

Tolkien's Kingdoms of the West: Founded in History

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The Lord of the Rings is a much beloved series which owes part of its success to how J.R.R. Tolkien leveraged real-world history to create a fantastical fairy tale that was still familiar and relatable to the reader. While *The Lord of the Rings* should not be taken as an allegory for any specific historical event, Tolkien used his knowledge of history and languages to bring historical elements into his story that helped provide a familiar foundation for his legendarium. While many scholars have written on Tolkien's use of linguistics and on the structural soundness and depth of his fictional history, fewer scholars have tackled the commonalities between his fictional history and the real world. In this paper we will explore how the secondary-world histories of Númenor, Gondor and Arnor are, in part, a retelling of the primary world's myths and history of Atlantis, Rome and Byzantium.

On Tolkien

Any analysis of Tolkien's work, especially one that looks for links to the real world, should first examine Tolkien's own view on his writing. First, Tolkien has made it very clear that he disliked allegory and didn't believe that any specific war or period of time in the real world directly influenced his plot or the development of his story. However he acknowledged that it's understandable that people would look for allegory in his writing. As he put it in a letter to Milton Waldman of London publisher Collins in 1951, "I dislike Allegory – the conscious and intentional allegory – yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language. (And, of course, the more 'life' a story has the more readily will it be susceptible of allegorical interpretations; while the better a deliberate allegory is made the more nearly will it be acceptable just as a story)" (Tolkien Letters 145). Tolkien maintained his stance on allegory throughout his life and often addressed the question on whether his experience in World War I or his views on World War II had any influence on his stories. In a letter to Professor L.W.Forster in 1960 he reaffirmed this position by stating that "Personally I do not think that either war (and of course not the atomic bomb) had any influence upon either the plot or the manner of its unfolding. Perhaps in landscape. The Dead Marshes and the approaches to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme. They owe more to William Morris and his Huns and Romans, as in *The House of the Wolfings* or *The Roots of the Mountains*" (Tolkien Letters 303).

However, while *Lord of the Rings* and the Middle-earth legendarium should not be interpreted as allegory for any real-world event, it's clear that Tolkien used elements of the real world to inform events in Middle-earth. In various

correspondence with publishers, family and friends, Tolkien acknowledged that elements of language, locations, plot and even individuals did find a home in his writings. In a 1954 letter to Naomi Mitchison, a proofreader, he commented that "The archaic language of lore is meant to be a kind of 'Elven-Latin', and by transcribing it into a spelling closely resembling that of Latin the similarity to Latin has been increased ocularly" (Tolkien Letters 176). Similarly, he wrote to his grandson, Michael George Tolkien in 1966 that he borrowed names from history in his works with "Mirkwood is not an invention of mine, but a very ancient name, weighted with legendary associations. It was probably the Primitive Germanic name for the great mountainous forest regions that anciently formed a barrier to the south of the lands of Germanic expansion" (Tolkien Letters 369). He would often reply to friends, colleagues and fans with insights into where ideas in his writing came from. He responded to one question regarding the origin of Galadriel, agreeing that elements of Mary the Virgin Mother of Christ are in her makeup, but also that of the penitent, as she was paying for her sins of rebelling against the Valar, Middle-earth's divine residents, in the First Age (Tolkien Letters 407). His commentary also referenced his use of history as he compared the end of *The Lord of the Rings* to the reestablishment of the Holy Roman Empire (Tolkien Letters 376). Religion also played a role in his story as he stated in a 1956 letter that "Actually I am a Christian, and indeed a Roman Catholic, so that I do not expect 'history' to be anything but a 'long defeat' – though it contains (and in a legend may contain more clearly and movingly) some samples or glimpses of final victory" (Tolkien Letters 255). His belief that life is a 'long defeat' goes a long way in explaining why, even after the ultimate victory over Sauron, there were still many sad partings and the victory may not have been won for those like Gandalf, Frodo and the elves. Even with the fall of Sauron, strife and war continued to plague the free peoples of Middle-earth. King Elessar and King Eomer went to war with the Easterlings and Southrons in their own territories beyond the Sea of Rhûn and into the far south following the war (Tolkien King 1045).

Scholars of Tolkien's works seem to agree that Tolkien relied on his real world knowledge to help frame his stories. As Michael Perry put it in *Untangling Tolkien* "Like most gifted writers, Tolkien borrowed heavily from the past, showing talent in what he selected. In his case, that meant names, themes, plots and even literary style were taken almost wholesale from the ancient languages and literature of Northern Europe" (Perry 20). Various scholars point to different time frames that Tolkien may have leveraged in

his writings. Christina Scull, in her paper *The Influence of Archaeology and History on Tolkien's World* commented on how his scholarly focus influenced his writing by stating "Tolkien was mainly concerned with teaching and writing about works in Old and Middle English, though his interests extended to Nordic and Germanic languages and sagas, Celtic tales, Welsh language, and the Finnish Kalevala. Many critics have noted how much Tolkien's knowledge of these texts contributed to his writings about Middle-earth" (Scull 33). James Obertino pointed to the classical period as an influence in his paper *Barbarians and Imperialism in Tacitus and The Lord of the Rings* (Obertino 117). As the classical world gave way to the Dark Ages, so to do scholars think this period also influenced Tolkien's writings. Patricia Reynolds in her essay *Looking Forward from the White Tower* discussed how elements of life in the Dark Ages were included in the series (Reynolds 6), while James Allen reinforced this concept in his essay *The Decline and Fall of the Osgiliathian Empire* (Allen 4). Perhaps best summing up how history may have influenced Tolkien is Douglas Burger's comment in his essay *The Uses of the Past in The Lord of the Rings* that "Thus when J.R.R. Tolkien turns to fantasy, it is in no way surprising that his work should be deeply indebted to the past, particularly to the past of early legend and medieval tale... Quite naturally, then in his trilogy, Tolkien uses the genres, characters, symbolic structure, and often the original languages of ancient and medieval story" (Burger 23).

Tolkien's Use of History

Tolkien's ability to weave a self-contained history for his legendarium while still leveraging elements from the real world is a key factor in the readability and believability of his works. As Lionel Basney put it in his essay *Myth, History and Time in The Lord of the Rings* "The central characteristic of Tolkien's work – thus the one the critic must explain first and most carefully – is this structural and tonal integrity..... The most comprehensive of these structures are 'myth' and 'history; the most general movement, the growth of one into the other" (Basney 184). Basney goes on to say that because Tolkien isn't anchored to retelling a specific story anchored on some external factor, Tolkien's fictional world can create its own historical structural integrity (Basney 193). Douglas Barbour added in his essay *The Shadow of the Past* that it's not just the readers of the story which are led through this fictional history but the characters when he stated "Nevertheless, not only do the readers feel they are surveying a deep past, but the protagonists of the story are continually making the same discovery, and thus the stories, legends and history of their world continually affect the way they feel, think and act" (Barbour 36). These historical elements, by referencing the past, build credibility for the present story (Barbour 39). Tolkien himself reinforces that his approach to *The Lord of the Rings* and the Middle-earth legendarium is one of a historian more than a writer of fiction. In a letter to Miss. A. P. Northey in 1965 he states "I think it is better not to state everything (and indeed it is

more realistic, since in chronicles and accounts of 'real' history, many facts that some enquirer would like to know are omitted, and the truth has to be discovered or guessed from such evidence as there is)" (Tolkien Letters 354). Tolkien further strengthens the structural integrity of his fictional history by tying it to the history of our real world. Tolkien states "imaginatively, this 'history' is supposed to take place in a period of the actual Old World of this planet" (Tolkien Letters 220) and that "Mine is not an 'imaginary' world, but an imaginary historical moment on 'Middle-earth' – which is our habitation" (Tolkien Letters 244). He even suggests that a gap of 6,000 years exists between the fall of Barad-Dûr, Sauron's stronghold at the end of the Third Age, and our present times which would put these events around 4,000 B.C. (Tolkien Letters 283).

Even individual characters within the story lend themselves to establishing this self-contained history. Barbour points out that Shelob, the giant spider lurking in Cirith Ungol, is terrifying because she is so ancient, a throwback to Ungoliant who brought darkness to Valinor in the First Age. Likewise, the Ring's history stretches back to the early part of the Second Age and Sauron also goes back to the First Age. The song of Beren and Lúthien ties many of these elements together showing Frodo and Sam that they are part of the epic tale that began back when the world was created (Barbour 39). Burger points out that "Gandalf serves as a model scholar in his attitude toward the past and in his uses of past knowledge; and the particular characteristics of the kindly old wizard conveyed even more sharply and emphatically when his attitudes are compared with another deeply learned wizard of Middle-earth, Saruman" (Burger 25). Even some of the human characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are shown to be students of history with both Denethor and Faramir having studied the ancient lore housed in Gondor (Tolkien Towers 655). Drawing this back to Tolkien, the sub-creator, Burger concludes that "Tolkien does for our world what Gandalf does for Middle-earth: he tries to reconcile the past of old story to present life" (Burger 27).

While the structural integrity of the fictional history is critical to the believability of Tolkien's writing, the familiarity of the history is also a key component in gaining the reader's interest and attention. In his essay *Middle-earth: An Imaginary World* Paul Kocher states "But Tolkien knew, none better, that no audience can long feel sympathy or interest for persons or things in which they cannot recognize a good deal of themselves and the world of their everyday experience" and "Consequently the reader walks through any Middle-earth landscape with a security recognition that woos him on to believe in everything that happens. Familiar but not too familiar, strange but not too strange" (Kocher Imaginary 147). While the average reader may not be the student of history that Tolkien was, most are familiar with the broad concepts of classical, medieval and renaissance history, especially those who live in Europe where they are surrounded by the monuments and ruins of the past. In *High Towers and Strong Places* Timothy Furnish points out that "J.R.R. Tolkien's Secondary World is so convincing, and

the influence of his books so vast, that it might be reasonable to view him as not just a novelist but as a historian – and a Eurocentric one, at that, since Middle-earth is clearly “the North-West of the Old World, east of the Sea” (Furnish 6).

The Númenorean Connection

While the entire Middle-earth legendarium has elements of the real world woven into it, the history of Númenor and its two descendent kingdoms, Arnor and Gondor, are of particular interest in this essay. Gondor is a central location in *The Lord of the Rings* and a critical component of its history. Númenor and Arnor are also historically relevant in the story as Númenor’s fall prompts the creation of the Kingdoms in Exile and Aragorn is the last in the line of Arnorian heirs. These kingdoms represent a few of the human kingdoms in a world populated by elves, dwarves, orcs and other fantasy creatures. As human kingdoms they are most likely to reflect the politics, economies and warfare similar to those seen in our real world history. While some scholars will draw comparisons to the Egyptians (Scull 37) or Iron Age cultures (Allen 3), most scholars agree that the Roman and Byzantine Empires influenced the descriptions of Arnor and Gondor.

However, it’s important to keep in mind that Tolkien’s presentation of Middle-earth’s history shifts as it progresses from the creation of Arda through the First and Second Ages to its culmination at the close of the Third age. Arda’s creation is presented by Tolkien as cosmological myth, similar to those found in Greek, Christian and other real world creation myths. While the creation myth may be believed, it’s distant from and outside of recorded history. The events of the First Age and early Second Age are a blend of myth and history as elements of the ‘divine’ are slowly overshadowed by those more tangible and real (Tolkien Letters 146). Tolkien notes that “As the stories become less mythical, and more like stories and romances, Men are interwoven” (Tolkien Letters 149). The Dominion of Men, realized as the Third Age comes to a close, is the final transition from myth and legend into pre-history, linking Middle-earth to our real world (Tolkien Letters 207).

As a result, direct comparisons of the Roman and Byzantine Empires to the Third Age kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor are more easily seen than those to Númenor of the Second Age. Tolkien himself, in the letter to Milton, prompts a robust comparison to the Roman and Byzantine empires with the following statement “In the south Gondor rises to a peak of power, almost reflecting Númenor, and then fades slowly to decayed Middle Age, a kind of proud, venerable but increasingly impotent Byzantium” (Tolkien Letters 157). Arnor and Gondor’s history follows a path similar to that of Roman and Byzantium with the kingdoms impacted by migrations of people from the east, internal strife, plague and war. As described by Kocher, “Just as Earth has seen wave after wave of tribal migrations into Europe from east and north, so on Middle-earth the elves, the Edain, the Rohirrim, and the hobbits have drifted west at various periods from the same directions. Also, our

Europe has warred from early times against Arabs from the south and Persians, Mongols, and Turks from the Near or Far East. Similarly Gondor resists Easterlings and Southrons, who have pressed against its borders for millennia and have become natural allies of Sauron. The Haradrim of the south even recall Saracens in their swarthy hue, use of elephant ancestors, while the Wainriders from the east come in wagons rather like those of the Tartar hordes. The men of Gondor live and fight in a kind of legendary Arthurian, protomedieval mode, and the Rohirrim differ from early Anglo-Saxons mainly in living by the horse, like Cossacks” (Kocher Imaginary 161). Reynolds draws an even closer comparison stating that “Tolkien uses history in the second way, as a means of verifying detail; for example several parallels have been suggested for the siege of Minas Tirith, including Vienna and Constantinople. I suggest that Tolkien drew upon one or more of these to make sure he portrayed the siege in a believable way. Similarly, the stewards of Gondor have a parallel in the Major of the Palace of late Merovingian France. These Men, originally members of the Royal household kept power from les rois faineants, the child-kings” (Reynolds 9).

While Gondor and Arnor are comparable to the Roman and Byzantine Empires, Tolkien viewed Númenor as his take on the Atlantis myth (Tolkien Letters 151). Like Atlantis, Númenor was an island kingdom peopled by a race of men thought to be superior to those on the mainland. Both islands reached a technological peak greater than other kingdoms and then became corrupt, using their might to oppress other people. Both kingdoms were destroyed over the course of one night as the islands were swallowed up by the ocean. While the early history of Númenor and the overarching story pull heavily from the Atlantis myth, elements of Roman and Byzantine influence are present, especially as Tolkien’s history transitions from the more mythical early Second Age to the more historical Third Age.

As part of the analysis showing how the history of the Númenoreans, Arnorians and Gondorians draws strongly from that of Atlantis, Rome and Byzantine empires we will examine the evolution of the political and military positions of the kingdoms during key historical points. Three frameworks will be applied to help examine these positions. The first framework is the ruling structure of kingdoms as discussed in Furnish’s book *High Towers and Strong Places*. This book looks at the different types of rulership in Middle-earth and how the different races, based on their characteristics, most often fell under one type versus another. This framework looks internally at how a kingdom or empire is managed versus how the kingdom interacts with other cultures and realms. Furnish’s framework is as follows:

- Rule by One – Monarchy is a clear example of this category with Dictatorship being an extreme example
- Rule by a Few – Feudal systems, aristocracy or oligarchy are examples of where power is concentrated across a small group due to family, religious or economic power

- Rule by Many – A republic or democracy where all people have a voice in decision making (Furnish 76-77)

Examples of these systems include the ancient Egyptian pharaohs, medieval Europe and the United States, respectively.

The second framework is drawn from David Wilkinson's essay *The Power Configuration of the Central World Systems* which examines the environment in which the kingdoms existed. Unlike the Furnish framework which looks at the internal management of the kingdom, the Wilkinson framework looks at the external environment in which the kingdom exists. Wilkinson indicates that kingdoms typically exist in one of seven environments as follows:

- Empire – Unified, centralized, usually bureaucratized system wide structure
- Hegemony – A Weaker form of systemwide inequality and domination
- Unipolarity/Non-hegemonic – Where one superpower is unable or disinclined to induce general followership among the weaker states
- Bipolarity – With two great super powers
- Tripolarity – With three great super powers
- Multipolarity – With more than three great super powers
- Non-Polarity – No great super powers (Wilkinson 659)

Finally, the kingdom's military and cultural strategy at each time point will be categorized using the classification developed by Edward Luttwak as described in his books *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* and *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*. Effectively, the strategy is a reflection of how the first framework, the internal management of the kingdom, addresses the environment in which they exist, the Second Framework. The categories are as follows:

- Julio-Claudian – Core Empire with client states responsible for implementing the empire's authority and acting as a buffer against other kingdoms (Luttwak Rome 219)
- Antonine System – Empire has few to no client states and takes on military responsibilities for defending borders lands (Luttwak Rome 220)
- Defense-in-Depth – Purely defensive strategy where enemy incursions were contained by local troops supported by redeployment from surrounding areas (Luttwak Rome 221)
- Byzantine System – Diplomacy First, Force Second (Luttwak Byzantine 55)

While the history of Númenor, Arnor and Gondor spans thousands of years specific instances and periods of history stand out as key points for the kingdoms. For Númenor, whose history Tolkien documented mostly through a description of the kings' reigns supplemented by short stories, there appears to be four distinct phases: The Early Period, the Expansionistic Period, the Imperial Phase and the Fall. These phases echo what we know of Atlantis and reflect both islands' establishment, its slide into evil and its eventual destruction. Arnor and Gondor, which were established following Númenor's fall, have a common history and share many key events which could be categorized as: The Kingdoms in Exile, The Fate of Arnor, Gondor's Early Years, The Enemies of Gondor, the Kinstrife, Plague, and the Empire on the Brink. Finally, the promise of restoration is found in Aragorn's return as the King of the Reunified Kingdom. All of these key periods in Arnorian and Gondorian history, while not necessarily in the same chronological order, echo similar events in the history of the Roman and Byzantine Empires. From a perspective of the framework described above, Gondor and Arnor reflect the Eastern and Western Roman Empire, respectively.

Númenor's Early Period

What might be referred to as the Early Period of Númenor begins when the island kingdom was first established under the reign of Elros Tar-Minyatur in 32 Second Age (S.A) and ended with the return of Númenorean ships to Middle-earth. Following the War of Wrath that ended the First Age the Valar, divine stewards of Middle-earth, recognized the humans who fought against Melkor in the First Age. The Edain, as they were known, were given "a land to dwell in, removed from dangers of Middle-earth" (Tolkien King 1011). The island of Númenor was raised from the ocean to serve as the home of those faithful to the Valar. The leaders of the Númenoreans were legendary figures who preserved the lineage of the heroic Edain chieftains, the lineage of High-elven Kings, and the Maiar, a subset of the Valar, who had inter-married with the elves (Tolkien *Silmarillion* 261). The newly established island kingdom of Númenor was the first of its kind for the humans in Middle-earth and lasted for 3,287 years.

Atlantis had a similarly mythic founding. According to Plato, Atlantis was founded when Poseidon, the Greek God of the Seas, fell in love with a human woman named Clito. He created an island kingdom for her and their sons. When his sons came of age he turned the island kingdom over to them, leaving his oldest, Atlas, as high king (Plato 1299-1300). As such the Atlanteans had divine blood in them, granting them long life and a superior quality over other men (Plato 1306).

Using the previously mentioned framework, Númenor was operating as a Monarchy but because of its isolation was outside any defined international system (Furnish 93). Tolkien provides clarity regarding the rule of Númenor with the insight that "A Númenorean King was monarch, with the power of unquestioned decision in debate; but he governed

the realm with the frame of ancient law, of which he was administrator (and interpreter) but not the maker” (Tolkien Letters 324). Furnish further elaborates that “Second Age Númenor was a monarchy, no doubt; but not an absolute one. Despite the fact that its twenty-five kings were the most powerful and esteemed rulers in all of Arda and, after the time of the ninth, Tar-Súrion, the most powerful militarily, they did not govern unaided, but in concert with the Council of Númenor, known officially as the Council of the Scepter” (Furnish 80). As Númenor wasn’t directly interacting with any other kingdoms it also didn’t have a defined strategy, the third framework, to manage those interactions.

Númenor’s Expansionistic Period

The next period, which stretches from 590-1868 S.A., is an Expansionistic Period where the Númenorean’s return to Middle-earth and begin establishing colonies. The Númenoreans returned to the mainland under the reign of Tar-Elendil, the fourth king of Númenor, who reigned from 590-740 S.A. The Númenoreans re-established contact with the elven kingdoms and later began to establish colonies on the shores of Middle-earth (Tolkien Unfinished 218-219). Tolkien’s story of *Aldarion and Erendis* provides some insight into the period when the Númenoreans first return to Middle-earth. While driven initially by an interest in exploration, the focus of these visits turned to trade as Aldarion returns with many riches for the kingdom. As his trips to the mainland become more frequent, he helps establish colonies loyal to the Númenoreans on the coast. However, once he and his crew return to Númenor, the native population attacked the settlements showing that it was the Númenorean presence which held the colonies together. During this same time period Gil-galad warns the Númenoreans that the evil of Sauron was growing in Middle-earth. It was Sauron’s influence that was disrupting the Númenorean colonies (Tolkien Unfinished 173-217). The conflict with Sauron came to a head when Tar-Minastir, who reigned from 1731-1869 S.A., sent a fleet to aid Gil-galad in the first war against Sauron. The Númenorean’s became a power for good in Middle-earth (Tolkien Unfinished 220).

Atlantis similarly became an honored kingdom. The Atlantean race expanded and amassed wealth beyond what had been known to be possible. They also became the rulers of many other islands and kingdoms throughout the Mediterranean. They were benevolent rulers who provided for the needs of their subjects. They also kept their faith by maintaining the temple and holy ground sacred to Poseidon (Plato 1301-1302).

During this period, Númenor continued to operate as a Monarchy but their expansion brought them into contact with the international environment which was dominated by Sauron’s hegemony. In response to the request for aid from Gil-galad against Sauron, the Númenoreans implemented an Antonine-like strategy where their own military forces were engaged to fight to defend their colonies on the shores of Middle-earth and address the threat of Sauron.

Númenor’s Imperial Phase

The third phase marks a shift from Númenor’s more altruistic expansionistic phase to a self-serving Imperial Phase which runs from 1869-3101 S.A. This period marks a slow but steady decent where Númenoreans began to oppress the other peoples of Middle-earth and neglecting their relationship with the creator, Eru Iluvatar. Under the greedy Tar-Ciryatan, who reigned from 1869-2029 S.A., the Númenoreans began to oppress the other men in Middle-earth and brought back metals and precious gems at their expense. Tar-Ciryatan’s reign was the first on a dark path as not only did he oppress the men of Middle-earth, he forced his father, Tar-Minastir, to surrender the throne to him. Tar-Ciryatan was succeeded by a line of kings each of whom continued to push Númenor down a dark path. Tar-Antanamir, who reigned from 2029-2221 S.A., exacted heavy tribute on the men of Middle-earth and was the first king to speak openly against the Valar. Tar-Ancalimon, 2221-2386 S.A., widened the rift with the elves and banned the use of Elvish languages in Númenor. Under Ar-Adûnakhôr, the kings began to name themselves using the Adûnaic tongue, claiming to be the ‘Lord of the West’. This was seen as blasphemous by the Faithful, a subset of Númenoreans who still loved the elves and remained dedicated to Númenorean ideals. As the Númenoreans moved further into darkness, the length of their life span declined and their kings ruled for fewer years with almost every generation. As their life span declined, the kings of Númenor became more and more obsessed with finding a way to preserve their lives (Tolkien Unfinished 221-222).

As the desire for more wealth from Middle-earth increased, the Númenoreans expanded the number and reach of their colonies (Tolkien Silmarillion 266). These colonies would eventually be the foundation for the kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor. Ruth Lacon in her essay *The Earliest Days of Gondor* suggested that “The main interest of the Númenoreans in Middle-earth lay in Harad: every later reference to the King’s Men places them in Umbar or further south....Harad possessed gold ivory for certain, and may have had gemstones, spices, exotic woods and fancy dyes” (Lacon Earliest 11). Lacon goes on to say that “Much of this trade was probably embedded in the social systems of the inland tribes rather than being the market trade we are familiar with. It would be difficult but not impossible for the Númenoreans to become part of such a system. Roman merchants managed the same feat in Iron Age France” (Lacon Earliest 12). As these settlements became endangered by the native population or the forces of Sauron, the Númenoreans responded by placing a more permanent military force to protect their interests in Middle-earth.

Atlantis began its slide into evil the same way. The Atlanteans, who already ruled multiple island kingdoms, extended their reach through conquest, “setting out to enslave all of the territory inside the strait (meaning the Mediterranean)” (Plato 1232). While continuing to portray themselves as “beauteous and blessed” they were filled with a lust for possessions and power which drove their conquests. Plato

also recounts that “when the divine portion in them began to grow faint as it was often blended with great quantities of mortality and as their human nature gradually gained ascendancy, at that moment, in their inability to bear their great fortune, they became disordered” (Plato 1306).

Unfortunately, Plato’s description of Atlantis lacks many of the details that might better help us understand the Númenorean Imperial phase. However, the early Roman Empire may help fill in some of the gaps. Rome went through a similar expansionist phase after cementing its control of the Italian peninsula. Rome had extensive contact throughout the Mediterranean and northern Europe. Archaeological evidence dated back to that time shows that jewelry, materials such as ivory, and pottery indicate that Rome had an extensive trade network throughout the Mediterranean (Beard 84). This trade, similar to the Númenoreans, led to expansion through the establishment of colonies or military conquest. As territory was annexed the conquered lands swore allegiance to Rome and became client states. These client states were populated by members of the local population and led by a mix of those locals supportive of the Romans and Roman citizens (Beard 165).

Success in expansion, trade and war had the benefit of increasing the Roman Empire’s wealth. “By the mid second century BCE, the profits of warfare had made the Roman people by far the richest of any in their known world...and there was enough left over to line the pockets of the soldiers, from the grandest general to the rawest recruit” (Beard 178). This wealth, in turn, led to a building boom in the empire. “Pompey’s vast building scheme of theatre, gardens, porticoes and meeting rooms, all lined with famous works of sculpture, was a decidedly imperial innovation. It was far more extensive than the individual temples commonly erected by earlier generals in thanks for the help of the gods on the battle field had ever been” (Beard 275). This trend continued after Caesar Augustus became emperor. “One part of this was a massive programme of restoration, of everything from roads and aqueducts to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline, the founding monument of the Republic” (Beard 365). While the Romans imported the wealth of other countries through their expansion they exported culture. Conquered peoples and those that bordered the expanding empire saw the success the Romans had and began to emulate their culture. For example, the Britons adopted many of the cultural aspects of the Romans, dressing in togas and hosting elaborate banquets (Beard 495).

Drawing from what we know of the Romans it’s not hard to guess how the Númenoreans would have approached Middle-earth during their expansionist phase. Per Tolkien, “At first, the Númenoreans had come to Middle-earth as teachers and friends of lesser Men afflicted by Sauron; but now their havens became fortresses, holding wide coastlands in subjection” (Tolkien King 1012). Following Aldarion, the Númenoreans took a different approach, using force to maintain their holdings. This control of lands echoes the early Roman Republic which used its military power to annex land (Campbell 170). As Campbell describes the

Romans, “After consolidation had been completed and major opposition suppressed, the troops had a significant role as peacekeepers within the provinces, and in putting down low-intensity violence, and in maintaining internal security (Campbell 174). Further, “The Romans recognized few restraints in dealing with people they felt were obstinate in their resistance...Indeed, the Romans occasionally resorted to mutilation.” As a result “It is indeed not surprising that many peoples quietly accepted the rule of Rome and her agents, since the economic and social consequences of defeat by the Roman army were incalculable” (Campbell 169-170). With the Númenoreans following a similar pattern, the heroes of the First Age became the scourge of the Second. Elizabeth Hoiem in her essay *World Creation as Colonization* highlights the start of the moral fall of the Númenoreans by stating “Although Númenorean abuses of native Middle-earth peoples are briefly mentioned, the main objection to colonization is its moral corruption of the colonizer” (Hoiem 77).

During this imperialistic phase Númenor continued to be ruled as a Monarchy but it now operated within a bipolar system (Furnish 93). Númenor was one of the two powers on the international stage, balanced against the equal power of Sauron. As it looked to increase trade and the wealth it was bringing back to the island, the Númenoreans subjugated the other humans, developing a series of client states which it used to drive their ambitions. This was indicative of a Julio-Claudian-like approach to their environment. Luttwak explains that Rome was driven similarly as “The Romans generally solved the security problems of their growing empire by further expansion, but this expansion was mostly hegemonic rather than territorial” (Luttwak Rome 53). The client states created by the Roman Empire were responsible for acting in Rome’s interests but had the latitude to do so without direct oversight. Fear of Roman reprisals for uprisings or failure to support the empire kept the client states under control (Luttwak Rome 219-220).

Númenor’s Fall

The final phase of Númenor is its Fall, which encapsulates 3102-3319 S.A. This period is marked by increased religious persecution of those Faithful to Eru and ends with the island’s destruction. Initially, the Númenoreans worshiped Eru Ilúvatar and were respectful of the Ban of the Valar, which prohibited the Númenoreans from sailing west towards the Valar’s home of Valinor (Tolkien King 1011). The Númenoreans relationship with the Valar was so important that the King originally served as high priest by “offering prayer for the coming year at the Erukyerme in the first days of spring, praise of Eru Iluvatar at the Eru-laitale in midsummer and thanksgiving to him at the Eru-hantale at the end of autumn” (Tolkien Unfinished 166). However, the Númenoreans began to slowly shift away from revering the Valar to chafing under the Ban. Under Ar-Adûnakhôr, who reigned from 2899-2962 S.A., kings stopped taking on elvish names when they ascended the throne. Ar-Gimilzôr, who reigned from 3102-3177 S.A.,

banned the use of elvish and prohibited the Eldar from visiting Númenor. The Faithful, those still loyal to the elves and Valar, soon became oppressed and were punished for their faith under the reign of Ar-Gimilzôr. The Faithful were given a respite when Tar-Palantir ascended the throne in 3243 S.A., but this was short lived. Ar-Pharazôn, the last king of Númenor, resumed persecution of the Faithful when he gained the throne in 3255 S.A. Ar-Pharazôn is the most powerful of the Númenorean Kings and successfully captures Sauron. Sauron is at first a prisoner of the King, but through his knowledge and cunning he rises to become the chief counselor to the king. Sauron's influence increases the persecution of the Faithful as he convinces the bulk of the Númenoreans that Eru Iluvatar is a lie and that the real chief of the gods is Morgoth. The Númenoreans build a new temple to Morgoth and sacrifice members of the Faithful to their new god (Tolkien Letters 155-156). The blasphemy continues and eventually the Númenoreans declare war on the Valar (Tolkien *Silmarillion* 268-269). The Númenoreans had completed a cycle where monotheism was supplanted by paganism, except for a brief period under Tar-Palantir, which then became devil-worship.

Rome went through a similar but opposite religious cycle. The Roman Empire began as a pagan empire which was then converted to Christianity. However, this conversion did not occur immediately and in the early stages, the faithful Christians were persecuted for their beliefs. When Christianity first started taking hold in the Roman Empire, the leaders of the Pagan regime were uncertain how to deal with the new religion. Historically, Rome had been very tolerant of other religions, incorporating them into their own pantheon of gods. However, the Christian Religion didn't allow for other gods and claimed their God was the one and only real god. As this went counter to Roman culture the Christians were persecuted in the hopes of getting them to fall back to the pagan ways (Beard 476). The Christian-Pagan conflict came to a head in the fourth century when co-emperors Licinius, who ruled the eastern Roman Empire, and Constantine, who ruled the west, could not come to an agreement on how Christianity should be addressed. Licinius was a Pagan and in 323 A.D. "compelled everyone in his administration to sacrifice <to non-Christian gods> or else lose their job... Roman governors were free to punish dissident Christians, shut down some churches, demolish others and, in the case of the bishops in the province of Bithynia-Pontus south of the Black Sea, murder key figureheads in the Christian clergy." Constantine used Licinius's actions as one of the many reasons to attack him in an effort to consolidate control of the empire. Constantine's army was a Christian one, decorated with symbols of its faith, and it defeated Licinius's pagan-army at the battle of Chrysopolis. Following Constantine's victory over Licinius, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire (Baker 356-363). However, not two generations after Constantine, Emperor Julian the Apostate drove a return to paganism. However as Lars Brownworth put it in *Lost to the West* "It was all to no avail. Paganism was a spent force only dimly

half-remembered by its former adherents, and no amount of public prodding would bring it back" (Brownworth 33). Christianity resumed its place as the official religion of the Roman Empire and would continue until the Empire's fall.

The religious persecution of the Faithful was a symptom of an even greater problem which would lead to the downfall of Númenor. Ar-Pharazôn, who had taken the throne of Númenor by force and forced the rightful ruler, Queen Míriel, to marry him, had withdrawn from Middle-earth to cement his rule. With his absence Sauron put forth his might and began to subjugate the people on the mainland and claimed that he was now "King of Men". Ar-Pharazôn became angry at this claim and invaded Middle-earth with his forces capturing Sauron. Upon returning to Númenor, Ar-Pharazôn paraded Sauron and the captured spoils of war through Númenor before imprisoning Sauron. Over time Sauron, because of his divine nature and charisma, became an advisor to the king. He fed the king's fear of old age and death. Terrified of his own mortality Ar-Pharazôn was persuaded by Sauron that the secret of eternal life was being withheld by the Valar. Ar-Pharazôn launched an invasion against Valinor which resulted in the destruction of the Númenorean navy and the island kingdom itself (Tolkien King 1012-1013). While some might point to Sauron's demonic nature as the reason for the fall, he only accelerated a pattern of events that the Númenoreans had already put into place. The Númenoreans had allowed their culture to become corrupted over time through their exposure to the lesser men of Middle-earth and eventually Sauron's influence. As Hoiem remarked "Thus what ultimately destroyed Aldarion's royal line is a pattern of idolatrous sins: poisoning as gods to native Middle-earth people, worshipping false gods, and attempting to usurp the Valar's rule of Arda... They eventually build elaborate tombs, become obsessed with death, and envy the elves their immortality, all of which violate Augustine's injunction "Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world" (Hoiem 80).

Atlantis suffered a similar fate. Once an honored kingdom, faithful to the gods, they allowed their lust for power and material goods to corrupt their society. Where once they were seen as educators and benevolent rulers they became tyrants and invaders. While Athens and a number of Mediterranean cities stood against them (Plato 1232) it was, in the end, divine retribution that doomed their empire. "Zeus, god of the gods, reigning as king according to law, could clearly see this state of affairs, he observed this noble race lying in this abject state and resolved to punish them..." (Plato 1306). Like Númenor, Atlantis was swallowed by the sea.

While Númenor's fate is directly comparable to Atlantis's, corruption of culture is often pointed to as a reason for the fall of both halves of the Roman Empire. It's argued that Rome's early strength was built on a homegrown military and warrior ethos derived from its mythical ties to the Roman God of War and the she-wolf who suckled Romulus and Remus. This strength was eroded as Rome expanded and began to be influenced by the cultures it was

conquering. For example, the Greeks were perceived as soft by the Romans, yet the Romans adopted many of the Greek gods and began to follow their philosophic teachings. It's further argued that Christianity, with its teachings that true reward was to be found in the next life, called into question the need for aggressive expansion and wealth, further weakening the empire. Repeated exposure to foreign cultures, whether by conquest or trade, worked its way into the Roman ethos. The Romans, who had worked to be inclusive of the lands they conquered, began to adopt some of the cultural manners of the conquered. "The poet Horace exaggerated when, in the late first century BCE, he summed up the process as one of simple cultural takeover: 'Greece, once conquered, conquered her savage victor and brought culture into the rough land of Latium'" (Beard 499). As the Romans began to value their individual lives more than the Rome itself, they began to rely more and more on non-Roman troops to defend their lands. Eventually they were no longer able to defend themselves, leading in part to the fall of the Roman Empire.

To the end, Númenor continued to be ruled as a Monarchy. However, "All these negative policies taken together indicate the onset of despotism rather than true monarchy, in that force or cunning became paramount" (Furnish 80). Despite the decline into tyranny, Númenor succeeded in marshaling enough military might to shape the international environment. The Númenoreans implemented an Antonine-like strategy to address the threat of Sauron, fielding their own military to battle Sauron's forces. The bipolar standoff between Númenor and Sauron was broken as Sauron's forces fled when Ar-Pharazôn and the Númenoreans prepared for battle. The capture of Sauron created a unipolar environment, where Númenor was the sole power in the area.

Kingdoms in Exile

When Ar-Pharazôn led his ill-fated attack on Valinor, the Valar called upon Eru Iluvatar to defend them. In response Iluvatar destroyed the attacking fleet and sunk Númenor beneath the waves. However, prior to the destruction of Númenor a number of the Faithful, led by Elendil, fled from the island taking with them their families, heirlooms and other such items. The Faithful reached the shores of Middle-earth following the cataclysm. Building on the

foundation of the Númenorean colonies already in place, the Faithful established two new kingdoms in 3319 S.A. Arnor was founded by Elendil in the North-West and Gondor was founded by Anárion and Isildur in the South-East (Tolkien *Silmarillion* 276-282). These kingdoms continued the legacy and traditions of the Númenoreans. While the split of the Roman Empire into east and west was not caused by a divine cataclysm, it is similar in that two kingdoms with similar heritages were established with similar geographic positioning. Their fates, described subsequently, also had many parallels.

Gondor and Arnor both started as Monarchies supported by an advisory council. As Furnish notes "Although only Gondor is mentioned as having an advisory Council it is virtually certain that the northern kingdom had an analogous body, as both would have emulated Númenor" (Furnish 81). These kingdoms were founded in a Non-Polarity environment as the power of the elves had waned, the power of Sauron was broken for the moment, and the other human kingdoms hadn't as yet established themselves. Reeling from the cataclysm, the Númenoreans undertook a Defense-in-Depth strategy focused on consolidating their power and defending what they had.

The Fate of Arnor

While most of the events described in the Second and Third Age impacted both Kingdoms in Exile, they are mostly documented from a Gondorian perspective due to the longevity of the kingdom relative to Arnor. As such, after addressing the fate of Arnor, the rest of this paper will focus on historical events from Gondor's perspective. However, the fate of Arnor also has parallels with the fate of the Western Roman Empire which will be covered here.

Arnor was established by Elendil and, while separate from Gondor, was meant to be the seat of the High King over both realms. Elendil ruled as High King from the founding in 3319 S.A. to his death at the hands of Sauron in 3441 S.A. or 1 Third Age (T.A.). Unfortunately, the war against Sauron also claimed the life of Anárion who fell before Barad-dûr, Sauron's stronghold. Following Sauron's defeat, Isildur tried to return to Arnor to claim the throne of the High King, but he and his three eldest sons were ambushed and killed by orcs. As a result the framework of two kingdoms with one High King was disrupted. The throne of Gondor fell to



Anárion's son Meneldil, while Valandil, Isildur's fourth son, ascended to the throne of Arnor. While both kingdoms lost their experienced leaders, Arnor appeared to be in the better position with few apparent enemies nearby while Gondor had to contend with Mordor and foes to the east and south. As Scull puts it "The Western Empire with its capital in Rome, and the Eastern with its capital at Constantinople. This is very like the division of Elendil's kingdom after his death into North and South, with separate capitals but rulers related by blood....In that case the history of the Kingdom in exile echoes that of Rome: the older capital and the senior kingdom fell, and the junior endured. Annúminas can be compared to Rome and Minas Tirith with Constantinople" (Scull 41).



Like the Western Roman Empire, Arnor fell relatively quickly due to internal strife and concentrated efforts by its enemies. Following the defeat of Sauron in 1 T.A., the Northern Kingdom appears to have had a period of relative peace. However, this peace was soon unintentionally undermined by the 10th King, Earendur, who lived from 640-861 T.A. King Earendur split Arnor into three with each of his sons ruling the smaller kingdoms of Arthedain, Cardolan and Rhudaur (Tolkien Peoples 193). These three kingdoms, while ruled by brothers and their heirs, often were at odds as each was trying to gain territory at the expense of the other. At this point the capital of Annúminas was abandoned and the seat of Arthedain's power was established in Fornost. During the reign of the Arthedainian King Malvegil, who reigned from 1272 to 1349 T.A., one of the Nazgûl, the Witch-King, establishes a kingdom of evil men in Angmar.

From here he waged war on the smaller kingdoms. Cardolan and Rhudaur fell during the reign of King Arveleg I, who reigned from 1356-1409 T.A. Eventually the capital of Arthedain was taken and the last king of the northern realm, Arvedui, died trying to flee in the frozen wastes of Forochel in 1974 T.A. (Tolkien King 1015-1017).

The fate of Arnor is comparable to the fate of the Western Roman Empire. The Roman Empire had grown too large to manage effectively and the Emperor Diocletian broke the empire into Eastern and Western halves. Over each half he appointed a senior ruler, known as an Augustus, who in turn selected a junior ruler known as a Caesar (Baker 319). The Tetrarchy, rule by four, was successful until Diocletian decided to retire. Without Diocletian's hand guiding the process, the Tetrarchy intensified the power battles between the four new leaders resulting in botched assassination attempts and finally war (Baker 324). The empire was briefly reunited under the rule of Constantine but was again split into eastern and western halves under the rule of Valentinian I, who ruled from 364-375 A.D. The Western Roman Empire declined rapidly after Valentinian. Inept leadership and multiple claimants to the throne fractured the Western Empire over the next 140 years. Weakened by the infighting, the West couldn't stand against the barbarians who invaded and brought the empire to its knees. Like in Arthedain, the capital of the Western Empire was moved from its original location, Rome, to a more defensible one, Ravenna, in 402 A.D. (Brownsworth 94). While it was no longer the capital, Rome was still the spiritual heart of the empire and its sacking in the fifth century showed that the empire was effectively dead. The sacking of Arthedain's capital in Fornost and the original capital at Annúminas could easily be described by Brownsworth's description of Rome where "For three days, the barbarians sacked the Eternal City, even breaking into the mausoleum of Augustus and scattering the imperial ashes" (Brownsworth 51). Odovacar, a Roman general, deposed the last Western Roman Empire and sent his royal vestments to the Eastern Roman Empire (Baker 47).

Gondor's Early Years

Before diving into the historical events that impacted Gondor, it's important to understand the position and economy of the kingdom and how that was similar to the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. Unlike Arnor, which was nestled in the North, Gondor's position would appear to be a precarious one. While Arnor was primarily landlocked and lacked the natural defenses of the mountains and sea, Arnor was located far from Mordor and other enemies. A true enemy to Arnor didn't arise until the Witch-King established the Kingdom of Angmar during the reign of King Malvegil. Arnor also had the benefit of having elven allies close by in the form of Lindon and Rivendell. Gondor on the other hand, stretched from the coast where it bordered Harad, to the south, to the mountains surrounding Mordor. In addition to the enemies to the south and east, the Easterling tribes posed a threat from the north-east. All of these

kingdoms tended to be at odds with the Gondorians, with Mordor the most frequent adversary. Luttwak's description of the Byzantine Empire also fits that of Gondor, "With more powerful enemies and a less favorable geography, the eastern empire was certainly the more vulnerable of the two" (Luttwak Byzantine 5).

While the economy of Gondor isn't detailed in Tolkien's writings it's probable that its similarity to the Byzantine Empire would lead to a similar economic system. In her essay *The Economy and Economic History of Gondor*, Ruth Lacon describes how Gondor's economic system may have unfolded. She begins by establishing that "the best comparison is with the classical world...which was basically an agrarian society" (Lacon Economy 37). Upon first arriving in Gondor, Pippin brings this to life as he sees that "The townlands were rich, with wide tilth and many orchards and homesteads there were with oast and garner, fold and byre, and many rills rippling through the green from the highlands down to Anduin" (Tolkien King 734). Lacon then goes on to divine that "For its time and place Gondor was a sophisticated state: revenue collection and expenditure would be of vital importance in maintaining the state and its structure" and "taxes themselves probably followed the Roman model, the possibilities being severely restricted by the administrative capability of the state" (Lacon Economy 39). While similar to Rome, Lacon did state that "External trade was probably more important to Gondor than to the Roman Empire due to the location of the country" (Lacon Economy 39).

Military strategy evolved for Gondor in a way similar to that of the Roman and then Byzantine Empires. Following the defeat of Sauron in 1 T.A., Gondor went through a period of peace which allowed them to rebuild their cities and military. However, Gondor was attacked by Easterlings during the reign of King Ostoher, who reigned from 411-492 T.A. This invasion by Easterlings was repulsed and Gondor turned its attention to expanding and protecting its borders. Gondor made key gains under King Falastur (830-913 T.A.) who expanded Gondor's borders around the mouth of the Anduin. King Hyarmendacil I (1015-1149 T.A.) defeated Harad to the south and made them swear fealty to Gondor. Gondor also expanded its naval might under King Eärnil I (913-936 T.A.) and King Ciryandil (936-1015 T.A.) which ushered in the era of the Ship-Kings. Under King Atanatar II (1149-1226 T.A.), Gondor reached the peak of its military power with direct rule over a vast area and with tribute coming from the Men of the Anduin Vale and the realm of Harad. Estimates of Gondor's military at the time of the War of the Ring were around 45,000 troops who defended a population of around 1-2 million (Wigmore, 1). Given the significant population erosion leading up to that time, it's easy to imagine Gondor's population at its height being 3-4 million with around 90,000 infantry, archers and knights.

At its height, Gondor was operating as a Monarchy in a Unipolar environment. As seen historically in Númenor and Arnor, one king continued to preside over the realm though he was advised by a council. At this time Gondor

represented the only significant power in Middle-earth as the elves military power had diminished following the War of the Last Alliance, Arnor had been split into three weaker kingdoms and Mordor was still recovering from its defeat at the beginning of the Third Age. Rohan, who would later become another power in the region and a future Gondorian client-kingdom, wouldn't be founded until the rule of the Steward Cirion which lasted from 2489-2567 T.A. (Tolkien Unfinished 205). While Gondor wielded significant power it couldn't extend its rule into the land of the Easterlings nor could it fully conquer Harad's lands to the south. To address this environment, Gondor at its peak implemented a Julio-Claudian-like strategy where its core empire was defended by a strong military but client states, like Harad and the Anduin Vale, were held responsible for tribute and implementing Gondor's will.

Enemies of Gondor

The Orcs of Mordor, the Southrons of Harad and the tribes of Easterlings would continue to be Gondor's main adversaries throughout their history. While the Eastern Roman Empire faced many nations, the archetypes of their enemies can be found in enemies of Gondor. The Barbarians and Huns were similar to the Easterlings in how they arrived in waves and represented an almost alien military adversary. "As for the other races, the Southrons are the Arabs, the Orcs are the most destructive of the barbarians, and the Dwarves have no relations with Gondor and therefore have no counterparts in real history" (Allen 5). Like many of the Eastern Roman Empire's enemies, who were driven in part by their Islamic beliefs to wage war on the Christian empire, the enemies of Gondor were typically driven by the influence of Sauron who wanted the kingdoms of the west destroyed.

Chronologically, the first human adversaries encountered by the Gondorians were the Easterlings who first attacked in 490 T.A. While the Easterlings initially appeared to reflect the barbarians which plagued the Western Roman Empire, the subsequent waves became to more reflect the Huns and Islamic Turks which faced off against the eastern half of the empire. As described by Ford, "The first major conflict occurred early, prior to Gondor's expansionist phase under the Ship-Kings: "Gondor was first attacked by wild men out of the East" who were defeated and driven out, they reappeared in "fresh hordes," and who were ultimately driven out again. Rome's first foreign invaders after the creation of the Republic were Celtic tribesman, specifically the Gauls, who were being forced out of their settlements in the upper Danube region of Eastern Europe by an influx of Germanic peoples" (Ford 63). However, Lacon points out that "The Easterlings belonged to cultures alien and often hostile to that of Gondor: the proper comparison here is with the attitude of medieval Europeans to Islam and the East - Belligerent incomprehension" (Lacon Easterlings 28). Each wave of Easterlings that attacked Gondor appeared to present some new military challenge, with the ultimate challenges presented by the Wainriders. "The Wainriders

appear seemingly out of nowhere, launching a powerful invasion in the course of which the armies of both Gondor and Rhovanion were defeated” (Lacon Easterlings 30). These Wainriders came in caravans of wagons, or wains, and attacked using chariots (Tolkien King 1024). Ford recognized that “The Wainriders are an echo of the Huns, or more accurately, the Huns as remembered by the descendants of the Germanic peoples” (Ford 65). Similar to the Huns, the Easterlings “were able to call in aid from their kinsfolk to the east and recoup while neither Rhovanion nor Gondor had the strength to drive them out” (Lacon Easterlings 30).

The second human enemy engaged by the Gondorians was the Haradrim or Southrons. First encountered during the Ship-King era, their conflict echoes that of early Rome and its conflict with Carthage. As detailed by Ford “Gondor’s first enemy after it entered into its expansionist phase under the Ship-Kings was a great harbor to the south, called Umbar. After a lengthy conflict, Gondor defeated the men of Harad for control of Umbar.” When Rome began to expand beyond Italy, the first great enemy it faced was Carthage in north Africa, which was a harbor across the water almost directly to the south of Italy” (Ford 63-64). While the similarity to Carthage continues with the Haradrim’s use of *Mûmakil*, Middle-earth’s predecessor to the elephant, most presentations of the Haradrim have them being similar in appearance to the armies of the Arab nations. This imagery was used in Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy. This depiction aligns with Harad’s southern location and the description given when Sam encounters a Haradrim close up. Sam notices that “He came to a rest in the fern a few feet away, face downward, green arrow-feathers sticking from his neck below a golden collar. His scarlet robes were tattered, his corslet of overlapping brazen plates was rent and hewn, his black plaits of hair braided with gold were drenched with blood” (Tolkien Towers 646).”

While the Northmen represented the ‘good’ barbarians who came to become allies of Gondor, the Orcs represented the more feral and evil barbarians who continuously tried to bring down the empire. In *Germania*, Tacitus puts forth a framework for classifying the barbarians (i.e. non-Romans) that are engaged with the Empire. Obertino suggests that “Tolkien draws upon Tacitus in depicting both the admirable and debased peoples that Frodo encounters” and that “Tacitus description of ferocity among the Germans may well influence Tolkien’s portrait of the Orcs, who excel in hatred and anger, even among themselves” (Obertino 118).

Not only were the peoples encountered by the Gondorians similar to those faced by the Roman and Byzantine Empires, their response was often the same as well. When Gondor held the advantage militarily they would repulse invasion, invade the lands of their enemies and demand tribute, turning them into client states. Gondor would then take the children of the rulers as hostages (Tolkien King 1021). The Roman Empires also practiced taking family members as ‘honored guests’ to ensure the loyalty and compliance of conquered foes. For example, Antiochus IV, a Syrian King

in 2nd century B.C., had spent 10 years as a hostage in Rome before being exchanged for another relative (Beard 191) and in 195 B.C. the son of Philip V of Macedon was taken as part of the Roman peace treaty (Matyszak 51).

Kinstrife

Following the era of the Ship-Kings, Gondor suffered invasions by the enemies described above and other events that eroded the strength of the Kingdoms. In 1437 T.A. a dispute over the legitimacy of King Eldacar threw the kingdom into a civil war called the Kinstrife. In the Kinstrife, Eldacar, the half-Northmen son of King Valacar, is overthrown due, in part, to his mixed heritage, his father was a pure blood Dúnedain but his mother was a Northman. Castamir the Usurper was a pure blood Dúnedain with a claim to the throne. His claim came through his grandfather who was the youngest son of a previous king (Tolkien King 1022). The Gondorian civil war has similarities to those in Roman history. The first is the instance of family members fighting amongst one another for the throne. Three generations after Caesar Augustus became the first emperor of Rome, the Julio-Claudian dynasty was brought to an end due primarily to the infighting between potential heirs. In 50 A.D., Emperor Claudius married Julia Agrippina and adopted her son, Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus. While Claudius already had a male heir in Britannicus, Agrippina was determined that her son would become the next emperor. Through slander, politicking, and poison she destroyed rivals to her son’s claim to the throne and then killed her husband and his son. Ironically, Lucius, now known as Emperor Nero, returned the favor and killed his mother, Nero was later overthrown and the Julio-Claudian dynasty was ended (Baker 192-198). Family violence in the name of succession wasn’t just prevalent in the early days of the empire. In 1183 A.D., Andronicus the Terrible became emperor of the east by having his cousin put to death and marrying his widow. Andronicus lasted 2 years before being overthrown (Brownsworth 249).

Another element of the Kinstrife that also plagued the Roman Empire was the concept of what it was to be a true citizen of the empire. Castamir built his claim to the throne of Gondor on the fact that he, as a pure blood Dúnedain, was most qualified to rule. His supporters feared that Eldacar’s mixed heritage would weaken the throne of Gondor and they would not accept him as king. A similar question was raised in Rome as it expanded. “The expansion of Roman power raised big debates and paradoxes about Rome’s place in the world, about what counted as ‘Roman’ when so much of the Mediterranean was under Roman control and about where the boundary between barbarism and civilization now lay, and which side of that boundary Rome was on” (Beard 179). An example of this is revealed in the war between Augustus and Marc Antony. Both were Roman by birth, but Augustus was able to paint Antony as a non-Roman due to his ‘extravagant and immoral’ life style, as evidenced by his relationship with the Egyptian Cleopatra (Beard 349).

Plague

Another Gondorian event echoing the past was the great plague of 1636 T.A. “Following upon the entry of great numbers of Northmen ‘a deadly plague came with dark winds out of the east.’ Like the Roman great plague of the second century AD, the Gondorian plague weakened the state and contributed to its downfall” (Ford 64). While the details of the plague are sketchy, Tolkien’s description of the macro level effects is quite dramatic. First, the plague took the lives of the King and all his children, this left Gondor without leadership in a time of crisis. In addition, the plague killed a great number of Gondorian citizens, especially those living in Osgiliath, Gondor’s capital. The plague left the city, and others like it, as ghost towns which slowly were abandoned. The military was also impacted as the fortresses that guarded Gondor’s borders were left unmanned. Those that survived the plague noted that it coincided with Sauron’s return to power and that, while it weakened his armies as well, it removed the watch on his borders allowing him more freedom to operate (Tolkien King 1023). Beyond the top level impact of the plague, the details of how it impacted the empire are left to our imagination.

The plagues that ravaged classical, medieval and renaissance Europe may provide some insights into how the plague played out in Gondor. The Black Death that struck Europe in the 1300s had both immediate and long term impacts. The plague struck quickly bringing mortality rates as high as 50%. It spread along the trade and military routes as the rats that carried the fleas and disease moved with the goods being transported. As the death toll climbed, a new problem arose of how to, in a timely manner, properly bury the deceased. The clergy, also decimated by the plague, were not unable to keep up with the demand for their services nor could gravediggers provide enough graves for the deceased. As demand outstripped supply, the dead were buried in mass graves (Cantor 23). The plague also had a snowball effect in the economy. As the population died off there were less people to work in the fields or industry. With less people working in the fields, food became scarce. Scarcity drove up prices but less people also meant less tax dollars to buy the supplies necessary to continue government services or field a standing military (Cantor 190). The impact of the plague didn’t stop with the generation it had afflicted. With less people available to have children, the next generation had critical labor shortages. These shortages were primarily in rural areas as peasants filled the labor shortages in the cities at higher wages. As wages sky rocketed the aristocracy forced through labor laws designed to hold costs down. This led to the Peasants Revolt of 1381, which almost toppled the English government (Cantor 24). “The pestilence deeply affected individual and family behavior and consciousness. It put severe strains on the social, political, and economic systems. It threatened the stability and viability of civilization” (Cantor 25).

The Justinianic plague (542 A.D.) is considered to have been a key factor in weakening the Roman Empire, contributing to its steady decline throughout the centuries (Smith

10). The plague is believed to have originated in Egypt and traveled along trade and military routes deep into the empire (Smith 5). Plagues killed the rich and poor alike and dramatically changed the economic and military of the affected kingdoms (Beard 439). “In Constantinople, the disease raged unchecked for four months with the horrifying casualty rate of ten thousand per day. The dead fell in such numbers that they overwhelmed the graveyards and had to be flung into an unused castle until the rotting corpses were spilling over the walls. The depopulated city ground to a halt, unable to maintain the rhythms of daily life under the strain. Trade sank to almost nothing, farmers abandoned their fields, and the few workers who remained did their best to flee the stricken city. When the plague at last abated, famine and poverty followed in its wake” (Brownsworth 104). With the military weakened, the emperor had to buy off attacking enemies, depleting the treasury even further. With no tax base to replenish the treasury, Justinian slashed the budget (Brownsworth 111). Salaries of teachers, physicians and entertainers were cut to help reduce costs (Smith 7). Gondor must have suffered similarly as man power fell following the plague.

Empire on the Brink

Decimated by invasion, civil war and plague, Gondor had to evolve its strategy. Expansion and holding on to captured territory was no longer possible and the Gondorians had to implement a defensive strategy to hold their enemies at bay. This strategy involved a heavily fortified city which provided a refuge for its citizens during times of invasion, an intelligence network designed to frustrate enemies, and strategic alliances to defend the borders. This strategy echoes that of the Byzantine Empire. As the Byzantine strategy was described by Luttwak, “A new strategic approach was thereby affirmed: diplomacy first, force second, for the costs of the former were only temporary, while the risks of the latter could be all too final” (Luttwak Byzantine 55).

The chief refuge for Gondorians became the walled city of Minas Tirith. Founded in 3320 S.A. as Minas Anor, Tower of the Setting Sun, the city was on the western half of the region of Ithilien. Its sister city, Minas Ithil, Tower of the Rising Moon, sat on the opposite side of the region on the border of Mordor. Between them, stretching over the Anduin River, was the first capital of Gondor, Osgiliath. However, the ongoing wars and plague caused Osgiliath to become deserted and King Tarondor, who reigned 1636-1798, moved the capital to Minas Anor. Like the Western Roman Empire’s move from Rome to Ravenna was driven by an increased need for defensibility, the Gondorian capital was moved to Minas Anor which was more defensible than Osgiliath. Minas Anor was built into a mountain range and surrounded by a vast wall. Then Minas Ithil fell to Mordor during the reign of King Eärnil II, who reigned from 1944-2043 T.A. Minas Anor was renamed Minas Tirith, Tower of the Guard, by King Eärnur, who reigned from 2043-2050 T.A. (Tolkien Peoples 201-202). The magnificence of Minas Tirith was described by Tolkien as such, “Pippin gazed in

growing wonder at the great stone city, vaster and more splendid than anything that he had dreamed of; greater and stronger than Isengard, and far more beautiful” (Tolkien King 736).

Similarly, Byzantium’s capital was the heavily fortified Constantinople. Constantinople had a similar defensive wall and reputation. “The eastern emperor Theodosius II was so alarmed by the sack of Rome that he immediately ordered huge new walls built around Constantinople. Rising forty feet high and nearly sixteen feet thick, these powerful defenses of stone and brick would throw back every hopeful invader for the next thousand years” (Brownsworth 52). “It was also by far the most impressive city, with its spectacular maritime setting on a promontory projecting into a strait and its array of majestic palaces and churches....” Its name alone shows that the prestige of the city was immense and far-reaching. To the Slavs nearby in what is now Bulgaria and Macedonia, or father away in Russia, Constantinople was Tsargrad, the “City of the emperor,” the capital of the world, even the outpost of God on earth” (Luttwak Byzantine 124-125).

Gondor’s rangers were a specialized part of the military which ventured into enemy lands to collect intelligence and slow their enemy’s progress. As described in *The Two Towers* the rangers used stealth and surprise to ambush Southron forces and took shelter in hidden refuges (Tolkien Towers 645-647). For the Byzantines, the diplomatic envoy was the source of intelligence for the empire. While not a formal organization or part of the military, the Byzantine Empire trained envoys to act as their representative at distant foreign kingdoms to either bolster alliances or disrupt governments that opposed the empire. The funneling of information back to the empire was a key component of their role (Luttwak Byzantine 100-101).

Similar to the Byzantine Empire, Gondor also relied on diplomacy to defend their borders. One of the earliest wars Gondor participated in was the War of the Last Alliance which brought Gondor, Arnor and the Elven nations together to face the threat of Sauron. Building on this experience, Gondor now aligned itself with Northmen who would serve as allies against the Easterling invasions. The Gondorians gave the Northmen lands to the north of Gondor, using them as a buffer against the Easterlings (Tolkien King 1021). “Gondor’s success against the Easterlings may have owed much to Regent Minalcar’s recruitment of Vidugavia, King of Rhovanion, as an ally” (Lacon Easterlings 30). To recognize this growing alliance, Minalcar sent his son Valacar to be an ambassador to the Northmen. Valacar grew to love the Northmen and took Vidumavi, Vidugavia’s daughter, as his wife (Tolkien King 1022). As Allen put it “In Gondor the use of Northmen – with Gothic names – as allies against the Easterlings led to close friendship between the two peoples, and eventually to the marriage of the heir to the throne of Gondor to a daughter of one of the Rhovanion chieftains” (Allen 4). This alliance through marriage would prove crucial in turning the tide against Castamir who tried to usurp Gondor’s thrown during the Kinstrife, described

later. Rohan eventually became a buffer state which helped protect the northern border of Gondor from Easterling attacks.

The Byzantines used similar alliances to defend their lands. The closest to the Northmen in *The Lord of the Rings* were the Bulgars who lived north of the Byzantine Empire. While the Bulgars were on-again-off-again allies they were critical in the defense of the empire. During the second siege of Constantinople by the Arabs in 717-718 A.D., the Bulgars attacked from the north, killing over 20,000 Arabs (Luttwak Byzantine 175). The Northmen who became the Rohirrim were also similar to the Germanic peoples who were initially enemies of Rome but who later became their allies, generals and leaders (Ford 64). The Byzantine Empire strengthened relations with their allies by bestowing titles and land, sending diplomatic envoys and through strategic marriages.

While the line of Gondorian kings had long since ended, the kingdom continued to be ruled as a monarchy by a line of Stewards. These Stewards had to contend with an increasingly complex international environment where two hegemony, that of Gondor and Mordor, dominated (Furnish 94). Gondor leveraged what remained of the Númenorean military might, its heavily fortified capital and strategic alliances to defend the kingdom. Instead of trying to annihilate its enemies, Gondor realized that it needed to weather the assaults of its enemies while reserving its strength for times of need. “The strategical success of the Byzantine empire was of a different order than any number of tactical victories or defeats: it was a sustained ability, century after century, to generate disproportionate power from whatever military strength could be mustered, by combining it with all the arts of persuasion, guided by superior information” (Luttwak Byzantine 6).

At the time of the War of the Ring, Gondor’s might appeared to be waning. “During the last millennium of the Third Age, Gondor’s population was falling in numbers for reasons now inexplicable, leading to a drop in productivity, trade and revenues. The country suffered actual losses of territory: Calenardhon was ceded to the Éothéod by treaty in 2510 T.A., becoming Rohan, while Ithilien was gradually abandoned” (Lacon Economy 43). When Boromir addresses the Council of Elrond he admits that, while Gondor continues to fight against Mordor and its allies, without help they may finally fall to the rising evil (Tolkien Fellowship 239-240). Their leadership is also failing. Denethor’s focus has shifted from protecting the empire to preserving Gondor as he perceives it. When faced with the realization that Gondor may fall and, worse yet, it would only be saved by the return of the true king and not Denethor’s line, he cannot accept it and kills himself (Donnelly 23). The start of the war goes badly at first, with southern Ithilien overrun by the Haradrim while the Corsairs of Umbar had taken the port city of Pelargir (Tolkien King 857). While Minas Tirith stood, the realm was falling.

At end of the Byzantine Empire it was much the same. Islamic forces under the command of Murad II attacked

the Byzantine Empire in 1421 A.D. Thessalonica was under siege and the Peloponnese was raided. By 1422 Constantinople itself was under attack. Fortunately for the empire, Murad had to withdraw to deal with a potential civil war back home and a tenuous peace was reached. During this peace Emperor John VIII went to Europe, the last hope of the Empire, in hopes of recruiting a new Crusade to rescue the weakened empire. In return for their help, John VIII had to promise that the Orthodox empire would convert to Catholicism. The result was civil unrest at home. Unfortunately, the crusading army was defeated and the last hope of the Empire was gone. Constantine XI, the last emperor of the Byzantine Empire, ascended the throne in 1449 with the armies of the Sultan ready to deliver the death blow to the empire (Brownsworth 282-284).

Aragorn and the Kingdom Restored

Constantinople, and the Byzantine Empire, fell in 1453 A.D. Like a prize heavy weight fighter on the ropes, the city which had dealt with invasions, plagues, and civil wars was about to receive the knock-out blow. The city was surrounded and the Turkish forces deployed a great cannon to bring down the Theodosian walls which had protected the city for a thousand years. The defenders of the city, led by a later Emperor Constantine, were valiant and pushed back the invaders by day and repaired the broken walls by night. Eventually, the end came. The Genoese troops that had been supporting the Byzantines retreated from Constantinople when their leader was wounded. As the Genoese retreated the Turks broke through the walls. "The emperor's worst fears were immediately realized. . . . From his position by the Saint Romanus Gate, Constantine knew that all was now lost. With the cry "the city is lost, but I live" he flung off his imperial regalia and plunged into the breach, disappearing into history" (Brownsworth 292-297).

The fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 A.D. and the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire in 1453 A.D. were world changing events that left their mark on the psyche of the Europeans. The fall of the Western Roman Empire led to regional conflicts and the descent into the dark ages. Constantinople remained the only protection for the west against the enemies growing in the east. When it fell, the path to the west was open. However, because it stood for so long, the strength of its enemies had been weakened and Western Europe was spared its destruction (Brownsworth 302). For Europe the ruins of the ancient empires reminded them of a golden age gone by. They hoped for the return of a leader who would restore the empire and return order to the world (Brownsworth 152). "Jordanes ends his history of the Goths in such a way as to fulfill that mission: he provides a way for the Goths to initiate the renewal of Rome, expanded to include the Germanic peoples. The *Getica* ends with marriage between a Roman patrician family related to the Byzantine Emperor, the Ancian family, and the royal house of the conquered Goths, the house of Amal. This couple bore a son named Germanus, of whom Jordanes wrote: "This union of the race of the Anicii with the stock of the

Amali gives hopeful promise, under the Lord's favor, to both peoples" (Ford 57). The Frankish King Carlos the Great, better known as Charlemagne, came closest to fulfilling the hope of a restored Western Empire (Ford 69). Charlemagne succeeded in reuniting, through conquest or diplomacy, most of Western Europe. In 800 AD, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as Imperator Romanorum, or Emperor of the Romans (Allen 5). Unfortunately, Charlemagne's empire was divided between his grandsons, once again breaking the empire apart (Ford 69).

Despite the Battle of the Pelennor Fields beginning much like the siege of Constantinople, Gondor's fate was almost a complete opposite of the Byzantines. The forces of Mordor and their allies besieged the walled city of Minas Tirith and used the great battering ram Grond to break down the Gate of Gondor and all looked lost (Tolkien King 810). However, instead of watching allies retreat from the battle, the Gondorians saw the Rohirrim attack the enemy's flank. Where the Genoese troops retreated, the Rohirrim arrived to aid their longtime allies (Tolkien King 820). The vain hope of help from Europe was realized when Aragorn and the reinforcements from western Gondor appeared and turned the tide of the battle. And instead of a king fighting one last battle and vanishing into myth, Aragorn returned from myth to lead the forces of Gondor to victory (Tolkien King 829). "Aragorn's restored Gondor was more a Germanic ideal than a Roman one because his kingdom incorporated the other peoples of the west, appropriate to both the point of view of Anglo-Saxon myth-makers and to a medieval perspective" (Ford 66).

Where Gondor is the Byzantium Empire with a happy ending, Aragorn is a successful Charlemagne or a returned Constantine who makes that possible. When Tolkien first wrote about Strider, Aragorn's nickname in Bree, he had no idea that this character was going to become the King of the Reunited Kingdoms (Kocher Master 131). However, throughout the trilogy the importance of Aragorn's role as the Returned King becomes more and more clear. The first sign of Aragorn's royal lineage is when he uses athelas, King's Foil, to slow the poison in Frodo's system after the battle at Weathertop (Tolkien Fellowship 193). His power over sickness echoes that of medieval kings who were thought, by divine grace, to be able to heal the sick (Kocher Master 157). Next, Aragorn identifies himself as the heir to the throne of Gondor and Arnor at the Council of Elrond in Rivendell (Tolkien Fellowship 240). He reveals himself to Sauron when he wrests control of the palantír from him and finally becomes king after the Ring is destroyed (Kocher Master 152-153). Even his marriage to Arwen is significant. Through this marriage he reunites the two separate lines of Eärendil as Aragorn is a descendent of Elros, Eärendil's son who became the first king of the Númenoreans, and Arwen is descended from Elrond, the son who chose to become an Elf (Tolkien King 1010).

In some way's Tolkien's epic answers the lingering question of what would have happened had Constantinople not fallen in 1453 A.D. It's easy to imagine the armies of

Islam being turned back to the east yet again. With those armies defeated and scattered a renaissance occurs not just in Western Europe but around the entire Mediterranean with Constantinople at its heart. Like Aragorn, who pursues his enemies deep into their own territory (Tolkien King 1045), armies from Christian kingdoms would rally around the Roman flag flying in Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire would cross the Bosphorus taking the war to the Ottoman Empire. The long standing enemy of Western Europe would finally be defeated and a lasting peace would be built on the foundation of a Roman Empire that had lasted for over two millennium.

While *The Lord of the Rings* is not an allegory for the Roman or Byzantine Empire, nor for any other specific instance of real-world history, it's clear that Tolkien leveraged his knowledge of history and languages to build his Middle-earth legendarium and infuse it with realism. Númenor, Gondor and Arnor are built with the myth and history of Atlantis, Roman and Byzantium Empires, make their stories more familiar and therefore more easily relatable to by the reader. Tolkien's ability to blend these familiar elements into his self-contained history and mythology is one of the many strengths that have made *The Lord of the Rings* a much beloved series by many generations.

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