



one course to bring them all
who have survived *The Created Medieval History*

THE RECORDS OF THE HISTORY OF MIDDLE-EARTH

HSTR436T

pre-requisite: HSTR336T

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UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
SPRING 2020
Thursdays 2:30 to 5:20

The History of Middle-earth

is the lifetime work of J.R.R. Tolkien. A product of his deep academic background and his imaginative genius, it stands as a remarkable and unique achievement. It is remarkable because of its sheer size and range, running to thousands of printed pages, containing a myriad of details over a huge range of subjects, and unique because it is a true history in its form and content, and is no less history simply because it is created.

To some extent, all history is created, even the assumed real history of university departments and professional historians, for everything that is of the human intellect is in part a creation, as rational processes are applied to topics and issues and problems. The establishment of fact, that chimerical and unreliable pseudo-thing so often thought to be the stuff of real history, is certainly to be found throughout Tolkien's *History*. But it is the true and proper purpose of history that Tolkien managed to make the stuff of his work. It is the understanding of why and how peoples have understood their worlds, developed ideas and ideals, comprehended the natural and supernatural, and tried to act and react to the circumstances in which they find themselves, all the while amidst change and striving to retain continuity and understanding of themselves and their societies. It is for this reason that Tolkien's work is best understood as history, rather than literature. Of course, among the many sources for the historian is literature, so Tolkien's literary output is *de facto* worthy of historical study.



But Tolkien created much more than simple literature, if he created literature at all. Starting with a foundation of new and complete languages – themselves the foundation of knowing – he built around them the history of a world of unrivalled depth and complexity. And it is no coincidence that the mass of materials he produced looks to the historian just like the records of true history: they are full of complexity, existing in various versions and replete with contradictions and editorial puzzles; there are gaps and losses, usually in the very places we would most like to have clarity; there are various subject areas that we cannot explore, because there is nothing with which to work. Historians live here, with Eriol and Rúmil, Meril and Gilfanon, Caladriel and Elrond, Bilbo and Frodo. We will live here this term.