of House Lannister.

5. Gulltown - The main city and port of the Vale, with a population in the tens of thousands. Ruled by House Grafton, bannermen of House Arryn.

6. **White Harbor** - The main city and port of the North, with a population in the tens of thousands. Ruled by House Manderly, bannermen of House Stark.
7. **Towns** - The likes of Duskendale, Barrowton, and Stoney Sept, with populations of a few thousand each, are considered to be large towns rather than cities.
8. **Castles** - Castles are held by the noble houses of Westeros and range in size from the vast, city-sized edifices of Harrenhal or Winterfell to small towerhouses or fortified farmsteads run by landed knights. The size of a castle and in what state of repair it is kept reflects the wealth and power of its ruling family. The most notable castles of Westeros include Harrenhal, Storm's End, the Eyrie, Pyke, Riverrun, the Twins, Winterfell, the Dreadfort, Casterly Rock, Highgarden, Sunspear, Dragonstone, and the Red Keep of King's Landing.

Animals

Westeros is home to several notable animal species:

1. **Aurochs** - A large, bovine animal. Used as a beast of burden and domesticated livestock, noted for their extreme size. When Dragons were extant in Westeros, the larger ones were known to hunt aurochs. This species of steer is based on our own earthly extinct ancestor of modern cattle.
2. **Dragons** - Winged reptiles of tremendous age and ferocity, capable of breathing fire. Originated in the east and enslaved by the Valyrians, who used them to forge their empire. Most dragons were destroyed in the Doom four centuries ago, leaving the few possessed by House Targaryen as the only known surviving dragons in the world, which they used in their invasion of Westeros. The last Targaryen dragons died over 150 years ago. The skulls of more than a dozen dragons are kept in the Red Keep. The dragon is taken as the sigil of House Targaryen.

3. **Direwolves** - A larger cousin of regular wolves, only found north of the Wall. In the south, they are considered near-mythical. Occasional sightings of direwolves have been reported by the Night's Watch, but at the time the series starts there have been no confirmed sightings south of the Wall for centuries. The direwolf is taken as the sigil of House Stark.
4. **Krakens** - Massive cephalopods that stalk the world's oceans. So rare that they are largely held to be mythical, though sailors occasionally report seeing them. The kraken is taken as the sigil of House Greyjoy.



Part of a Tapestry of a Dragon being used in Battle

5. **Ravens** - Trained messenger-ravens are used as part of a widespread communications network that links all of the major cities and holdfasts in the Seven Kingdoms.
6. **Shadowcats** - Large feline predators, found throughout Westeros but most notably in mountainous terrain such as the Vale of Arryn.

In the Books

Westeros in the books is depicted much as in the TV series, though it is possible that the book version of the continent is slightly larger, as in the TV series it only takes a large party a month to get from Winterfell to King's Landing. In the book version, this

would only be possible for a fast single rider with frequent changes of mount. George R.R. Martin has stated in interviews that the continent is roughly the size of South America.

This is backed up by the suggestion by Maester Luwin in Season 2 that Torrhen's Square is "barely forty leagues" (120 miles) from Winterfell. On the book maps, the distance is actually about 220-230 miles. However, how far Luwin was rounding down (or up) is unknown, making precise determinations of the difference impossible.

The three least populous of the Seven Kingdoms are the North, the Iron Islands, and Dorne - which all also are the "fringe" regions where Andal culture is not totally dominant. There is a difference between the lowest total population, however, and population density. All three have quite low populations relative to the other kingdoms, but Dorne has the least total population. The Iron Islands seem to have the next-lowest population. The North is

nearly as large as the other six kingdoms put together, but has a population somewhat smaller than one of the other moderately-sized kingdoms of the south, such as the Vale or the Stormlands (judging by the size of the armies that the Starks can raise). Thus the North has perhaps the third-lowest total population, but its population density is the lowest of all regions, with its population scattered across vast stretches of moors and forests but little arable land to support more people. The North is vast but there is very little in it. The Iron Islands have a total population almost as small as Dorne's, but the seven main islands are derided as wind-swept rocks with very little total surface area, so their population density might not be less than is typical on the mainland. Dorne's population density is deceptive: almost all the population is crammed into the valleys of the Greenblood River and its tributaries in the east. Outsiders who visit Sunspear or other major settlements in the river valleys think that they have the same, or even greater, population density than other regions of Westeros - not realizing that the towns in the river valleys represent almost the entire total population of Dorne. There are also settlements up in the Red Mountains to the west, but central Dorne is a true rolling-sands desert, and utterly uninhabited except for a few oasis-castles.



The Faith of the Seven

“In the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros, the dominant religion is the Faith of the Seven. First brought to its shores by the Andals, some six thousand years ago.” - Catelyn Stark

The Faith of the Seven, also commonly referred to as the New Gods, is the main religion of the Seven Kingdoms. It is little-practiced beyond its borders. The Faith of the Seven is dominant in the south of Westeros. The only regions where it is not the majority religion are the North, where worship of the Old Gods of the Forest remains strong, and on the Iron Islands, where the local religion of the Drowned God is most widespread. There are many

exceptions in these areas, however.

The Faith originated six thousand years before the War of the Five Kings in the continent of Essos, specifically in Andalos where, according to legend, the “God of Seven” manifested before the Andal people. Afterward the Andals sailed west and their invasion of Westeros began. Some of the Andal warriors carved the seven-pointed star, the symbol of their religion, into their flesh to demonstrate their devotion. Bearing weapons made of steel, the Andals conquered the First Men and slaughtered the Children of the Forest, viewing their magic as an abomination before the Seven. The Andals burned down most of the Weirwood trees in the south, which are considered sacred in the worship of the Old Gods of the Forest. Soon all the kingdoms of the First Men, with the exception of the Kingdom of the North, fell to the invaders, who intermingled with some of the local dynasties, such as House Gardener, or replaced them altogether, as was the case of Mountain Kings of the Vale. As the Andals asserted their dominance over all regions south of the Neck, they asserted their religion over the First Men they conquered, replacing the worship of the Old Gods almost entirely throughout the southern kingdoms of Westeros. Thus the Andals’ Faith of the Seven became the dominant religion on the entire continent, except for in the North and the Iron Islands.

Prior to the rule of House Targaryen, the Faith had the right to dispense justice, conduct inquests and trials and pass judgment over all echelons of society, including kings. This justice was enforced by the Faith Militant. However, this right was taken away from it by the Targaryen kings and, whilst the Faith remained an important part of Westerosi customs, they grew corrupt and their practices became little more than a façade. Nevertheless, the Faith’s importance could not be understated and most if not all noble Houses had a septa present in their household to raise their daughters, such as Septa Mordane for House Stark (due to the influence of Catelyn Stark, who firmly believed in the Gods, despite the fact that she had married into a Northern family which worshiped the Old Gods).

The Faith holds that there is one god who has seven faces or aspects: the Father, the Mother, the Maiden, the Crone, the Warrior, the Smith, and the Stranger. Each aspect represents one part of life or existence.

- 1. The Father:** Represents divine justice, and judges the souls of the dead.
- 2. The Mother:** Represents mercy, peace, fertility, and child-birth. She is sometimes referred to as “the strength of women”.
- 3. The Maiden:** Represents purity, innocence, love, and beauty.
- 4. The Crone:** Represents wisdom and foresight. She is repre-

sented carrying a lantern.

5. **The Warrior:** Represents strength and courage in life.
6. **The Smith:** Represents the arts and craftsmanship.
7. **The Stranger:** The Stranger represents death and the unknown. It is rarely prayed to.

The Stranger is depicted as neither male nor female, thus the number of male and female aspects within the godhead is equal: three males (Father, Warrior, Smith), three females (Maiden, Mother, Crone), and one who is neither. Unlike the other aspects which are represented as human figures in artwork, because the Stranger represents the unknown it is often portrayed in a wide variety of forms, often frightening. Sometimes it is represented as a skeletal figure, or a non-human creature possessing various animistic features. Due to its seven “aspects”, the deity is often referred to as the “Seven-faced God” or the “God of Seven”, but most frequently as simply “the Seven”. The Seven are also referred to as “the New Gods” or “New God”, in contrast with the “Old Gods” of the Forest worshiped by the First Men before the invasion of the Andals.

In practice, many devotees will refer to the aspects as “Gods” plural, though priests of the Faith will attempt to stress the theological nuance to their followers that there is indeed only one God, the “Seven-in-One” deity. This has not stopped the commonly heard exclamation “Gods be good!” from being used pervasively throughout the Seven Kingdoms.

Due to the “Seven-in-One” nature of the deity, the number seven is sacred in the religion, with symbolism involving the number seven featuring heavily in its belief system. Newborn babies are anointed with seven oils and named in the light of the Seven the day they are born. In death, the Faith believes that there are Seven Heavens and Seven Hells. The exclaimed curse “Seven Hells!” is commonly heard in Westeros.

The Seven Pointed Star is the most prominent symbol of the Faith, representing how each of the seven aspects is one facet of a unified whole.

This is used as an allegory to explain the complex theological concept of a single God composed of Seven persons: just as the star has seven points, but all points are part of the same star, so too is there only one deity, which appears to men in seven different ways.

Unlike the Old Gods of the Forest, whose worshipers in the North are looked down upon by members of the Faith of the Seven as savages who worship multiple gods, the Faith is based on a number of holy texts and complex social rules. The central holy text of the religion is The Seven-Pointed Star.

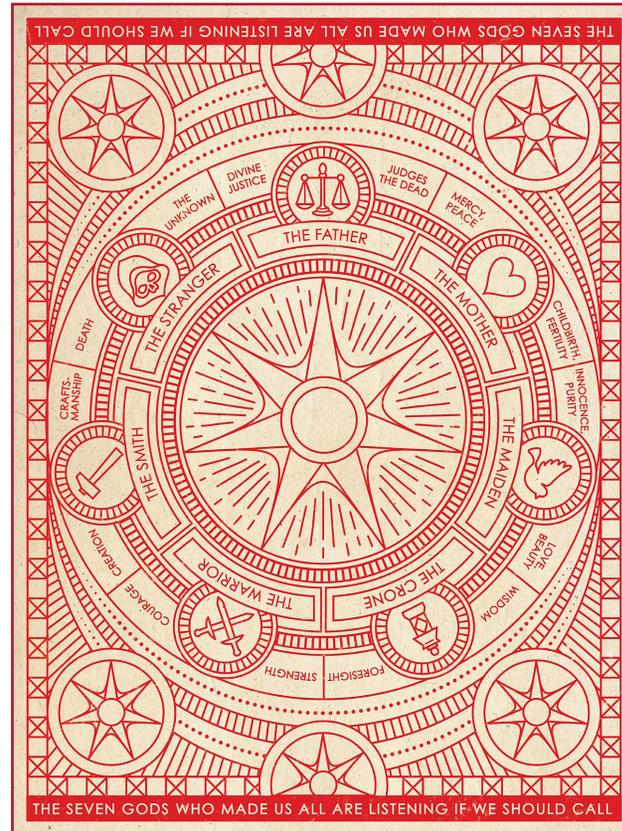
Temples of the Faith are seven-sided buildings known as “Septs”, with each wall dedicated to one of the seven aspects. Followers of the Faith gather in Septs for group prayer, which frequently involves singing hymns of praise to the Seven. One such hymn dedicated to the Mother is “Gentle Mother, Font of Mercy”. There are also monasteries, known as “Septries”, where smaller numbers of worshipers gather who have taken a monastic oath. Septries often have vows of silence or other requirements, and are places of quiet contemplation.

Along with the Old Gods, the Faith shares several basic social rules against incest, kinslaying, and bastardy. The Faith of the Seven, along with all major religions, also upholds the laws of hospitality, which hold sacred the good behavior of a guest and host towards each other.

The Faith of the Seven considers homosexuality to be a sin, albeit one of lesser severity than incest or kinslaying. Therefore, homosexuals in the Seven Kingdoms such as Ser Loras Tyrell and Renly Baratheon must keep their true sexual and romantic behavior secret, or else face significant social consequences.

Only members of House Targaryen are permitted to practice incest in order to “keep the bloodline pure”, after the Faith was forced to turn a blind eye towards the incest after the Faith Militant uprising.

There are no different denominations within the Faith of the Seven, as all adherents are part of one universal organization. However, different regions of the Seven Kingdoms may interpret and apply its rules more or less strictly than others, particularly Dorne. When the Rhoynar migrated to Dorne a thousand years ago, they brought with them their own social



The faith of the Seven (credit: Dan Liuzzi)

customs from their river-based city-states on the continent of Essos. The Rhoynar converted to the Faith of the Seven, but in many ways they picked and chose which parts of the religion they liked and simply ignored the parts they didn't want to follow. Thus the present-day Dornishmen who descend from them follow the rules of the Faith somewhat loosely. In particular, the Rhoynar were quite tolerant of sexual behavior including homosexuality, and thus homosexuality or bisexuality carries little if any social taint in present-day Dorne, even though they are still nominally followers of the Faith of the Seven. Thus while a knight from the Reach such as Ser Loras Tyrell must hide his homosexuality, several major lords and ladies in Dorne are openly bisexual or homosexual - such as Oberyn Martell and Ellaria Sand. The Rhoynar also had much less disdain for bastards than the peoples already established in Westeros when they arrived. While bastards in present-day Dorne do have to use the bastard surname "Sand" and are less likely to inherit, it is actually not unusual to see bastards living at the court of their noble parents there.

Unlike the worship of the Old Gods, the Faith of the Seven has an organized clergy with a complex internal hierarchy. Both men and women can be priests of the Seven. Male priests are known as Septons and female priests as Septas.

The head of the Faith is known as the High Septon, who resides at the headquarters of the Faith of the Seven, the Great Sept of Baelor, which is located in the capital city King's Landing. The ruling council of the Faith is known as the Most Devout, who also reside in the Great Sept. The Most Devout rank just below the High Septon, but are responsible for electing a new High Septon when the current one dies.

There are several monastic or devotional orders that believers in the Faith of the Seven may belong to. One of the most prominent of these is the Silent Sisters, a separate all-female monastic order devoted to the Stranger, the aspect that represents death. The Silent Sisters are responsible for dressing and preparing dead bodies for funeral rites, and have taken vows of silence and chastity. Silent Sisters are separate from the regular clergy, and

are not considered to be Septas.

Weddings

Unlike the faith of the Old Gods of the Forest, which lacks elaborate ceremonies, weddings under the auspices of the Faith of the Seven are elaborate and highly ritualized. These ceremonies typically take place inside of a sept and are presided over by a septon. At the beginning of the ceremony, the bride is escorted to the altar by her father where the groom and the septon await. The groom is then told, "You may now cloak the bride and bring her under your protection" and drapes a cloak bearing his house's colors around the bride's shoulders.

The bride and groom then join hands, which are tied together with a ribbon by the septon, who says, "In the sight of the Seven, I hereby seal these two souls, binding them as one, for eternity." He then instructs them to, "Look upon one another and say the words." At this point, the bride and groom turn to face each other and recite the following vow in unison: "Father, Smith, Warrior, Mother, Maiden, Crone, Stranger, I am his/hers and she/he is mine from this day until the end of my days."

Deviations from this ritual do occur sometimes. Owing in large part to its spur-of-the-moment, secret nature and the characters' remote location at the time, the wedding of Robb Stark and Talisa Maegyr takes place outside instead

of inside a sept. It also appears that Robb did not cloak Talisa - possibly because he did not have a cloak available. Talisa is also not given away by her father, who was not present or anyone else for that matter. By contrast, Sansa Stark is given away at her wedding but not by her father, who had been executed beforehand. Instead, King Joffrey Baratheon, as "the Father of the Realm," takes it upon himself to give Sansa away.

In the Books

Author George R.R. Martin has stated that the Faith of the Seven in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels is loosely analogous, at least in social function, to the medieval Catholic Church. Martin himself was raised Roman Catholic



King Joffrey's Wedding to Margaery (credit: HBO A Game of Thrones)

but by the time of the TV series, describes himself as a “lapsed Catholic”. He borrowed the idea of the three-in-one Holy Trinity (Father-Son-Holy Ghost) and modified it into a “Holy Septinity” of sorts when he made the seven-in-one god of the Faith of the Seven.

When Aegon the Conqueror invaded and subdued Westeros three centuries ago, he gained the support of the Faith, who crowned him King and convinced the rulers of the city of Oldtown to open their gates to him. The Faith’s support was critical to Aegon taking control of the continent. However, when he died and his son Aenys (born of incest, which is proscribed by the Faith) took the throne, they led a religious uprising against him. This uprising was eventually crushed by the Targaryen dynasty with great loss of life, when the weakling Aenys died and was succeeded by his ruthless brother Maegor the Cruel. Peace was reached when Maegor died and was succeeded by Aenys’ son Jaehaerys, who brokered a peace agreement: the Faith didn’t have to actively support the incestuous marriage practices of the Targaryens, but it did have to at least acknowledge the marriages as valid, and the Faith’s leadership accepted the offer. The Faith’s military forces, the Faith Militant, disbanded and the Faith have remained loyal supporters of the crown ever since.

Many Septons and Septas are based at a Sept or Septry, but “begging brothers”, Septons without a sept, wander the Seven Kingdoms and minister to smaller towns and villages which lack Septs of their own. This is analogous to medieval friars.

Similar to the real-life College of Cardinals in Catholicism, the Faith is ruled over by a council known as the Most Devout, which elects the High Septon. New High Septons are usually selected from among the members of the Most Devout, but this is not a requirement. While Septons and Septas serve on the council of the Most Devout, the High Septon is usually male. It hasn’t been mentioned if there is an actual rule against electing a “High Septa” and there has never been one, or if there were High Septas in the past, and one simply hasn’t been elected during the time frame of the novels.

Real World Influences

Unlike J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, *A Song of Ice and Fire* addresses religion in some detail and portrays several competing religions. More than any other novel in the series, *A Dance with Dragons* explores the different religions of Westeros and Essos. Each of the religions reflects its culture’s temperament. George R. R. Martin based the series’ faiths on real religions, tweaking or expanding them a little. However, no religion is presented as the

true faith, although there are displays of power on many sides, nor do any have a monopoly on virtue.

Known influences include:

- The Old gods are “based on animism and traditional Pagan beliefs of Wicca and various other Celtic systems and Norse systems”, melted into one construct. They are nameless and numerous fey beliefs and more.
- The Faith of the Seven is based on the medieval Catholic Church, although it borrows other elements as well. The Faith’s central doctrine that there is one God who has seven aspects is partly based on the Catholic belief that there is one God who has three aspects: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. With the Seven, instead, you have The Father, The Mother, The Maiden, The Crone, The Smith, The Warrior, and The Stranger, who’s the psychopomp figure. The Faith Militant, the Faith’s military order, is loosely based on crusading orders, e.g. Knights Templar and Knights Hospitaller.
- Similarities between the religion of the Drowned God and the Norse mythology can be found; For example, Ironborn believe they will feast eternally in the Drowned God’s watery halls after they die, similar to Norse warriors, who hoped to feast in Valhalla.
- The Mother Rhoyme religion is polytheistic worshiping of the Rhoyme and many lesser river-dwelling deities such as the Old Man of the River and the Crab King. The Rhoynar may be inspired by the Roma (who do not worship a single faith), to a degree.

Martin tries to slowly reveal how the many different kinds of magic in the Ice and Fire world may be manifestations of the same mysterious supernatural forces. This leaves readers free to wonder about the validity, teachings and supernatural power of the competing religions, allowing for a sense of wonder, for things that escape the net of explanation in terms of the physical sciences. Martin regards any religion’s claim to truth with suspicion, as he does the claims of real religions. The series’ gods, he said, are unlikely to appear deus-ex-machina in Westeros.

Regional Religions

Westeros

Westeros has relatively few significant religions. They include:

The old gods are nameless deities of stream, forest, and stone. They were worshiped across Westeros by the children of the forest, and eventually by the First Men, sometime after signing the Pact. Following the arrival of the Andals, who brought with them their own religion, the old gods were

no longer dominantly worshiped in the south of Westeros. Only in the north does the majority of the houses still worship the old gods. North of the Wall, the free folk continue to worship the old gods. Although some accounts state that there are clans who worship different gods (dark gods beneath the ground in the Frostfangs, gods of snow and ice on the Frozen Shore, or crab gods at Storrol's Point), there is no reliable confirmation.

The Faith of the Seven is the dominant religion in the southern part of the Seven Kingdoms. The Faith worships "the Seven Who Are One", a single deity with seven aspects or faces. For the less educated, however, this concept is often difficult to grasp, causing them to often believe that there are indeed seven different gods. Subsequently, the number seven is considered holy.

The Drowned God, also called He Who Dwells Beneath the Waves, is a sea deity worshiped by the Ironborn of the Iron Islands. The religion of the Drowned God is old, dating back to before the Andal invasion. All attempts of the Andal invaders to supplant it with the Seven have failed. The Drowned God's enemy is the Storm God.

R'hllor, also known as the Lord of Light, the Heart of Fire, and the God of Flame and Shadow, is a prominent god in Essos with few followers in the Seven Kingdoms, where he is more commonly known as the red god. Based on a dualistic, Manichean view of the world, R'hllor, the god of light, heat, and life, is eternally at war against the Great Other, the god of ice and death.

Mother Rhoyme, the chief goddess of the Rhoynar, is still worshiped by the orphans of the Greenblood, descendants of the Rhoynar.

Additionally, the Lady of the Waves and the Lord of the Skies were worshiped on the Three Sisters before the Andals introduced the Seven. And there are the sea god and the goddess of the wind from the legend of Durrant Godsgrief.

Essos

In Essos across the narrow sea, there are numerous different religions. In Braavos, one can find temples and shrines to almost every god one can imagine. Named religions include:

1. Aquan the Red Bull, whose priests sacrifice calves.
2. Bakkalon, the Pale Child favored of soldiers
3. the Black Goat, a deity worshiped in Qohor.
4. the Great Shepherd, the deity of the Lhazareen.
5. the Hooded Wayfarer, a patron of the poor.
6. the horse god, the deity worshiped by the Dothraki.
7. the Lady of Spears, the deity of the Unsullied.

8. the Lion of Night, a god preferred by rich men.
9. the Many-Faced God of Braavos, believed to be the true face of all the gods.
10. the Merling King, a deity worshiped by sailors.
11. the Moon-Pale Maiden, a deity worshiped by sailors.
12. the Pattern, a labyrinth leading to wisdom.
13. R'hllor and the Great Other, a dualistic religion of Fire and Ice.
14. Semosh and Selloso, brother gods with twin temples.
15. the Silent God, who is worshiped at the Stones of the Silent God.
16. the Stone Cow of Faros, a deity worshiped on Faros.
17. Trios, a three-headed deity.
18. the Weeping Lady of Lys, a favorite of old women.



R'hllor & the Great Other

Are There Really Only Two Gods?

During the series and within the books, it has become painfully clear that all the gods of men are very similar to what goes on with our own history. It is littered with forgotten religions and thousands of gods who were never really god-like at all.

The belief systems within Westeros and Essos are often based on location and culture. The descendants of the First Men in the North continued to believe in the old gods long after the Faith of the Seven became the standard religion of Westeros through the Andal invasion. The Drowned God remains the God of the Iron Islands, while R'hllor found footing through Melissandre's persuasion with Stannis along with Lord Beric's resurrection via

Thoros of Myr. R'hllor is the God who seems to have more footing in Essos, and his priests are interested in proselytizing people into the faith of the Lord of Light. I don't see that with any other religions in Essos (too numerous to name) and the Faith Militant is more about keeping moral order while insuring that the Faith of the Seven is also a political power.

Are all these various faiths really under an umbrella of two warring gods—light and dark, or Ice and Fire? The Aeron Damphair section suggests as much when Euron tells his brother: “Kneel, brother....I am your king. I am your God. Worship me, and I will raise you to be my priest”. Euron is sitting atop of all the gods impaled on spikes—the various images of the seven, R'hllor, the Great Shepard God of the Lamb Men and other foreign gods, along with the Drowned God. Interestingly enough, there is no image of the old gods from the Weirwood trees, nor the Many Faced God of the Faceless Men. Aeron is shocked at this blasphemy, but it suggests that Euron is embracing what Melisandre calls the Great Other.

So what if R'hllor and the Weirwood Trees are both manifestations of the Lord of Light? And the Great Other is his adversary and used the Children of the Forest as his way into the world? Euron spent time in Asshai where he may have learned shadow magic that Melisandre practiced on Renly in the show and on Ser Cortnay Penrose in the books, along with whatever God is about destruction. We don't really know much about the Many Faced God except that he is the God of Faces, deception and death. What relationship would he have with the Others/White Walkers if any? If the Many Faced God is real, then he was part of bringing down Valyria. So does he want to bring down Westeros as well? A better question might be who uses these religions to their own political gain.

It is well noted within the stories that the Dragons bring magic into the world, and with the rise of these magics, seems to come the rise of the White walkers and the Night King. The god of Fire and the god of Ice seem to be very much at odds with each other in extremely visible ways. The Dragons seem to symbolize R'hllor and the White Walkers symbolize the Great Other perfectly. The Night King can raise the dead to create his army of wights and the Priests of R'hllor can raise the dead to live again. No other faith seems to have that power.

Martin has hinted that he favors Zoroastrianism as his personal religion and these two gods sum it up well. Zoroastrianism is based on two main gods, a god of goodness and a god of evil, who are at constant struggle with each other. Martin himself has said he developed the idea of the monotheistic, fire-worshipping faith surrounding R'hllor from Zoroastrianism, a pre-Islamic religion that emerged thousands of years ago in what's now Iran. Beyond the purifying importance of fire in rituals in both faiths, Iran's ancient

traditions gave realms further west the first understanding of a moral universe shaped by a binary good and evil.

This sense of eternal struggle and combat with an evil “Other” is hardly unique to Zoroastrianism. But it is the most clear blueprint for the cosmic clash being set up in “Game of Thrones,” This is where a righteous hero of fire will eventually take on a relentless evil from the lands of ice. Life will take on the undead and, being that Martin loves to play with our emotions, it would be clear that there will be a heart wrenching twist. Since HBO went out on its own and finished the series, I am certain that Martin will use the only two real gods to finish up his story differently and with a far more intelligent ending.

Gods and Other Notables

Below is an alphabetical list of the gods mentioned along with other notable creatures and events written about in the series *Song of Ice and Fire*. What is not always easy to discern is what beings are divine and what beings are magical, or simply mythic within the narratives of Martin's plot lines.

A

Aquaan the Red Bull: He has a temple at Braavos, in the Isle of the Gods. His priests sacrifices a pure white calf in every thirteenth day and offer bowls of blood to beggars.

Azor Ahai: According to legends from the Further East, the Blood Betrayal of the Bloodstone Emperor began an age of darkness—which Westerosi call the Long Night—in ancient times when the Old Empire of Ghis was still forming. A great warrior rose with a powerful sword (*Lightbringer*) to fight this darkness lying over the world, according to a legend which spread from Asshai. Followers of R'hllor say the hero's name was Azor Ahai, while other cultures call him Hyrkoon the Hero, Yin Tar, Neferion, and Eldric Shadowchaser. Tales from Yi Ti speak of a heroic woman with a monkey's tail, and legends from the north regale about a last hero who gained the aid of the children of the forest.

Melisandre has mentioned the prince that was promised and Azor Ahai interchangeably, although she tends to use the name Azor Ahai far more often. It is unknown if Azor Ahai is connected with the Westerosi legend of the last hero, who lived during the Long Night and helped to defeat



the Others, but it seems likely that he is.

According to prophecy, in ancient books of Asshai from over five thousand years ago, Azor Ahai is to be reborn again as a champion sent by R'hllor. This will occur after a long summer when an evil, cold darkness descends upon the world. It is said that wielding *Lightbringer* once again, Azor Ahai will stand against the darkness and if he fails, the world fails with him.

B

Bakkalon: Also known as the *Pale Child* and called Bakkalon of the Sword, is a god worshiped in Essos, including Asshai, Braavos, and Lys. Little is said of Bakkalon other than that his statue stands in the *House of Black and White*, and that he is favored by soldiers. This could be an expansion on Martin's book "*And Seven Times Never Kill Man*" that was published in 1975.



Aegon the Conqueror rides atop Balerion (credit: Jordi Gonzalez Escamilla)

Balerion the Black: Called the Black Dread, was a dragon of House Targaryen. He was ridden by King Aegon I Targaryen during his Conquest, alongside his sister Queen Visenya's Vhagar, and his sister Queen Rhaenys's Meraxes. Other known riders of Balerion were King Maegor I Targaryen, Princess Aerea Targaryen, and King Viserys I Targaryen.

Balerion died of old age in 94 AC during the reign of King Jaehaerys I Targaryen, around two hundred years of age. His skull is seen several times

in the series in the cellar of the Red Keep. Balerion was named after the ancient god of the Valyrian Freehold.

Balerion's scales and wings were black. His fire was black, sometimes with swirls of red. When he was in the fullness of his power, his flames could melt steel and stone, and fuse sand into glass.

Balerion was the largest of all the Targaryen dragons since Aegon's Conquest. His wingspan was so large that his shadow could engulf entire towns when he passed overhead. His teeth were as long as swords, and his jaws were large enough to swallow an aurochs whole, or even one of the hairy mammoths that are said to roam the cold wastes beyond the Port of Ibben. By 93 AC, Balerion had finally stopped growing. He had grown sluggish and heavy and was difficult to rouse. When Prince Viserys Targaryen claimed the dragon that year, the dragon struggled to take to the air. Prince Viserys believed the dragon no longer had the strength to fly from King's Landing to Dragonstone.

Balerion: Balerion was one of the many gods worshiped in Old Valyria. Lord Aegon Targaryen's dragon was named after this god. He was a god of death and the underworld.

Basilisks: Basilisks are a kind of reptile, hideous and fierce. They are said to infest the jungles of Yi Ti. In Sothoryos, basilisks were once numerous in the Basilisk Isles, lending them their name. Basilisks are still found in great numbers on Basilisk Point, some large, some small, and some twice the size of lions. In some places, basilisks are used to fight other animals, such as dogs, with wagers made on the outcome. A basilisk is able to tear a large dog to pieces.

Basilisks are venomous, and are the source of basilisk venom. The Faceless Men use a paste spiced with basilisk blood, which gives meat a savory scent, but induces a violent madness in any creature with warm blood, whether man or beast. Reportedly, a mouse will attack a lion after a taste of basilisk blood.

Black Goat: The Black Goat is a god of the Free City of Qohor. Qohor was founded by worshipers of the Black Goat who abandoned Valyria in rejection of the Freehold's tenet of religious tolerance.

The Black Goat demands daily blood sacrifice. The Qohorik often bring calves, bullocks, and horses before the Black Goat's altars. However, on holy days it is condemned criminals who go beneath the knives of the god's cowed priests, and, in times of danger and crisis it is written that the high nobles of the city offer their own children to placate the Black Goat, that

he might defend the city.

Boash: Also called the Blind God, is a deity that was once worshiped in the Valyrian Freehold. His followers settled on the main isle of Lorath.

The followers of Boash ate no flesh and drank no wine. They went about barefoot, clad only in hair shirts and hides. Their priests were eunuchs, who wore eyeless hoods in honor of their god, as they believed that only in darkness their third eye would open, allowing them to see the “higher truths” of creation that lay concealed behind the illusions of the material world.

The followers of Boash held the belief that all life was sacred and eternal. They further believed that all on earth were equal creatures of god; men and women, lords and peasants, rich and poor, slave and master, and even man and beast. Part of their doctrine was the extreme abnegation of the self, for only by freeing themselves of vanity could men hope to become one with the godhood.

Bran: Brandon Stark, typically called Bran, is the second son of Lord Eddard Stark and Lady Catelyn Tully. He is one of the major POV characters in the books. Bran becomes a major source of prophesy and rebirth of the old gods in the stories.

Bride of Battle: See *Lady of Spears*

C

Chainmaker: The Chainmaker is a Ghiscari deity in modern Slaver’s Bay. There’s a bronze statue of it in the plaza adjacent to the Slave Exchange of Meereen. The Ghiscari are a people native to the region of Ghiscar on the continent of Essos.

Children of the Forest: The original folk of Westeros and a direct nod to the Fey Kingdoms of the European myths. Martin uses the lore of the fairy peoples to create this population in his storyline.

Crab King: a lesser god of the Rhoynar. He fights the Old Man of the River for dominion of all life below the flowing water.

Crone (of the Seven): She represents wisdom, planning and foresight in the Faith of the Seven. She is represented as an old cloaked figure carrying a lantern.

D

Daenerys Targaryen: Daenerys has the traditional purple eyes and silver-gold hair of the Targaryens. She is slender and very beautiful, but also possesses a certain toughness due to her relative life of hardship. She develops many titles over the course of the story like “Mother of Dragons” and “Khaleesi”. At times, she seems imbued with supernatural powers, and indeed, she is very resistant to fire and heat, as is her bloodline, but her other fantastic powers seem to stem from her beauty, guile and being the first thing that the dragons imprint upon. As the story develops, we are led to believe that she is the Promised Prince come to cleanse the lands of darkness and is somehow attached to R’hllor’s plan.



The eunuch priests of the Blind God (credit: Jordi Escamilla)

Dothraki Religion: The Dothraki worship a horse god. The Dothraki believe that when someone dies, the horse god parts the grass and claims the deceased for his starry khala-sar, so the deceased can ride the nightlands. The Dothraki further believe that the moon is a goddess, and that she is the wife to the sun. In addition, they believe in a hell.

The Dothraki hate and fear the sea and the ships in it, as they mistrust all water their horses do not drink. They refer to the sea as “the poison water” and the “black salt sea”. Dothraki believe that anything of importance in a man’s life must take place beneath the open sky.

An ancient prophecy of the Dothraki predicts that one day the khal of all khals will rise. This stallion who mounts the world is prophesied to unite the Dothraki into a single khalasar and ride to the ends of the earth, making everyone in the world his herd. The Dothraki believe that someday ghost grass will cover the world, and then all life will end.

Bloodmagic is forbidden amongst the Dothraki. The Dothraki consider a “maegi” to be a woman who lays with demons and practices the black-

est of sorceries. A maegi is considered to be a vile thing, evil and soulless.

Dragons: Dragons are magical creatures, which existed on the continents of Westeros and Essos, but are considered to have been extinct for almost one hundred and fifty years. The only remaining traces of the dragons are skeletal remains and dragon eggs which are thought to have turned to stone. New-born dragons are referred to as hatchlings while dragons that are older, but not full-grown are known as drakes.

Dragons are depicted in the sigils of Houses Blackfyre, Targaryen, Toland, Vance of Atranta, Vance of Wayfarer's Rest, and Willum.

Dragons are scaled, reptilian creatures. They have four limbs: two wings, which are used as fore-legs like bats, and two rear legs. George R. R. Martin's dragons thereby differ from the traditional depiction of dragons as six limbed creatures. Martin came to his decision as he was bothered by the fact that no animal in nature has ever evolved in such a way (i.e. four legs and two wings). Nonetheless, some A Song of Ice and Fire artwork shows them with four legs and a detached pair of wings.

Dragons have strong jaws, sharp teeth and claws, leathery wings, and long necks and tails, with horns upon their heads. As young hatchlings, they are around the size of a cat.

Dragons have strong jaws, sharp teeth and claws, leathery wings, and long necks and tails, with horns upon their heads. As young hatchlings, they are around the size of a cat. Provided it has food and freedom, a dragon never stops growing. A dragon given such freedom can reach a span width of twenty feet within a year and a half. Dragons which are locked up, e.g., the Targaryen dragons housed in the Dragonpit in King's Landing, do not grow as large as dragons left free to fly as they wish. Although increasing age means increasing size, a larger size is not always an indication of a higher age (e.g., the younger *Meraxes* was larger than the older *Vhagar*).

The polished skulls of the Targaryen dragons look like glittering onyx, and their teeth like curved daggers of black diamond. Dragonbones are black due to their high iron content.

It is said that dragons are fire made flesh. Great heat emanates from dragons' bodies, to the point that they steam during cold nights. Dragons only eat cooked meat, and use the extremely hot dragonflame which they breathe to cook their meat before eating it.

A dragon's scales are largely, but not entirely, impervious to flame as well, and serve as protection for the more vulnerable flesh and musculature beneath. As a dragon ages, its scales thicken and grow harder, affording even more protection, leaving dragons nearly immune to fire, although they can still be wounded by dragonflame (e.g., Moondancer's eyes being blinded by Sunfyre's fire during the Dance of the Dragons). Similarly, as dragons age, the fires they breathe become hotter and fiercer. Where a hatchling's flame



Two of Khalcesi's Dragons (credit: HBO Game of Thrones)

can set straw aflame, the flames of older dragons, like *Balerion* and *Vhagar* in the fullness of their power, could melt steel and stone. The lifespan of dragons is many times that of a human, though their maximum natural lifespan is difficult to determine: as beasts of war, most of the known examples died in battle. *Balerion*, the largest and oldest Targaryen dragon, already alive when House Targaryen relocated from Valyria to Dragonstone in 114 BC died of old age in 94 AC during the reign of King Jaehaerys I Targaryen. *Balerion* was near two hundred years of age when he died, but as the only known example of a dragon who died of old age, it is unclear

if this should be considered typical. Dragons are not invulnerable; a scorpion bolt through the eye killed *Meraxes*. When *Balerion* returned with Princess Aerea Targaryen before Aerea's death, the dragon had large new and bloody wounds from an unknown cause.

Dragons are believed to be intrinsically tied to magic in the world. Since the death of the last dragon in 153 AC, summers grew shorter and the winters colder and crueler, while magical spells became less powerful. This also plays into the theme of R'hllor vs. the Great Other.

Dragonbone is as strong as steel, but lighter and far more flexible, and impervious to fire. It has been used to make brooches, bows, hilts of

Valyrian steel daggers, and whip handles.

There are many stories in the books about where Dragons came from, but there is no definitive answer.

Dragonglass: A common name in Westeros for the substance known as obsidian, a form of volcanic glass. Along with Valyrian steel, it is one of the two known substances capable of killing White Walkers. It is also capable of killing wights. In Old Valyria, it was known as zirtys perzys, which translates to “frozen fire”. Large amounts of dragonglass can be found on Dragonstone.

Dragonglass was a very important tool to the Children of the Forest, using it to fashion weapons. A long-forgotten secret is that the Children actually created the White Walkers as a weapon, by transforming humans into them: this was achieved in a magic ceremony that involved (among other things) plunging a dragonglass shard into a human’s chest.

Dreamfyre: A she-dragon, ridden by Princess Rhaena Targaryen and later by Princess Helaena Targaryen. Dreamfyre was a slender she-dragon.

Her coloration was primarily pale blue, with silver markings. She had silver crests and pale blue wings. By 35 AC, Dreamfyre was large enough for the twelve-year-old Rhaena Targaryen to mount her.

Dreamfyre was hatched during the reign of King Aegon I Targaryen. As a hatchling, she bonded with nine-year old Princess Rhaena Targaryen, Aegon I’s first grandchild, in 32 AC. Three years later, she became Dreamfyre’s rider.

During the Dance of the Dragons, after Helaena’s six-year old son was slain during the civil war, Helaena spent her days in darkness, weeping, and was not capable of riding Dreamfyre anymore. Dreamfyre resided in the Dragonpit, and it is said that when Helaena threw herself to her death from her window in Maegor’s Holdfast, Dreamfyre rose suddenly with a roar that shook the Dragonpit and snapped two of the chains that bound her.

Dreamfyre remained chained in the Dragonpit when the people of King’s Landing stormed the pit. Out of the four dragons present, Dreamfyre was the only dragon able to break free of her chains when the mob broke in. She took wing, circled the cavernous interior of the dome and swooped down to attack the men below. She slew more men than the other three dragons combined. Archers and crossbowmen loosed arrows and quarrels at the her,

and whenever she landed men swarmed her to attack, driving her back into the air. Eventually one of her eyes was nicked by a crossbow bolt. Half-blind and maddened, Dreamfyre flew into the Dragonpit’s great dome above, which cracked on impact. Half of it came tumbling down, crushing her and the dragon slayers under tons of broken stone and rubble.

Drowned God: “What is dead may never die, but rises again harder and stronger.” He is also known as He Who Dwells Beneath the Waves, the Drowned God is a very old sea god only worshiped by the Ironborn of the Iron Islands. Believed to live beneath the sea in his watery halls, the Drowned God is a harsh deity who is in a constant struggle with the Storm God who lives in the clouds (no one believes in him besides the Ironborn either). When the Andals invaded Westeros, everyone except the North

adopted the Faith of the Seven, but the opposite happened on the Iron Islands; the Andals accepted the Drowned God. Newborns are “drowned” in his waters in a ceremony resembling a baptism, but his clergy, the Drowned Men, are actually drowned and brought back to life (some of them don’t make it back).



A Dragonglass Knight's Watch Dagger

If the idea of the Drowned God’s holy men being people that have died and come back (funny how often that happens) is peculiar, it’s also worth noting that the god “is believed to have brought flame from the sea and sailed the world with fire and sword,” and to have made the Ironborn “reave and rape, to carve out kingdoms and to make their names known in fire and blood and song.”

The origin of this deity is a question. The Iron Islanders were in origin First Men, and it seems likely that the Drowned God developed out of some original deistic beliefs of the First Men, before they took up the old god. Or, if not that, the deity actually originates in the Iron Islands as something entirely new. In either case, the god is a grim and harsh one, suited to the nature of the isles and the Ironborn who inhabit it. There’s something of the Norse deity in him, with warriors hoping to feast in his watery halls, much as the Norse warriors hoped to feast in Valhalla.

Like the followers of the old gods, the Drowned God’s worshipers have no real organization. Unlike them, however, there are priests and certain rites. The priests of the Drowned God appear to receive the calling and simply declare themselves priests, and it’s up to their conduct to prove that they bring the Drowned God’s holy word to the faithful. The biggest

test is the drowning, an extreme baptismal rite in which someone is literally drowned, only to be resuscitated (with a primitive sort of CPR); it's a particularly holy priest who always gets a drowned man breathing again.

Their holy water is seawater, and if you're an Iron Islander, when you're young, "they drown you and you're brought back to life," to quote Martin's explanation of their baptism ceremony, which evokes the baptismal practices of some Christian sects (though the faith of the Drowned God is generally thought by fans to echo Viking practices—and water was also used in Viking naming rituals). This is why, when Theon Greyjoy returns to the Iron Islands, his father, worried that the Starks have converted him, makes him get baptized again. During the ceremony, Theon speaks the common prayer of the Iron Islands: "What is dead may never die."

The Drowned God literally requires his holy men to die and be brought back to life, and their words talk about how things that die don't ever really die, but instead they return even stronger. Not to mention, the Ironborn live horrible, harsh lives. Seeing the followers of the Drowned God pull up onto your shore is like having death itself show up.

Considering that Euron Greyjoy will be baptized anew in the faith of the Drowned God, all while promising to tame dragons, this faith has the potential to be very dangerous for all.

There has been little time dedicated to the Drowned God on Game of Thrones so far, but with season six finally including the Greyjoy family story from the novels, it's probably time to be familiar with this harsh deity.

Notable followers of the Drowned God: The Greyjoys of Pyke, Lords of the Iron Island. Most notably, Aeron Damphair, a noted priest of the Drowned God.

Durrán: Called *Durrán Godsgrief*, was the mythic first Storm King and the founder of House Durrandon. Legend has that he was married to *Elenei* and was the builder of Storm's End.

E

Elenei: Said to have been the daughter of the sea god and the goddess of

the wind. According to legend, she married Durrán Godsgrief, the first Storm King.

Essosi: Essos is an immense landmass located to the east of Westeros, extending into the far east of the known world. The Free Cities are located on its north-western shores, with the Dothraki sea located deep in the continental interior and the cities of Slaver's Bay on the south coast. The continent extends far to the east, around the Jade Sea, to the distant and fabled lands of Asshai and the Shadow. Those who come from Essos or are descended from them are referred to generally as Essosi.

F

Father (of the Seven): The Father based aspect of the Seven faced deity. He is concerned with judgment, justice, fatherhood, and patriarchy.

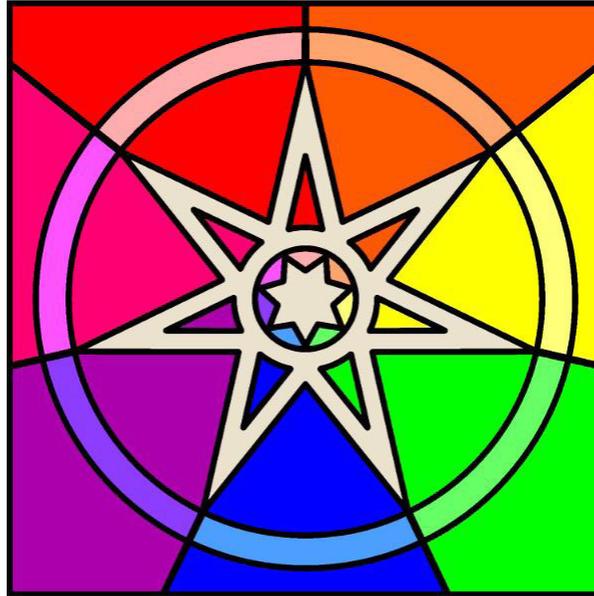
Faith of the Seven: "new gods" of Westeros (though, really, they're seven aspects of one god) came across the Narrow Sea with the Andals when they invaded. It is said the Seven walked the hills of Andalos in human form once, and eventually continued on to all of Westeros, save for the North

and the Iron Islands. Aegon the Conqueror also became a follower of the Seven. He was crowned and legitimized as the king of Westeros by the High Septon, the leader of the church.

The Seven are made up of:

1. *Father (judgment)*
2. *Mother (love and mercy)*
3. *Warrior (strength in battle)*
4. *Maiden (innocence and virtue)*
5. *Smith (craftsmanship and labor)*
6. *Crone (wisdom)*
7. *Stranger (death and the unknown)*

Followers often depict and are adorned with the seven-pointed star, and use light and crystals to symbolize the Seven too. Servants in the faith involve the leaders (Septons and Septas), and a number of different orders: the silent



The Rainbow Seal of the Seven

sisters, begging brothers, brown brothers, and the resurgent Faith Militant. While currently causing major problems for the Lannisters and Tyrells, the Faith Militant is a direct response to the unsafe and horrible realities the common folk of Westeros find themselves in during this fight for the Iron Throne.

There's also the matter of the last aspect of the Seven, the one few ever pray to: the Stranger. The god whose face is covered is neither male or female, and comes for all to lead them to the world of the dead. The Stranger is not loved like the other gods of the Seven, but rather feared. Yet all believers of the Seven know it will be the Stranger they will one day meet.

When it comes to the Faith of the Seven, it feels as though life is not for actually living, but about atoning for the very fact you are alive. In the trailer for season six we hear the High Sparrow, the one that was so eager to again have the Faith Militant fight in the name of the Seven, no matter how brutal and heartless they may act, say that we are all sinners that deserve to die. The Stranger might be the least loved god, but it is in his service the major religion of Westeros now serves.

The Seven gods are seven aspects of one deity... though some Septons teach they're in fact seven separate gods; some may well believe that doctrine, while others explain it as nothing more than a means to convey the gods to the smallfolk. A highly organized religion, it bears some distinct similarities to the Catholic church. The High Septon is the head of the Faith, elected by the Most Devout, as the Pope is elected by the cardinals. There are Septons in Septs, brothers in Septries and sisters in motherhouses, just as there are priests in churches, monks in monasteries, and nuns in convents.

The whole symbology of the Faith is tied up in the number seven: the seven colors of the rainbow (which leads to the use of faceted crystals to break up light into its constituent colors), for example, and the seven knights of the Kingsguard are another example. The Seven-Pointed Star is the chief holy text, but there is devotional literature of various sorts. Up through the reign of Jaehaerys the Conciliator, the Faith was a genuine power in Westeros, but with his predecessor Maegor's brutal oppression of the orders of the Faith Militant and Jaehaerys's promises to defend the Faith, the High Septon has up to recently been more a figure head than a political power, although there have been exceptions.

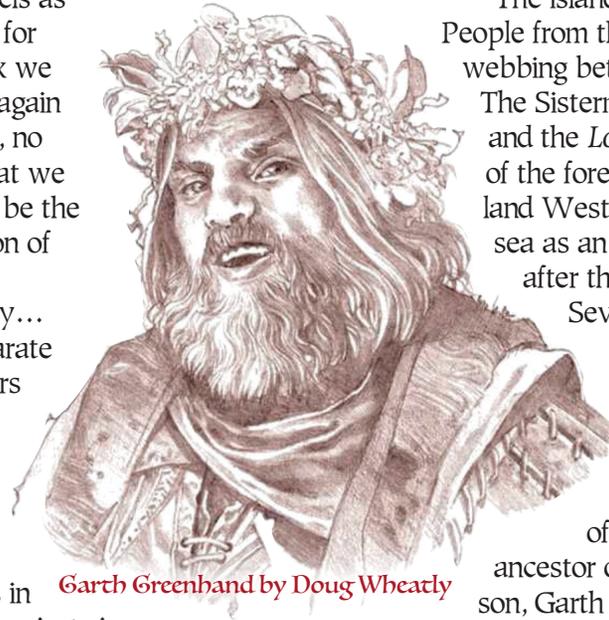
Notable followers of the Seven: Catelyn Stark, Ser Barristan Selmy,

Brienne of Tarth, most lords south of the Neck.

Father of Waters: A deity worshiped in the Free City of Braavos. His temple is rebuilt anew whenever the Father takes a new bride each year on his feast days.

Faith of the Three Sisters: The Three Sisters are a group of three islands, Sweetsister, Longsister, and Littlesister. They are found in the Bite, located south of White Harbor and north of the Mountains of the Moon. The islands owe loose allegiance to House Arryn of the Vale.

The islands are considered dens of avarice and sin by Septons. People from the Three Sisters are known as Sistermen. Some have webbing between their hands and feet, which they call the mark. The Sistermen of antiquity worshiped the *Lady of the Waves* and the *Lord of the Skies* instead of the old gods of the children of the forest, who had been adopted by the First Men of mainland Westeros. The Sistermen of that time cast dwarfs into the sea as an offering to the gods. Septons stopped the practice after the Andal invasion and the arrival of the Faith of the Seven.



Garth Greenhand by Doug Wheatly

G
Garth Greenhand: Also called Garth Greenhair and Garth the Green, was a mythical High King of the First Men and said to have been the common ancestor of numerous houses from the Reach. His firstborn son, Garth the Gardener, founded House Gardener, the Kings of the Reach.

According to some legends, Garth Greenhand was the High King who led the First Men across the Arm of Dorne. Other tales claim he predated the arrival of the First Men, making not only the first human in Westeros but also the only human, and that he interacted with the children of the forest and giants. In some tales he is a god, and in a few of these, the oldest ones, he demands blood sacrifice from his worshipers to ensure a bountiful harvest; in some stories the green god dies every autumn, only to be reborn with the coming of spring. Some tales claim he had green hands, green hair or green skin overall, or antlers like a stag. Garth supposedly wore a crown of vines and flowers and made the land bloom.

In the story, he is a direct correlation to the Celtic deity Cernunnos

or the Green Man from European lore. He is a god that represents a liaison between the human world and the wild world.

Goddess of the Wind: The goddess of the wind is the legendary wife of the sea god. The goddess of the wind and the sea god forbade their daughter Elenei's love with *Durrnan Godsgrief*. Regardless, Elenei gave her maidenhead to Durrnan, thus yielding to a mortal's death. For this, the gods hated Durrnan and, in their wrath, sent howling winds and lashing rains on Durrnan's keep on his wedding night, destroying his keep and killing all his family and guests. Enraged, Durrnan declared war on the gods, who replied by hammering his kingdom with massive storms. Thus, each new keep Durrnan built was destroyed by the gods, despite being larger and more heavily fortified. Durrnan's seventh keep, however, resisted the wrath of the gods—thus earning the name of Storm's End. According to some tales it was built with the advice of a boy who would grow up to become Bran the Builder, though others believe the children of the forest took a hand in the construction.

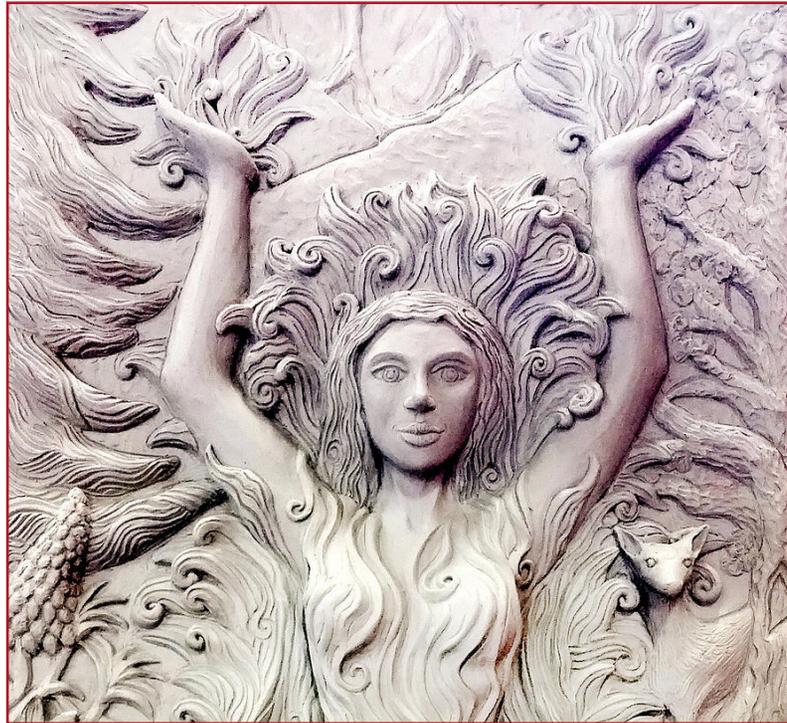
God-on-Earth: The God-on-Earth was the legendary first ruler of the mythic Great Empire of the Dawn. According to the tales told by the priestly scribes of Yin, he was the only begotten son of the *Maiden-Made-of-Light* and the *Lion of Night*, and traveled about his domains in a palanquin carved from a single pearl and carried by a hundred queens, his wives. He ruled for ten thousand years, until at last he ascended to the stars to join his forebears. He was succeeded by his eldest son, the Pearl Emperor.

Gods of the Rhoyme: Few people still live along the Rhoyme River in Essos, with most of its inhabitants and descendants long dead or long ago moved away (like Queen Nymeria to Dorne). So for those that still worship Mother Rhoyme, the *Old Man of the River* (Giant Turtle), and the *Crab King*.

Great Other: The God of Ice, Darkness, and Death, part of the dualist reli-

gion of R'hllor. He is the adversary whose name is unknown. If you've been reading this series you know the many signs point towards the Lord of Light being the other side of the *White Walkers'* Great Other and the *Night King*.

Great Shepherd: The Great Shepherd or Lamb god is the deity of the peaceful Lhazareen. They are taught that all men are one flock. The Lhazareen (also spelled Lhazarene) are a people of peaceful shepherds from Lhazar in the continent of Essos.



The River Goddess (credit: Laurel Hagner)

The Great Stallion: See Horse god

Greenseer: A title given to people who possess the magical ability to perceive future, past or distant events in dreams known as Green Dreams. According to legend, Greenseers were much respected by the Children of the Forest. Brandon Stark was a Greenseer.

Ghiscari Religion: The Ghiscari are a people native to the region of Ghiscar on the continent of Essos. The Ghiscari still worship the gods of Ghis, with Graces as their priestesses. The Green Grace is the topmost religious figure in a Ghiscari city. The Ghiscari consider the blood spilled in the fighting pits a sacrifice most pleasing to their gods.

H

Hooded Wayfarer: A god of gypsies, travelers and poor discarded people. There is a statue of it in the House of Black and White. The statue is most commonly visited by poor men.

Horse god: The horse god is a deity revered by the Dothraki. In the television adaptation *Game of Thrones* it is referred to as the Great Stallion.

The Dothraki horse god mirrors the importance of horses in Dothraki culture. Much is unknown about the Dothraki religion, but it appears to have no moral issue with raping and killing. The Dothraki believe in the stallion who mounts the world prophecy, a leader who will unite all the Dothraki

into a single khalasar under a single khal and ride to the ends of the earth, thus children are considered a blessing.

The House of Black and White: The House of Black and White is the temple of the *Many-Faced God* and the headquarters of the Faceless Men. It is located in Braavos. The House of Black and White sits upon a rocky knoll made of dark gray stone. It has no windows and has a black tile roof. Its wooden doors are twelve feet high and carved. The left door is Weirwood, the right ebony. In the center of the doors is a carved moon face ebony on Weirwood, Weirwood on ebony. Its gray stone steps lead down to the dock.

The knoll upon which the temple sits holds many passageways cut from the rock. Priests and acolytes' sleeping cells are located on the first level beneath the main floor. The sleeping cells for the servants are on the second. The holy sanctum lays on the third level, a restricted area. The third level contains the many faces collected by the House. The faces are hung on the walls, and are used as disguises.

In the center of the main room on the main floor lies a pool ten feet across. Statues of gods stand around the room. There are statues of thirty gods in all. Among them are the *Weeping Woman*, the *Lion of Night*, *Hooded Wayfarer*, *Bakkalon - the Moon-Pale Maiden*, the *Stranger* and the *Merling King*.

There are no services or songs of worship within the temple. The visitor can visit the pool, the gods, or ask for a priest.

L

Lady of Spears: The great goddess of the Unsullied is called by many names, including the Lady of Spears, the *Bride of Battle*, and the *Mother of Hosts*. According to Gray Worm, her true name belongs only to the ones who have burned their manhoods upon her altar. The Unsullied purify themselves according to the laws of their great goddess; one way is to bathe in the salt sea. The Unsullied may not speak of the great goddess to others.

Lady of the Waves: A goddess of old worshiped by people of the Three Sisters. Sacred storms were the result of the Lady mating with the *Lord of the Skies*. Worship of the Lady of the Waves ended with the arrival of the Andals and the Faith of the Seven.

Lamb god: See *Great Shepard*

Last Kiss: The last kiss is a rite practiced by the red priests of R'hllor. When a follower of the Lord of Light dies, priests fill their mouths with fire and breathe flame into the deceased, as they believe that fire cleanses and is a bright gift. Harwin and Thoros of the brotherhood without banners refer to it as the kiss of life.

Lightbringer: Also called the Red Sword of Heroes, is a magical sword associated with a heroic warrior most commonly named Azor Ahai. Melisandre claims that the sword of Stannis Baratheon is Lightbringer.

According to the legend of Azor Ahai, he labored for thirty days and thirty nights to create a hero's sword. However, when he went to temper it in water, the

sword broke. Azor Ahai was not one to give up easily, so he started over. The second time he took fifty days and fifty nights to make the sword, even better than the first. To temper it this time, he captured a lion and drove the sword into its heart, but once more the steel shattered. The third time, with a heavy heart, for he knew beforehand what he must do to finish the blade, he worked for a hundred days and nights until it was finished. This time, Azor Ahai called for his wife, Nissa, and asked her to bare her breast. He drove his sword into her breast, her soul combining with the steel of the sword, creating Lightbringer, while her cry of anguish left a crack across the face of the moon.

According to the Jade Compendium by Colloquo Votar, Lightbringer was henceforth always as warm as Nissa had been, and that the blade burned fiery hot during battles. Lightbringer was able to boil the blood of a monster when Azor Ahai thrust the sword through the belly of the beast. After steam poured from the beast's mouth and its eyes melted, its body burst



Inside the House of Black and White (credit: Paolo Puggioni)

into flame. Followers of R'hllor believe that Azor Ahai used the red sword to end the darkness.

It has been foretold in books from Asshai that when the stars bleed and the cold winds blow, Azor Ahai will be reborn as a warrior who draws the burning sword Lightbringer from a fire.

Lion of Night: The Lion of Night is a god in Yi Ti. The Faceless Men believe that is just another representation of the Many-Faced God. There is a statue of it in the House of Black and White which is most commonly visited by rich men.

According to tales told by the priestly scribes of Yin, the Lion of Night fathered a son on the *Maiden-Made-of-Light*. This son was the God-on-Earth, who ruled the Great Empire of the Dawn for ten thousand years before ascending to the heavens. The descendants of the God-Earth ruled the empire after him, each ruling a shorter time than the previous one, until the brother of the Amethyst Empress usurped her in the Blood Betrayal and crowned himself as the Bloodstone Emperor, ushering in the Long Night. The Maiden-Made-of-Light turned her back upon the world and the Lion of Night came forth in all his wrath to punish the wickedness of man.

The Five Forts, which predate the Golden Empire of Yi Ti, are claimed by some to have been raised by the Pearl Emperor to keep the Lion of Night and his demons away from the realms of men.

The Long Night: The Long Night is how the Westerosi refer to a period when a terrible darkness fell across the Known World. It occurred during the Age of Heroes approximately eight thousand years before Aegon's Conquest, in the midst of a great winter that lasted for years. The Long Night lasted a generation and laid waste through famine and terror.

According to Westerosi legends, in the midst of this darkness a race of apparent demons, called the Others, emerged from the uttermost north of

Westeros, the polar regions of the Lands of Always Winter. They wielded razor-thin swords of ice and raised wights to fight the living. The children of the forest and their allies, the First Men, fought valiantly against them, but were driven southwards by their advance.

Steps were taken to ensure that the people would never be caught off guard by an invasion from the north again. Bran the Builder supposedly raised the Wall, an imposing structure of solid ice and magic, stretching one hundred leagues from the Gorge in the west to the Shivering Sea in the east, cutting off the Lands of Always Winter from the remainder of Westeros. The Night's Watch guarded the Wall and protected the people from threats beyond the Wall.

Other legends from the Further East, including Yi Ti, state the Blood Betrayal began the Long Night. The Lion of Night was unleashed upon the world after the Maiden-Made-of-Light turned her back on it.

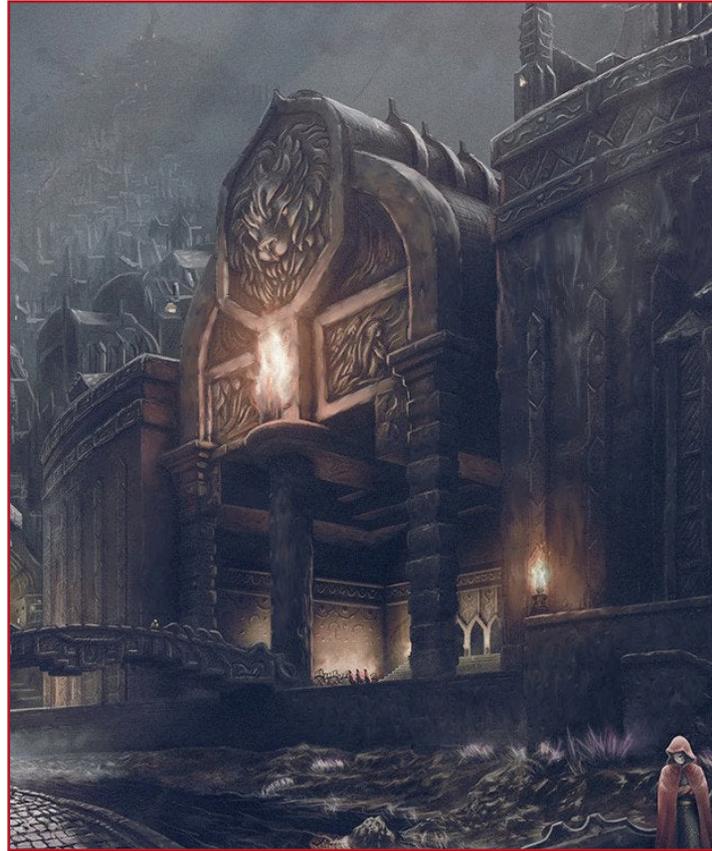
According to a legend from Yi Ti, during the Long Night the sun hid its face for a lifetime, ashamed at something none could discover, and disaster was only averted by the deeds of a woman with a monkey's tail.

A great hero, known in different cultures as *Azor Ahai*, *Hyrkoon the Hero*, *Yin Tar*, *Neferrion*, and *Eldric Shadowchaser*, wielded the flaming sword *Lightbringer* and led humanity to victory. Some say the Five Forts were built by the Pearl Emperor to guard against the Lion of Night and his demons.

The legend of Azor Ahai spread from Asshai and is especially prevalent among the followers of R'hllor. A later prophecy claims that the Others will return and Azor Ahai will be reborn to lead the fight. There is also a similar prophecy about the *prince that was promised*.

Lord of Light: One of the names of *R'hllor*.

Lord of Skies: A storm god of the Sistermen worshiped on Isles of three sisters before Andals cast down local faiths of Sistermen. Sacred storms were the result of the Lord mating with the *Lady of the Waves*.



Temple of the Lion of Night at Asshai (credit: Enrique Durguia)

Lord of Harmony: The Lord of Harmony is a god worshiped by the Peaceful *People of Naath*. There is a wooden hall dedicated to the god in Braavos.

The Lord of Harmony, regarded as the only true god, is said to be the one who always was and always would be that made the moon and stars and earth, and all the creatures that dwelt upon them. He is attended by butterfly women.

It is believed that the sacred butterfly spirits of the Lord of Harmony protect their isles against those who would do them harm. Many conquerors have sailed to Naath, but all of them sicken and die if they stay overlong. On the other hand, the slavers in their raids seem unaffected.

The disease is the so-called butterfly fever. The slavers are unaffected for they long ago learned that they have low chances of being infected if they stay on the isle for a few hours or if they attack at night.

The Lord of Harmony is represented as a laughing giant, naked and bearded and attended by swarms of women with butterfly wings

Lord of the Seven Hells:

A being who rules the seven hells associated with the Faith of the Seven. He does not seem to be a full god, because he is not listed as one in the faith, but he presides over the lands of Hell. He is said to have knowledge over dark magic and is capable of dispatching demons to do his bidding.

M

Maiden (the Seven): The young woman aspect of the seven faced god. She represents fertility, purity, innocence, love, and beauty.

Maiden-Made-of-Light: A goddess of Yi Ti origin. According to tales told

by the priestly scribes of Yin, the Maiden-Made-of-Light was impregnated by the *Lion of Night*. This son was the *God-on-Earth*, who ruled the Great Empire of the Dawn for ten thousand years before ascending to the heavens. The descendants of the God-Earth ruled the empire after him, each ruling a shorter time than the previous one, until the brother of the Amethyst Empress usurped her in the Blood Betrayal and crowned himself as the Bloodstone Emperor, ushering in the Long Night. The Maiden-Made-of-Light turned her back upon the world and the Lion of Night came forth in all his wrath to punish the wickedness of man.



Statues of the Seven in the Great Sept of Baelor. (credit: HBO's Game of Thrones)

Many-Faced God: “Valar morghulis – all men must die. Valar dohaeris – all men must serve.”

The Faceless Men of Braavos, those that serve in the House of Black and White, are their own religion. Their god is the Many-Faced God, who they believe is merely all of the other gods of the world, worshiped under different names yet existent as one deity... hence all those faces. The Stranger, the Black Goat, the Lion of the Night, etc—they are all the same god to the Faceless Men.

The history of the Many-Faced God dates back to old Valyria, when the first Faceless Man came to realize that the vastly different slaves working in the volcanic mines were praying to their own gods, but for the same thing. Believing he was the “instrument” for this singular god with many faces, he gave the slaves “the gift” of the god – a painless death (then later the slave masters too). A strange gift perhaps, but it answered their prayers.

While the Faceless Men can be hired to give their “gift” to someone (at a huge cost), people can also come to the *House of Black and White* to drink from its fountain, which also gives the gift. It can be said that almost every other god in the world can be considered to be one of the many faces of this god, that the god is a conduit to all the other gods or perhaps all the gods are him...

Meraxes the Silver: Meraxes was the dragon ridden by Rhaenys Targaryen during the War of Conquest. Meraxes was said to be capable of swallowing an entire horse. She participated in the Field of Fire, but was downed by a Dornish arrow in the First Dornish War, crashing to her death with Rhaenys on her back. Meraxes was named after one of the gods of Valyria. Meraxes is described as having “silver scales”, though it isn’t clear if it was one solid color throughout, or if its primary color was silver and it had a different secondary color, possibly golden. Rhaenys and Meraxes were both killed during the war in 10 AC. They died at Hellholt when a lucky shot with a scorpion-bolt pierced her eye and drove into her brain, instantly killing her in mid-air.

Meraxes: Meraxes was one of the many gods worshiped in Old Valyria. One of the dragons of House Targaryen was named after this goddess. She was the goddess of the sky.

The Merling King: A god of Braavos worshiped by sailors. The Merling King is a god associated with places near the narrow sea.

Ursula Upcliff of Witch Isle, who is said to have been a sorceress, called herself bride of the Merling King during the Andal invasion. The Velaryons claim they received the Driftwood Throne from the Merling King to conclude a pact.

There is a statue of the god commonly visited by sailors in the House of Black and White in Braavos, and the Merling King is a Braavosi galley named after him. There is a rock formation in Blackwater Bay called the spears of the merling king. The helm of Ser Marlon Manderly of White Harbor depicts the head of the Merling king.

Moon Mother: A deity in Essos

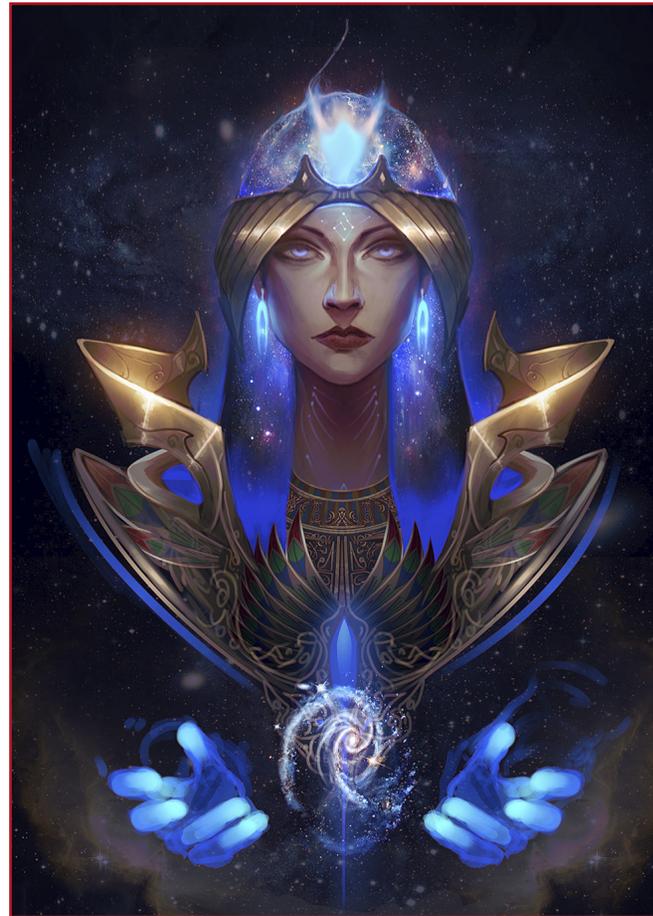
Moon-Pale Maiden: The Moon-Pale Maiden is a goddess. There is a statue of it in the House of Black and White. The statue is most commonly visited by sailors.

Mother (Faith of the Seven): She represents mercy, peace, fertility, and childbirth. She is sometimes referred to as “the strength of women”.

Mother of Hosts: See *Lady of Spears*

Mother Rhoyme: The chief goddess of the Rhoynar. She is associated with the river Rhoyme, which the Rhoynar revere. Her waters nourished the Rhoynar since the dawn of days. The giant turtles known as the Old Men of the River, named after a Rhoynish lesser deity, are held as her consorts. The *Orphans of the Greenblood* still worship Mother Rhoyme.

In the books, the worshiping of the river Rhoyme can be attributed to several religions like that of the Nile and Ganges rivers.



Meraxes the Sky Goddess (credit: Mohammed Saad)

n

People of Naath: Naath is west of the Basilisk Isles and northern Sothoryos. It is located east of the southernmost and largest of the Summer Isles, Jhala, and due south of the Valyrian peninsula. Naath is separated from Jhala and Valyria by large stretches of the Summer Sea.

Naathi have a unique look to them with flat faces, dark skin and golden eyes. They are called the Peaceful People, due to their belief in extreme pacifism. They make music rather than war and kill nothing, not even animals, eating only fruit and never flesh. They are widely sought after by slavers who consider them to make the best slaves.

The New gods: Another name for the Faith of the Seven

The Night King: The Night King was the master and the first of the White Walkers, having existed since the age of the First Men. He was also the supreme leader of the Army of the Dead. He seems to be an Avatar of the “Great Other” in the dualistic religion of R’hllor.

The Night King was a First Man who was captured by a tribe of the

Children of the Forest. Leaf, who was among the group, pressed a dragon-glass dagger into his chest, causing his eyes to turn blue and turning him into the first of the White Walkers. Thousands of years later, Leaf tells Bran Stark that her people created the White Walkers to defend themselves when Westeros was invaded by the First Men, who were cutting their sacred trees down and slaughtering the Children of the Forest.

However, the White Walkers soon turned on their creators and began what was known as the Long Night. Though the Long Night ended upon the First Men and Children's victory in the War for the Dawn, the Night King survived and retreated with the rest of his forces to the Lands of Always Winter, where they hid as they faded into legend and obscurity.

O

Old gods: Sometimes called godswood. Westeros was originally inhabited by a non-human race called the children of the forest. They worshiped the Old Gods, which had no names and were manifest in trees, rocks, and streams. There were no temples or priests. In the show, this religion is often symbolized by the white Weirwood trees. (When you cut such trees, they appear to bleed.) When men first came to Westeros from Essos, they accepted these gods, which is why the Starks worship them.

The Old Gods are roughly equivalent to the sort of pantheistic nature worship that has existed in Europe in one form or another for millennia. When the First Men came to Westeros they fought with the Children of the Forest for centuries, before eventually signing a pact with them and adopting their gods, now referred to as "the old gods." The old gods are mostly only worshiped in the North and Beyond the Wall now, though there are castles that have holy groves with Weirwood trees in them throughout the Westeros.

Nameless, the old gods are said to be found in the earth itself, in

stones and trees. The only real tangible proof of the faith are the sacred carved Weirwood trees, known as heart trees, which are thought to have some special power not totally understood by humans.

While there is no sacred text or writings attributed to the faith, acts such as kinslaying, incest, and slavery are in violation of the gods. They also take the laws of hospitality very seriously.



The Old Gods (credit: John Jude Palancar)

The gods of the children of the forest, seem like a sort of animistic religion. The Greenseers of the children, shamans of a kind, were said to be able to talk with all beasts and birds, and to see through the eyes of their carved weirwoods. When the First Men arrived, they first warred with the children, and cut down the weirwoods where they found them. In time, though, they made peace with them and adopted their old gods. The North is the only real stronghold for the old gods, however; south of the Neck, the Blackwoods are the only known noble house to still follow them.

There are no holy texts, no songs of worship, and practically no rites that go with the worship of the old gods. It's a folk-religion, passed from generation to generation. The closest thing to a ritual we've seen is prayer before the heart tree in a godswood, holy groves contained within castles throughout the Seven Kingdoms, and often the only places where living weirwoods still remain until one goes north of the Wall. It's said that

the sigh of the wind and the rustle of leaves are the old gods speaking back to worshippers.

Notable followers of the old gods: Lord Eddard Stark, Jon Snow, most Northern lords, Lord Tytos Blackwood.

Old Man of the River: A lesser god of the Rhoynar. He is the son of Mother Rhoyme, and his form is that of a giant turtle. According to Rhoynar beliefs, the Old Man of the River fought the Crab King for dominion of all life below the flowing water. The giant turtles of the Rhoyme, the Old Men of the River, are named after him

Old Ones: (*This is a nod to H.P. Lovecrafts writings by Martin.*) The Old Ones are gods said to have lived deep below the ruined subterranean cities on the island of Leng. The jungles of the island contain odd, overgrown ruins of unknown origin, which lead to massive underground labyrinths and caverns. The god-empresses of Leng are said to have had congress with the Old Ones, and they instructed the empresses on at least four occasions to massacre foreigners, at least according to the Jade Compendium.

When the YiTish emperor Jar Har conquered Leng, the warriors he sent into the ruins either returned mad or vanished altogether, so the emperor ordered the ruins' entrances to be sealed under penalty of death. According to legend, however, the Old Ones still dwell underground.

The Great Other: The God of Ice, Darkness, and Death, the dark part of the dualist religion of R'hllor. He is the adversary who's name is unknown.

Orphans of the Greenblood: Descendants of the Rhoynar, who fled in Nymeria's ten thousand ships to Dorne, but refused to assimilate into Dornish culture. The orphans still mourn the loss of their distant homeland in Essos, and so continue to practice the traditions of their river-faring ancestors.

They consider themselves to be "orphans" as they are of the Rhoynar and have been orphaned from their "Mother", the river Rhoyme, which in their faith also holds a divine status. Therefore, they also identify the river as "Mother Rhoyme."

The orphans live on rafts along the river Greenblood (a river in southern Dorne). It is said that when they first came to Dorne, they built their smaller boats from the burned carcasses of the ships they used to cross the narrow sea.

P

Pale Child: *Another Name for Bakkalon*

Pantera: Pantera is a six-breasted cat goddess worshiped in Lys. Lys is a port city with no established faith. Temples and shrines to many different gods can be found in the streets and waterfronts of the city, including a temple of R'hllor, and the Temple of Trade. Pantera, Yndros of the Twilight, Bakkalon and Saagael are some of the manifold deities of Lys.

The Pale maiden: A goddess of Braavos worshiped by sailors. Pantera. See the Moon-Pale Maiden



Orphans of the Greenblood (credit: Léon Adolphe Auguste Belly)

The Pattern: The Pattern is a religion worshiped in Essos. The Patternmaker's Maze is in Braavos, and the priests of the Pattern claim that only those who learn to walk the labyrinth properly will find wisdom. It is unknown if there are similar mazes in other cities or if there is a connection with the mazers of Lorath. Gyldayn claims that the Pattern is worshiped in Tyrosh, alongside R'hllor, Trios, and other gods.

The Pattern may be a reference by George R. R. Martin to *The Pattern* in the works of Roger Zelazny.

The Prince That Was Promised: (sometimes called "The Prince Who Was Promised" or "The One Who Was Promised") is a prophesied savior in the religion of the *Lord of Light* (R'hllor). According to the prophecy, this figure would be born "amidst salt and smoke" and pull a sword named *Lightbringer* from flames, which they would use to combat an impending darkness. The prophecy was originally written in High Valyrian, and this led to a misunderstanding as the nuances of that language were forgotten over the centuries: in High Valyrian, the word that corresponds to "prince" is gender neutral, so the correct name for this prophesied savior is "The Royal Born that Was Promised", indicating that it could be a man or a woman.

A Red Priestess, established in Volantis, preached to a group of slaves and freedmen that Daenerys Targaryen is their prophesied savior. Kinvara, the High Priestess of the Red Temple of Volantis, is also certain that Daenerys is the one who was promised, citing her freeing of slaves and birthing of dragons from stone as evidence. She agrees to send her best

priests and preachers throughout Essos, spreading the good word about the Queen.

Other names for The Prince That Was Promised include the *Lord's Chosen*, the *Son of Fire* and the *Warrior of Light*.

R

Red Priests: The clergy of the religion of R'hllor, called so because of the loose, crimson robes they wear. Red priests, who may be male or female, administer the last kiss to deceased followers of the *Lord of Light*.

They are a common sight in Essos, as the faith of R'hllor's influence is more widespread and children are sometimes given to temples of R'hllor to be raised into the priesthood. Red temples also buy children to serve as slaves of R'hllor and raise them as priests, temple prostitutes, or warriors known as the Fiery Hand. In cities where slaves are branded with facial tattoos, slave red priests have flames tattooed across their faces.

Red Temple: Red temples are religious buildings of red stone used by followers of R'hllor, the Lord of Light. Red priests light nightfires at sunset, welcome the sun in the morning, and preach to crowds. Red temples purchase slaves as children and raise them to be priests, prostitutes, and warriors.

Rhoynar Religion: (*not to be confused with R'hllor*) The Rhoynar practiced a number of customs that differ from mainstream Andal culture. These included equal primogeniture, granting inheritances to the eldest child regardless of gender. Due to their origin in city-states, the Rhoynar titled their rulers Princes and Princesses. Their influence made these customs standard in Dorne as well.

The Rhoynar worshiped a number of river-themed nature gods. Their primary god was *Mother Rhoyme*, or *Mother River*, the personification of the river Rhoyme itself. Other gods include the *Old Man of the River*, a turtle god, and his adversary, *the Crab King*.

R'hllor: "The night is dark and full of terrors."

This religion is the one that's been most closely tied to the plot of the show, thanks to the priestess Melisandre, who converted Stannis Baratheon and all his men. The Lord of Light comes from Essos, and his worshipers hold that the other gods are demons and must be destroyed. Sometimes the



A Red Priestess Offers Sermon to the Crowd (credit: HBO's Game of Thrones)

Lord of Light faithful decide that nonbelievers must be killed—hence that terrifying crucifixion scene in Episode 2 of this season. Unlike the Old Gods and the New Gods, the Lord of Light has no interest in coexistence and poses a real threat to any kind of religious harmony. The Lord of Light is connected with fire, which Melisandre uses in many of her rites, such as throwing leeches into flames while saying the names of the "three false kings." (Two of those men subsequently died, for what it's worth.) Perhaps the most confusing religion—it seems to be constantly grow-

ing and changing—it's also the most absolutist, as it espouses hard distinctions between light and dark and good and evil. As others have noted, there are clear similarities to Manichaeism, which also emphasized the good of light and the evil of darkness and envisioned the world as a battlefield between this duality.

Followers of the R'hllor believe in two gods: the Lord of Light and the Great Other, the god of ice and death. The two are forever in a struggle for the world, with R'hllor protecting the living from the darkness. The belief that R'hllor's great hero, Azor Ahai, will rise again wielding a sword of flame called Lightbringer and defeat the Great Other, comes from prophecies of the strange and dark Asshai in the Shadowlands.

Both men and women can be priests of the Lord of Light, with many temples to the god found throughout Essos. Attempts to spread the faith to Westeros haven't been as successful, with Thoros of Myr basically abandoning his attempts to convert the Iron Throne to R'hllor. Not until Stannis Baratheon did the religion make any kind of real progress in the Seven Kingdoms, which drew condemnation from the Faith of the Seven.

It is said that R'hllor allows some followers to see visions in his flames, that some priests and priestesses can conjure fire from their bare hands, and some can even bring people back from the dead (though they are also known to burn people to death in a ceremonial sacrifice).

It is believed that like all magic, R'hllor's followers' abilities have weakened since the last of the Targaryen dragons died. Dragons, with their fire-breathing sort of making them the living embodiment of fire, seem like a big deal to those that follow the Lord of Light.

Their obsession with dragons, and in turn Daenerys Targaryen, is as troubling as Melisandre's misreadings of the visions in her flames. We saw the movement of R'hllor's followers towards Daenerys when Tyrion was in Volantis and the red slave priestess was talking about the Mother of Dragons being the true savior of mankind. If dragons restore their ability to use magic there won't be room in this world for the nonbelievers, but a death by fire is no better than a death by ice.

Yes, the Great Other brings icy death, but dragons bring a death by fire. R'hllor's servants burn the living, and Melisandre also birthed a demon shadow baby. Thoros of Myr, a Red Priest that lost his faith, is able to bring his friend back to life saying the Lord of Light's prayers. On a television series, it's about fighting the undead to save the living, and the R'hllor religion is the most dedicated to fighting that battle. The two gods are intimately tied to raising the dead and bringing death to the living.



The daughter of the Sea god and the goddess of the Wind was Elenei. She married Durran and took on mortal form (similar to the Little (Mermaid) fable).

S

Saagael: Also known as the Giver of Pain and faceless Saagael, is a god worshiped in Lys. Lys is a port city with no established faith. Temples and shrines to many different gods can be found in the streets and waterfronts of the city, including a temple of R'hllor, and the Temple of Trade. Pantera, Yndros of the Twilight, Bakkalon and Saagael are some of the manifold deities of Lys.

Sea god: The sea god is the legendary husband of the Goddess of the Wind and the father of Elenei, the mythic wife of Durran Godsgrief.

The sea god and the goddess of the wind forbade their daughter Elenei's love with Durran Godsgrief. Regardless, Elenei gave her maidenhead to Durran, thus yielding to a mortal's death. For this, the gods hated Durran and, in their wrath, sent howling winds and lashing rains on Durran's keep on Shipbreaker Bay on his wedding night, destroying his keep and killing all his family and guests. Elenei protected Durran from harm, however. Enraged, Duran declared war on the gods, who replied by hammering his kingdom with massive storms. Thus, each new keep Durran built was destroyed by the gods, despite being larger and more heavily fortified.

Semosh and Selloso: Brother gods worshiped in Braavos. They are said to dream in twin temples which face each other across the Black Canal, which is crossed by a carved stone bridge.

Septons: Priests and People who worship the Seven Faced God.

The Seven: See the Faith of the Seven

Silent god: A deity worshiped in Essos. The Stones of the Silent God are located in Braavos.

Skinchangers: People who are able to enter the minds of animals and control their actions.

Being a Skinchanger makes way for changes in the personality of the human and the animal involved. In addition, a Skinchanger bond is easier if the human already knows and is close with the animal, like Bran Stark and his Wolf. Usually, skinchangers begin by entering the mind of the animal in their dreams. If an animal is killed while a Skinchanger is inside its mind, it is traumatic for the Skinchanger, and if a Skinchanger is killed while his or her conscience is inside the animal, some of his or her conscience may remain in the animal.

Not all Skinchangers realize they have this ability and other receive a great amount of training to hone their skills. Also see *Warg*.

Smith (*the Seven*): In the Faith of the Seven, he represents the arts and craftsmanship. He is the creative aspect of humanity.

The Song of Ice and Fire: The song of ice and fire is a subject of a prophecy, and is eponymous for the A Song of Ice and Fire series. The song of ice and fire is said to belong to the prince that was promised, but its content remains unknown.

In her visions at the House of the Undying, Daenerys Targaryen sees a man (Rhaegar Targaryen), and overhears him talking to a woman (Elia Martell) who is nursing a baby. "Aegon. What better name for a king... He is the prince that was promised, and his is the song of ice and fire"; When Rhaegar's eyes meet Daenerys's, he says (either to her or Elia), "There must be one more. The dragon has three heads," and he picks up a silver harp and begins to play.

However, neither Daenerys nor Seer Jorah Mormont know what "the song of ice and fire" means. It is implied that there is a connection between the song, the promise, and Daenerys herself. This is established more clearly when Maester Aemon identifies Daenerys as the "prince" that was promised.

The phrase "ice and fire" is also mentioned in the Reeds' oath of

loyalty to Bran Stark. The phrase "ice and fire" appears as an example of opposites. The phrase is also used to mean direction, and is used to refer to the world by Maester Yandel in his eponymous book *The World of Ice and Fire*.

The phrase may also refer to a union of House Targaryen and House Stark. The Pact of Ice and Fire was an agreement made between Prince Jacaerys Velaryon and Lord Cregan Stark during the Dance of the Dragons civil war, that a royal princess should marry into House Stark in exchange for their support of the blacks, but it was never fulfilled.

Stone Cow of Faros: A deity worshiped in city of Faros situated in Great Moraq island. The people of Faros worship it. There is a saying among the Qartheen that: "It is easier to milk the Stone Cow of Faros than to wring gold from the Pureborn."

Storm God: A god of the Ironborn of the Iron Islands. The eternal enemy of the Drowned God, he lives in a cloudy hall and ravens are his creatures. He sets snares to lure the Ironborn to their destruction and sends storms at sea. The hand of the storm god is included in the sigil of House Kenning of Harlaw.

After the Gray King killed the first sea dragon, Nagga, the Drowned God turned the beast's bones to stone. From her bones the Gray King made his hall, which he heated with Nagga's living fire. For a thousand years he reigned, during which he plotted his war against the Storm God. When the Gray King died, the Storm God snuffed out the fire.



Smithing gods of several cultures offer a clue to the origin the "Smith of the Seven".

Stranger (*the Seven*): The Stranger represents death and the unknown. It is rarely prayed to and is related to being a psychopomp who brings the newly dead to their final destination. It can be represented as male or female.

Syrax the Dragon: Syrax was a she-dragon. She was ridden solely by Rhaenyra Targaryen. Syrax had yellow scales. She was huge and formidable, but not as fearsome or experienced in battle as Caraxes. She was kept in chains and exceedingly well fed. She had not hunted for years at the time

of the civil war. Rhaenyra first took Syrax as a mount in 104 AC, when the princess was seven years old. Syrax was described as a “young” dragon at the time, and Rhaenyra herself named her “Syrax” (after a Valyrian goddess) - strongly implying that Syrax had no previous rider.

Syrax: One of the many goddesses worshiped in Old Valyria. Queen Rhaenyra Targaryen’s dragon was named after this god. He is similar to the Roman god Bacchus.

6

The Tears of Lys: A rare and expensive poison, made by the alchemists of Lys. It is clear, tasteless, odorless, and leaves no trace. When dissolved in liquids and swallowed, the poison eats away at the stomach and bowels of the victim, and appears to be a disease of those organs. Giving the victim a powerful purgative, if done early enough, may be the only thing that can save their life, but even that may not be enough. It is unknown if the poison has a connection with the *Weeping Lady of Lys*.

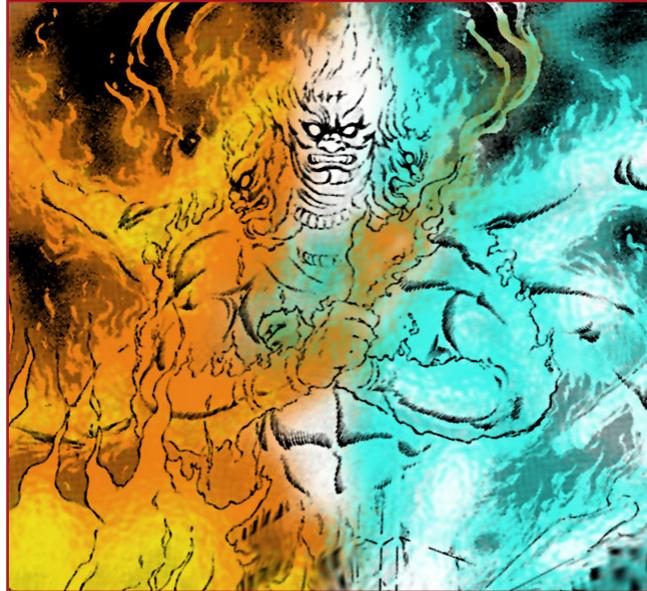
Trios: As evident from name, A three headed god worshiped in Free city of Tyrosh. There is a large statue of him near the Temple of Trios in Tyrosh. There is also a tower with three turrets dedicated to Trios in Braavos. The first head of Trios is akin to fire — it devours, consumes. The third is akin to ice — it preserves and allows people to emerge reborn. The mysterious second head — not the first or the third but the one in the middle — is chance or choice. It seems evident that the central head is judgment, allowing one to be reborn from having lead a worthy life or to be recycled into something anew. It is also interesting from the standpoint that the theme plays into the religion of *R'hllor*.

Three Eyed Raven: He was the last Greenseer, a human living among the last of the *Children of the Forest* beyond the Wall. He was killed by the *Night King*. His real name is unknown. Under the guise of a three-eyed raven, he appears in Bran Stark’s vision-dreams, following his fall and injury, prompt-

ing his quest beyond the Wall and guiding him to the cave in which his real human body resides. There, Bran is trained in the magic of *Greensight*.

V

Valyrian Religion: The Valyrian religion was practiced by the Valyrians in Essos throughout their vast empire, known as the Valyrian Freehold. The religion lasted for thousands of years within the Freehold, but was greatly diminished after the Doom of Valyria destroyed their civilization.



Three headed gods are prominent in gods that look over time, the cycles of the universe, and man.

The creation myth of ancient Valyria holds that all the world, the stars, and everything that is was once contained within a single egg. This egg sat solitary within a void until one day it was struck by a bolt of lightning. The egg split cleanly into two pieces, and those two pieces were pushed away by the power of the lightning. One side of the egg held very little land, and after the first bit of land fell out, the egg kept going, spilling an endless torrent of water as it flew away. The other side of the egg held lots of land, and as it flew away, it kept on laying down more and more earth. The first side of the egg birthed Westeros and the Sunset Sea. The other side birthed Essos, and the endless lands of the east.

In addition to these lands and seas, out of the egg also came twelve beings of great and terrible power. Standing upright with a body like men, but with the wings and horns and tails of dragons. These twelve built a beautiful tower at the top of Mount Valyr, and called themselves the Valyrians. With their powers, they made all manner of beasts; of the sea, of the sky, and of the land. But first among these, both in power and in the gods favor, was the dragon, created in the image of the gods. For eons, dragons ruled the world as the stewards of the gods creation, but all was not well. The dragons, while powerful, were still little more than mindless animals, and they regularly burned and destroyed the world that they had been created to protect. The gods decided that they needed a new creation, one to be lord over the dragons themselves. Together, the gods created a creature with the wit and cunning to overcome the dragons. Thus, man was born. The gods rejected the bestial aspects of their own appearance to give form to a creature above

beasts. The gods spread these men far and wide, to kill the dragons that terrorized creation.

However, in secret, the god Arrax, who pitied the dragons, created his own men, like the others, but he gave to them the blood of a dragon, so that these men would have a kinship with the dragons and not kill them like the other men. This had the effect of turning these men's hair to the color of silver, and their eyes violet. For this, Arrax is seen as the father of the ancient Valyrian people, and is chiefly worshiped among the gods

House Targaryen, a family of Valyrian nobles who survived by fleeing to Westeros, also later abandoned the religion when Aegon the Conqueror and his sisters converted to the Faith of the Seven (largely as a political move).

The Valyrian religion was polytheistic with a pantheon of several gods. The Targaryens named several of their dragons after the gods of old Valyria: *Balerion*, *Vhagar*, and *Meraxes*.

Ancient Valyrian Gods:

While there were many gods that were worshiped in ancient Valyria, there were fourteen main gods who are referred to as the Fourteen Flames. They are:

1. **Arrax:** Ruler of Gods, law, order, justice, governance and strength.
2. **Aegarax:** God of all creatures that walk, run, swim or fly. Creator of the first dragon.
3. **Balerion:** God of death and the Underworld.
4. **Caraxes:** God of the sea, twin of Meraxes.
5. **Gaelithox:** God of fire, stars, moon, sun and the dawn, rival of Meraxes.
6. **Meleys:** Goddess of love and fertility.
7. **Meraxes:** Goddess of the sky, twin of Caraxes.
8. **Shrykos:** Goddess of beginnings, endings, transitions and doorways.
9. **Syrax:** Goddess of wine, fruitfulness, parties, festivals, madness, chaos, drunkenness, vegetation, and ecstasy.
10. **Tessarion:** Goddess of music, arts, knowledge, healing, plague, prophe-

cy, poetry, beauty, archery and booty

11. **Tyraxes:** Goddess of reason, wisdom, intelligence, skill, peace, warfare and battle strategy.
12. **Vermox:** God of boundaries, travel, communication, trade, language, and writing.
13. **Vermithor:** God of smiths, crafts and artisans.
14. **Vhagar:** God of war.

The Valyrian Freehold was very tolerant of other religions - in the sense that so long as conquered peoples paid their taxes, the Valyrians



Visenya Targaryen with Vhagar (credit: ncorva on deviant art)

didn't really care what gods they prayed to. The Valyrian religion was primarily followed by the Valyrians themselves, the dragonlord families of Old Valyria, though they were disproportionately powerful in the society of the Freehold. Given that the Valyrian Freehold is loosely-inspired by the real-life Roman Republic, this mirrors how the Romans actually tolerated local religions so long as they did not interfere with the operations of the Roman state. Some also speculate that the dragonlords did this so no single religion would ever grow popular and powerful enough to start chal-

lenging their secular rule, or to unite widespread slave populations into open revolt.

Vhagar the Dragon: Vhagar was the dragon ridden by Visenya Targaryen during the War of Conquest. Though smallest of the dragons, Vhagar was still large enough to swallow a horse whole, and her flames could melt armor.

The color of Vhagar's scales, horns, wings, wing bones, and spinal crest, as well as the color of her flame are not mentioned in the books. However, the artist commissioned for the 2021 A Song of Ice and Fire Calendar, Sam Hogg, asked for clarification from George R. R. Martin's team and was told Vhagar was "bronze with greenish blue highlights and bright green eyes".

Vhagar (god): Vhagar was one of the many gods worshiped in Old Valyria. One of the dragons of House Targaryen was named after this god.

W

Warg: A warg is a term for a *Skinchanger* who specialises in controlling dogs and wolves.

Warrior (*the Seven*): In the Faith of the Seven, he represents strength and courage in life. The ability to do what is right at the right time and to fight when its time to fight.

Weeping Lady of Lys: A goddess worshiped by Lyseni people and some Braavosi. There is a statue of her called the Weeping Woman in the *House of Black and White* in Braavos. The statue is most commonly visited by old women. It is unknown if there is a connection between the goddess and the tears of Lys. When first entering the House of Black and White, Arya Stark notes the statue of a marble woman, 12 feet tall (3,66 meters). Real tears are trickling from the eyes, filling the bowl the woman cradled in her arms.

Weeping Woman: Another name for the *Weeping Lady of Lys*

Wights: The dead men or creatures resurrected by Others through necromancy, seemingly when touched by the cold that accompanies them. Anyone who falls against the Others must be burned, or else the dead will rise again as their blue-eyed thralls.

The appearance of wights depends on the condition of the corpse

when it is raised. Some are lifelike, while others are badly rotten although the process of decay has been halted. All are easily identified by their eyes having turned bright blue[3][4] like two blue stars, and their hands and feet black and swollen with pooled and congealed blood.

Unlike Others, wights are slow and clumsy. Wights have a queer, cold scent that can panic living animals if they catch a whiff of it. It appears that wights retain at least some of their former memories. Wights can remain in a state of stasis, lying in wait to attack. Others ride dead horses as their steeds.



White Walkers on their Fabled Spider Dount (credit: (Marc Simonetti))

Being dead, wights feel no pain and will continue to fight regardless of injury. Though they can be stopped by total dismemberment, their limbs can continue to move if detached from their bodies. When a wight is destroyed, the blue disappears from its eyes.

Wights are flammable and quickly consumed if set aflame.

White Walkers: The Others, also known as white walkers, cold gods, and white shadows, are a species of humanoid beings that exist in the north beyond the Wall. The Others are tall and gaunt, with flesh pale as milk. They have cold blue eyes that have been described as burning like ice, or being as bright as blue stars. Others have pale blue blood and shiny bones like milkglass.

According to George R. R. Martin, the Others “are strange, beautiful... think, oh... the Sidhe made of ice, something like that... a different sort of life... inhuman, elegant, dangerous.” Further, although Old Nan describes the Others as “dead things”, Martin has stated that the Others are not dead. However, the *Night's King's* queen, presumably an Other due to her blue eyes and pale skin, is described as a “corpse queen” on account of her white, cold skin.

The Others wear delicate, reflective, camouflaging armor that shifts in color with every step. According to comic book artist Tommy Patterson,

Martin told him that “the reflective, camouflaging armor” is able to pick up “the images of the things around it like a clear, still pond.” The Others appear to be superior swordsmen, wielding thin crystal swords.

When asked what substance the swords of the Others are made from, Martin answered “Ice. But not like regular old ice. The Others can do things with ice that we can’t imagine and make substances of it.” The blades the Others use seem to be rather cold. They are able to cover a metal blade in frost, and shatter a steel blade.

The Others are capable of resurrecting dead men or creatures as wights. Only burning the bodies of the deceased can prevent the Others from resurrecting them. Martin has refused to answer whether or not the Others control these resurrected people and animals in the same way a warg or Skinchanger can control an animal. There are tales of Others riding the corpses of dead animals such as bears, direwolves, mammoths, and horses. Some tales also speak of Others riding giant ice spiders.

The Others go lightly on the snow and leave no prints to mark their passage. Their movements can be lightning quick and graceful. Extreme cold accompanies them, but it is unknown whether the Others only come when it is so cold, or whether they bring the cold with them. White frosty mist also rises when they are near.

The Others seem to hate “every creature with hot blood in its veins. Melisandre, a red priestess, believes that the Others are the “cold children” of the *Great Other*, who wages eternal war against R’hllor.

The Others have a few known weaknesses that are recorded in ancient texts. One is obsidian, otherwise called dragonglass or “frozen fire”. Ancient texts also record a weakness to “dragonsteel”, which some think may be Valyrian steel. When asked about the ability of Valyrian steel to kill an Other, Martin replied that “the Night’s Watch would like to know as well”. Fire is known to dismay the Others.

U

Yndros of the Twilight: Yndros of the Twilight is deity worshiped in Lys. Yndros is male by day and female by night, and their acolytes can supposedly transform themselves from male to female and female to male in the act of love. Lys is a port city with no established faith. Temples and shrines to many different gods can be found in the streets and waterfronts of the city, including a temple of R’hllor, and the Temple of Trade. Pantera, Yndros of the Twilight, Bakkalon and Saagael are some of the manifold deities of Lys.

Yi Ti Religion: Yi Ti is a nation and region in Essos, east of Qarth and the Bone Mountains and bordered by the Jade Sea to the south. Nearby islands in the Jade Sea are Leng and the Isle of Whips.

Yi Ti is ruled by a god-emperor. Lomas Longstrider once described Yi Ti as “the land of a thousand gods and a hundred princes, ruled by one god-emperor.” Of old, the god-emperors were extremely wealthy and powerful, and commanded large armies. In present times, however, three men claim the title of god-emperor, while their power does not extend past the cities in which they live. Instead, the hundred princes rule their own realms as they see fit, as do the brigands, priest-kings, sorcerers, warlords, imperial generals, and tax collectors outside their domains.

The Lion of Night is a god in Yi Ti. The religion as practiced by the Church of Starry Wisdom supposedly originates from Yi Ti, with the Bloodstone Emperor of Yi Ti being seen as the first High Priest. The religion still persists in many cities throughout the known world.

The Yi Ti residents also honor several festivals. These include the Festival of Never-Ceasing Light, also known as the Festival of the Maiden-Made-Of-Light - Marking the transition of one year into the next, this festival is most famous for its floating lanterns. The Festival of the Ravenous Spirits takes place half way through the year. The Festival of the Ravenous Spirits is intended to celebrate and remember the ancestors, and takes place over three days. And lastly, The Plum Blossom Festival. A steadfast event through winter, the Plum Blossom gives its name to the celebration remembers times of frigid, trying weather and is the last to be celebrated before the cycle begins anew.

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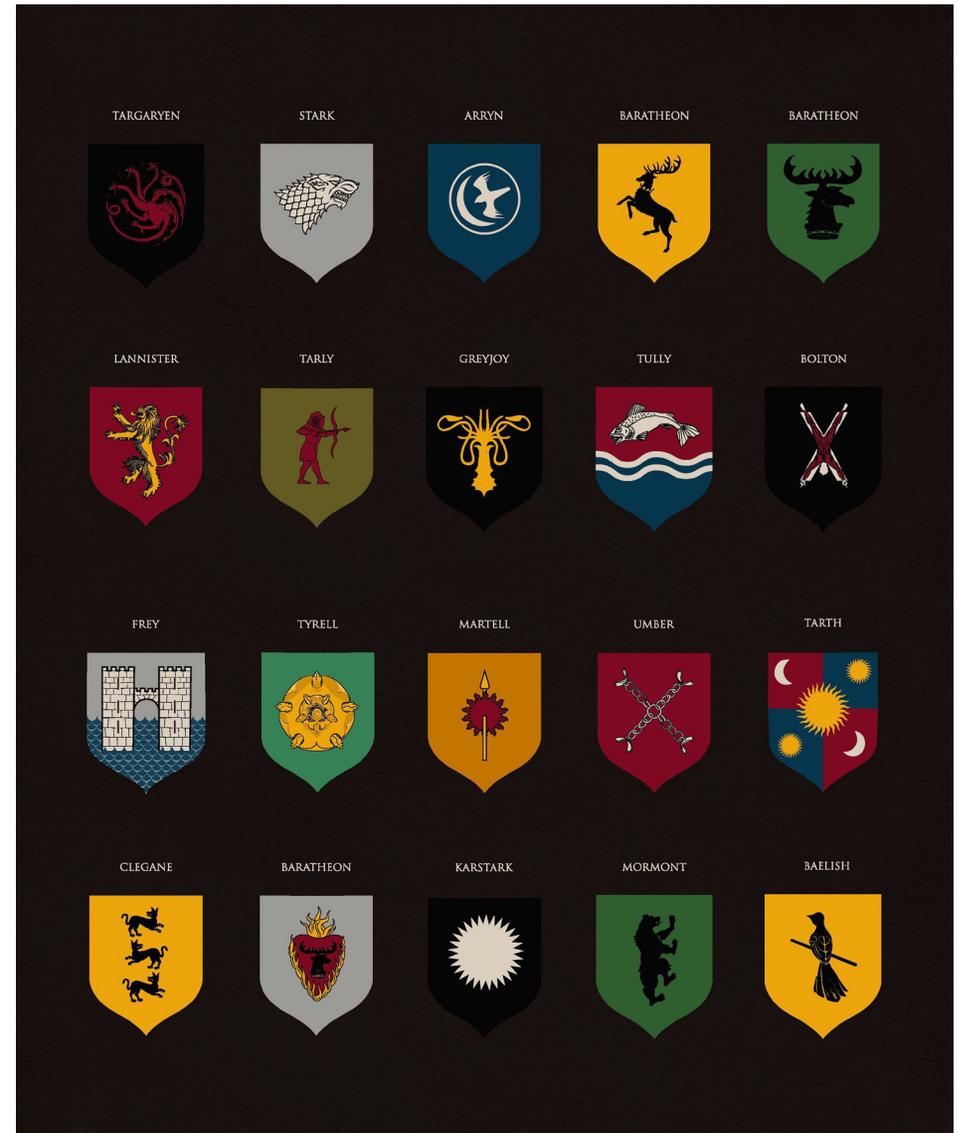
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House Emblems and Icons from the Books (credit: HBO's Game of Thrones)
There is a rich tradition of Heraldry from the Book series.