

HISTORY of the Hemeians and the Hemeian religion – PATH OF VIGOR

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Contents

Debate	1
Introduction	2
Creation Myth – Creation of the Moon of Vigor	2
The Age of Sanoans	3
The Dark Ages	3
Rise of the First Hemeian Kingdoms and start of the Path of Vigor:	4
Formation of the Great K'thonian Empire (1st Founding)	4
The Warring Period	5
Establishment of the Honnongvile Hemeian Empire (2nd Founding)	6
Present Day	7

Debate

During the present time, in the city of Hemeia, there is much debate over the perceived origins of the Hemeians and their main religion – “PATH OF VIGOR” – of how they came about and how they evolved through to the present day.

Much of this scholarly debate is between the new age students and historical chroniclers coming out of the university of Hemeia. The various guilds, in the floating city of Hemeia, have begun to financially support such organized discourse over the discovery of past histories and fund grant programs that enable more scholars to conduct studies around the same.

These discussions come much to the chagrin of the clerical office of the “PATH OF VIGOR” that governs the judicial turnings of the city of Hemeia and enforces the edicts of the religion. They claim sole authorship over any and all religious doctrines, histories, or beliefs, and of any changes made to the said records. But other than loudly protest, there is not much that they can directly do to curb any such discussions, mostly due in part to the recent changes made by the

late emperor Ferien allowing for more freedom of expression to all card holding members of the city guilds.

With the war with the Akeans in full swing, and the fear of mass starvation, the money spent on validating theories of the origin stories seems frivolous and attract the envy of the many near-starving residents in the lesser well-off parts of the city. With every new discovery that contradicts the official clerical record, the boiling pot of potential conflict brewing under the city grows more volatile.

Introduction

Most folks, in and outside of the city, the guilds, the monarchical system and even the clergy, believe in a common shared history for the most part, give and take personal politics. Some discussions around parts of it warrant only minor squabbles, whereas others can delve into warfare.

Let's take look at how the opinions differ and gather some insights into how the current Hemeian Civilisation came to be.

Creation Myth – Creation of the Moon of Vigor

According to the official clerical statements and oral myths, long ago in the beginning, the primordial entity only known as – Ah'thra, had decided to create the planetary body of Zilea in swirling currents of reality. To illuminate her creation, she spawned four offsprings in the form of large immensely bright and beautiful spheres that orbited Zilea. They would each take turns to keep the world lit for their mother - Ah'thra - to view.

Of the four, MOON OF VIGOR was the largest, and furthest away, but it shined bright and spent more time circling the planet than the others. In a bout of jealousy, the other three schemed to destroy it. A battle ensued in which one of the siblings shattered and rained on the planet. In the aftermath, they all came to a shared agreement and hence there forth, took equal turns to keep the planet alight despite their differences.

Very little is known about what transpired near the beginning, but the college of astronomical scholars believe that the myth has some truth to it. The presence of a ring around the planet and the elemental properties of the mystical shards (that everyone makes use of), suggests that there was once a fourth moon that orbited their planet. They believed that all moons had unique orbits, cycles and properties that made them each unique. And like the MOON OF VIGOR, each of them had a mysterious pull or an invisible energy that influenced the formation of the landscape and even life on Zilea and continues to do so.

The Age of Sanoans

Countless different iterations of life arose on Zilea, populating the known world, but none ever reached the same threshold of technological and cultural breakthrough as the Sanoans did.

This age was their golden era; they had come a long way to become more than just another tribe. They were a wide and diverse civilization that dotted the entire planet, trying as all civilizations do – out best each other technologically, culturally and explore the world around them.

From what can be discerned from the remaining texts, the Sanoan religion formed a core pillar of their culture, and the moons were directly codified as central deities in their religion.

Many from the clergy and artificer guilds believe that their codifying of the moons as gods marks the beginning of the PATH OF VIGOR or at least some proto version of it, but the university historians dispute this, citing lack of enough evidence in the records themselves and also the fact that many other religions also make a mention of the moons in one way or the other without having to be related to the PATH OF VIGOR.

Similarly, while the idea is enticing enough for it to be general myth, there is no concrete evidence pointing to the fact that the Hemeians are direct descendants of the Sanoan Civilization.

What is known is that the Sanoans were all intrinsically in-tune with the energies that emanated from the three remaining moons that orbited Zilea, a matter of fact of which they were well aware of and were happy enough to master to shape the world around, but it was also one of which they lacked the sufficient knowledge (even with their achievements) to understand the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of it. It formed the basis of many of their ponderous pursuits, of which, one would potentially cause the beginning of their decline.

The Dark Ages

There is more than a heated debate amongst historians and religious clergy about causes behind the decline of the Sanoan civilization.

Historians speculate that there was a gradual decline, the causes of which weren’t empirically documented. But archaeological evidence near the remains of ancient shard castles and some hints from past manorial rolls and crop ledgers suggest that the cause of the decline was the result of mass crop failure. Which seems to be had been compounded by the mystical nature of experiments they were conducting in relation to the moon of Vigor. A competing school of historians denied confirming these claims, citing lack of funding and resources for it from their guarantors.

On the other hand, the clerical scholars claim that the Sanoan age ended with a calamity brought on by the gods. They say that the Sanoans and the Akeans (another sentient species that inhabited Zilea), in their indulgence of extravagant decadence disrespected and angered the Ah’thra. So, in retribution, she rid them of all moon light and disappeared the moons and turned the skies of Zilea completely black. This was followed by a millennium of mass strife and

struggle that threw all organized societies into chaos and disrepair. Though the historians completely rebuke the claim, the belief is shared by most common folk.

There's another theory laid out by the old artificers and the royal mages. They claim that the dark ages were brought on by a series of natural disaster, followed by the emergence of a great threat from the dark depths of the blue abyss – The Weeping Ones. A race of ocean dwellers that took the opportunity of a weakened Sanoan state to attack and plunder, before eventually retreating back into the ocean depths. This theory is considered fringe and has been accused by many of pushing an agenda supporting the Emperor's war.

Not much is known about the surviving Sanoans; there are very few records of how they survived, of the societies they formed, or the religion they followed.

Rise of the First Hemeian Kingdoms and start of the Path of Vigor:

The deep strife of the dark ages ended with the beginning of the first Hemeian Age. As society began to recover, and people rediscovered the use of the moon-shards, and it became easier to establish larger societies and cities once again. More and more began to engage in work beyond subsistence farming. And slowly, a new group of people began to rise known as the Hemeians. At first, smaller tribes coalesced into larger ones, and as they conquered each other, the first Hemeian kingdoms and city-states were established.

This also marked the beginning of a proto form of what would later become the PATH OF VIGOR religion. However, at the time, it was still in the early stages - different kingdoms and city-states had their own interpretations of the religion and of how it should be practiced. In the background there was also the foundations of a clergy class beginning to form.

Formation of the Great K'thonian Empire (1st Founding)

K'thon the Great, the first ruler of the K'thonian Empire, managed to unite all of the Hemeian kingdoms under his rule and became the first Hemeian emperor. However, his dynasty would not last long. At this time, a central church determining the religious doctrine of the PATH OF VIGOR, which had been slowly forming in the shadows, had by now become a powerful entity within the new Hemeian empire.

The clergy posited that the Hemeian people could only ever be ruled over by someone who had mandate of Ah'thra, and according to them, only they could decide who could hold such a mandate. This caused tensions between the dynastic rulers of the K'thonian empire, and the clergy and it created divisions on fundamental lines within the empire. The army and the higher-class noble families would side with the K'thonian rulers, while the merchants and lower-class nobility sided with the clergy. This led to the start of the warring period.

The Warring Period

The first Hemeian Empire would quickly fall and fracture into multiple smaller kingdoms once again, each taking a side. And even after the death of every last claimant to the throne of K'thon, the wars would continue. Belligerents on either side would prop up new claimants faster than the old ones would die.

The K'thonian wars would last a very long time. Eventually, two fighting factions would become three, and three would become six. Deeper fault lines would begin to appear even amongst the most stoic of the clergy and their associated factions, who would often even fight amongst themselves, from time to time.

A commonly held view between all scholars and even the clergy of the present day is that this era had a major influence over the development of the Hemeian culture (how it is today) and over the formation of the two branches of the Path of Vigor: the HIGH PATH and the PENITENT PATH.

The HIGH PATH would closely resemble the original PATH OF VIGOR, while the PENITENT PATH advocated for people to give up all pleasures that weren't granted to them through prayer or through reaching zen. However, some of its followers believed that it wasn't enough to just let go of their worldly pleasures through prayer, they had to become penitent for the negative actions of all beings and not just their own, as a function of their daily life, believing it to be the only way to achieve zen. Led by an outcast priest, the faction radicalized and implemented a more stringent doctrine that would use violence to enforce the penitence over themselves and non-believers.

There are allegedly copious written documents detailing the many massacres and large-scale artificial starvation events that occurred during this era within the locked vaults of the clerical library. But the clerical office has, in the past and in the present, denied the existence of any such records, or wrongdoing, or culpability for any massacres that may have been committed in the name of Ah'thra. The only thing clerical office agrees on is the occurrence of schism that separated the clergy into two sects.

Establishment of the Honnongvile Hemeian Empire (2nd Founding)

This era is marked by the second unification of the Hemeians under one ruler - Honnongvile the Uniter - the great-great-grandfather of the late emperor Ferien.

It is said that he, with the help of the giants past the wavering mountains, took every kingdom and formed the Honnongvile Empire. He would also rig the chains, establishing the now floating capital city of Hemeia under the ruins of an old Sanoan city.

Upon taking the emperor's throne, his first steps were to pass various reforms to the PATH OF VIGOR religion, incorporating various aspects of both the HIGH PATH and the PENTITENT PATH, and at the same time making it the state religion and would assign the judicial duties to the newly established clerical office. It would also be the first time the clergy would hand the mandate to a sitting emperor.

While the power to rule and collect taxes remained with the emperor, the newly established clerical office oversaw all religious and judicial duties like the settling of internal disputes and passing of judgements. Though this allowed the clergy of the PATH OF VIGOR an official role - as an established institution with a large bureaucracy and its own army of warrior priests within the power structure - historians argue that true power still lay with the emperor, who was now not only the head of the state, but also the religion.

His successors followed his example and passed more progressive reforms that they thought would put them amongst their great forefather. One of such successors established the University of Hemeia and another introduced the guild system, encouraging wealthy merchants and noble houses to invest in the newly formed guilds and various trade infrastructure projects in the City of Hemeia.

While those at the top echelon of the city's hierarchy did enjoy the subsequent prosperity and became very rich, the quickly growing decline would become a clear indicator for what's come to next.

The late emperor Ferien Honnongvile was proud to continue his ancestor's legacy, but many argue that his efforts were largely to satisfy his own vanity than to maintain the prosperity of the empire and its subjects.

"No man is ever satiated with the food on his plate; he hungers for his neighbour's plate. It is fervent nature of who we are. Conquerors, masters are we, and so shall we fulfil what we were meant to be. The Empire must bleed, if it must survive." – Honnongvile

Present Day

The late emperor Ferien is Dead. He died in the war against the Akeans his great-great-grandfather started. A war that is slowly turning the cracks on the fringes of the empire into gaps that threaten to swallow all that everyone has worked so hard to keep.

The college of historians officially maintain the opinion that the world has never been better place for the common man - Freedom of expression, prosperity through trade and security through peace are all because of the actions of the Honnongvile Emperors.

But in the present day, for many, as the war with the Akeans worsens, the trade visibly declines, the people starve - the past now validated as truth, seems increasingly evident and more with past precedent. Which is something that scares anyone with even a little bit of common sense and intensifies the mistrust and paranoia amongst all parties (the historians, the college of astronomy scholars, the students, the guilds, the artificers, the royal mages, the court, the nobles and even the clergy).

However, there is also no shared consensus with which to proceed. Each faction and group are preparing a different plan for self-preservation, but there are also those looking to stoke the chaos, brewing below, to climb the ladder they see through the smoke.