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## Fallen Kingdoms and Ancient Monoliths: The Influence of Atlantis and Egypt in Tolkien's Númenor

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<sup>1</sup>*The Book of Lost Worlds* maintains that “there is no landscape in the world quite like that of Egypt. Its strangeness, its uniqueness, have intrigued men from before the time of Herodotus, who visited Egypt almost twenty-five hundred years ago; and it continues to fascinate jet-age travelers who see more countries in a month than the ‘Father of History’ saw in a lifetime” (Davidson, 1962, pp. 33). Delving deeper into Egyptian civilization, one finds a culture that honors kings as gods and buries them with pomp, heart-stopping man-made monuments, and early writings. Indeed, who isn’t fascinated by the world of Ancient Egypt? Even avid historians, who may not usually find interest in the eastern Mediterranean, cannot resist the allure of the Sphinx, the Nile River, the great pyramids of Giza, or even the immense temple of Abu Simbel. Those aspects of early institutions and the political unification of Upper and Lower Egypt seep through the cradle of civilization unlike anything else.

<sup>2</sup>In 1958, a woman called Rhona Beare wrote to Tolkien asking a number of questions so she could pass on the answers to a fan club she was a part of. One of them was about the various peoples of Middle-Earth. In the letter, Tolkien writes, that the Númenóreans of Gondor were “proud, peculiar, and archaic, and best pictured in Egyptian terms. In many ways they resembled ‘Egyptians’ – the love of, and power to construct, the gigantic and massive. And in their great interest in ancestry and in tombs.” Moreover, Tolkien suggested that the Gondorians took after their ancestors. Fans and scholars alike have debated the real-world prototypes for Gondor, and the history and civilization of Gondor have been compared to historical elements of the real world. Most notably, Italy and the Byzantine Empire. In this essay, I want to focus on Tolkien’s, somewhat underappreciated, influences on Gondor; particularly Ancient Egypt. What are scholars to make of Tolkien’s reference to Egypt? Is this inspiration meant to be taken lightly or does it provide a blueprint for Tolkien’s idealized version of the West? This is curious since one of the cultural attributes associated with the West is a stark contrast to Eastern civilization. I admit, from the outset, that a work like *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Fall of Númenor*, seems to have nothing whatsoever to do with Egypt. Besides, Ancient Egypt was a civilization in Northeast Africa, while Tolkien grew up in England and his passion was Norse Mythology.

Yet the early history of Middle-Earth offers striking parallels with that of the ancient Mediterranean. It is also worth mentioning Tolkien’s inspiration for Númenor, or what he called his ‘Atlantis complex’. Notably, some scholars claimed that ancient Egypt was a colony of Atlantis, much like how Gondor was a

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<sup>1</sup> A shortened version of this paper was first presented at the Tolkien’s Society at Oxonmoot 2023, at St. Anne’s College in Oxford on the 3rd of September 2023 as a webinar strand.

<sup>2</sup> See Letter to Rhona Beare (14 October 1958) (corresponds to Letter 211). J R R Tolkien, et al. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien : A Selection*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

survivor of Númenor (although it is unknown if Tolkien considered this aspect). In this essay, I want to argue that Atlantis and Egypt are perhaps Tolkien's most crucial sources of inspiration in his version of Westernesse. I believe an examination of the Atlantean influence on Tolkien's Númenor, more importantly, the remnants of Atlantean civilization survived by Egyptian colonists which mirrors the Realms of Exile is necessary to understand Tolkien's vision of the West because by comparing Gondor and Arnor to Egypt, this proves that he was a "master synthesist"—finding inspirations in many places, not just Norse myths. To clarify, this essay does not attempt to indicate the scope of Tolkien's ambition, let alone reignite the Ancient Egyptian race controversy. Rather, this essay seeks to prove that *The Fall of Númenor* can be interpreted not only as a reimagining of Atlantis but that Númenor and by extension the Realms of Exile, assume quite a number of Egyptian motifs, creating a synthesized body of ancient civilization that doesn't merely derive from what might be considered standard Caucasian European tradition.

As Númenor was the predecessor of Gondor and Arnor, Atlantis was, *allegedly*, the predecessor of Egypt—if we go by the Ignatius Donnelly theory. The primary source for the Atlantis legend appears in Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*. Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, stands with Socrates and Aristotle as one of the shapers of the intellectual Western tradition. As a literary form, the dialogue is a cross between an essay and a short story—it discusses serious ideas but utilizes a fictional conversation. The main characters in Plato's dialogues are his mentor Socrates, Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates, although all words and speeches are Plato's own. It is in the *Critias* dialogue where the bulk of the Atlantis story is told. Though its doctrine mainly centers on a creator god which inspired early Christian thought, many first-time readers will know this work from the story of Atlantis. Together, they are offered to Socrates in return for his account of an ideal state much like that of the *Republic*. The allegorical aspect of Atlantis as a result, became a byword for all supposed advanced lost civilizations and continues to inspire contemporary fiction, from comic books to films.

Some parts of Númenor's history seem to have been inspired not only by Plato but also by researchers and occultists whose theories were widespread during Tolkien's time. Ignatius Donnelly and Edgar Cayce were the most famous authors regarding Atlantis and mentioned events and concepts that Plato never did. For this essay, the focus is on Donnelly's theory that remnants of Atlantean civilization survived by colonists or survivors in Egypt. Donnelly was an American Congressman and populist whose fringe theories discussed in his book *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* were the source of many modern-day concepts about Atlantis. Although Donnelly's theories on Atlantis inspired writers and

artists alike, most of his theories are pretty far-fetched. “Atlantis is deliberately set up to contrast with Athens, as a sort of negative to the ideal city” asserts Thomas Kjeller Johansen in the Penguin Books classic edition of *Timaeus and Critias*, “those who are tempted to read the Atlantis story as a historical document need to bear in mind the extent to which it has been constructed by Plato to suit his own philosophical purposes. We cannot understand Atlantis other than in the context of Plato’s own political recommendations” (Johansen, 2008, xxix). More to the point, it draws from Plato’s philosophy in *The Republic*, where he confronts the view that being virtuous goes against one’s interests and tries to show that justice benefits us, because it represents a kind of healthy order in one’s soul, while injustice is a diseased disorder. “The *Timaeus-Critias* takes this reasoning one step further. The *Timaeus* shows how the good order of justice and goodness in general is represented in nature, such that if we follow the life of virtue we shall also be following the natural order and thereby be better off than if we go against nature” (Johansen, 2008, x).

What we can discern from Part V, the second chapter of *The Antediluvian World* is almost a reflection of what Tolkien had intended the survivors of Númenor to be.

The definition of Akallabêth or “The Downfall of Númenor” given by David Day in his work *An Encyclopedia of Tolkien: The History and Mythology That Inspired Tolkien's World*, is “Tolkien’s reinvention of the ancient Greek Atlantis legend. Tolkien often mentioned that he had ‘an Atlantis complex,’ which took the form of a ‘terrible recurrent dream of the Great Wave, towering up, and coming in ineluctably over the trees and green fields’ (Day, 2019, pp. 19) Númenor is, to all intents and purposes, the retelling of the Atlantis myth in Tolkien’s legendarium. Tolkien does not shy away from this inspiration. But rather, embraces it. The story of *Númenor* appears in different formats – including *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, and quite recently *The Fall of Númenor*, edited by Brian Sibley and compiled by Christopher Tolkien. The tale itself provides an account of the island kingdom of Númenor – gifted to the Men of Middle-earth who had fought loyally with the Elves in the War of Wrath after the First Age – and described how, through the corruption of Sauron, its destruction was accomplished.

Western culture, also known as Western civilization, is the heritage of social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, and belief systems of the Western world. Western culture also has roots in Greece and Rome, and later medieval and modern Europe shaped it into its present form. The concept of a great civilization of men, brought about by ruin or global catastrophe is at the heart of the Atlantis myth.

Stories of drowned lands tend to reside near a body of water or include strips of land that are exposed near the coastline as befitting the tradition of culture-bearing men of the Sea. According to Plato, Atlantis was in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean in the West (cf. Great Sea), its people were more advanced than those of the known world (cf. Kings of Men) but were corrupted by arrogance; the continent was destroyed by the gods and survivors created colonies, as in Egypt (cf. Realms in Exile). The story is described as follows:

“‘There was an island opposite the strait which you call the Pillars of Heracles, an island larger than Libya and Asia combined; from it travelers could in those days reach the other islands, and from them the whole opposite continent which surrounds what can truly be called ‘the ocean’—On this island of Atlantis had arisen a powerful and remarkable dynasty of kings, which ruled the whole island, and many other islands as well and parts of the continent; in addition it controlled, within the strait, Libya up to the borders of Egypt and Europe as far as Tyrrhenia’” (Plato, Edited by Johansen, 2008, pp. 15).

This is a brief account to Socrates, the story which Critias repeated from his grandfather, also named Critias, and which he had heard from Solon. In the dialogue, Critias asserts that the account while strange, is vouched as complete truth according to Solon, the wisest of the seven wise men, who visited Egypt on his travels. Atlantis has its influences notably in Libya, on the border of Egypt. The Númenóreans likewise began to establish dominions on the coasts, having tasted power in Middle-earth, and they made permanent settlements on the western coasts. Contrast this with *The Fall of Númenor*, where Númenor is situated in a metaphysical sense between Earth and Paradise. Here, the Valar give land for the <sup>3</sup>“Edain to dwell in, neither part of Middle-earth nor of Valinor, yet it was nearer to Valinor” (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 8). Both cities were founded by gods but in contrasting circumstances. Númenor is given as a gift to the Edain for their part in the war against Morgoth. Atlantis, in contrast, was founded by Poseidon as a way of protecting his lover, Cleito. While Númenor is a show of gratitude, Atlantis is already from its inception based on the appetitive. The use of primordial waters as the starting base is a dominant theme throughout stories of ancient civilizations.

However, it can also be viewed as a new beginning. <sup>4</sup>According to Egyptian mythology, in the beginning, there was nothing. The universe consisted of a great chaotic ocean and Benben, a huge pyramid-like mound, emerged from

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 32 *The Edain Reach Númenor*, pg. 8. Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fall of Númenor*. Ed. Brian Sibley. New York: HarperCollins, William Morrow, 2022. Print for details.

<sup>4</sup> See U in History / Mythology. “Egyptian Mythology: The Essential – Ra, Horus, Osiris, Seth, Anubis, Bastet – See U in History.” YouTube. YouTube, 16 Jan. 2019. Web. 29 April.

this primal chaos. There was a lotus flower with Benben and this, when it blossomed, brought the god Ra to the world. Ra generated Shu the god of the air and Tefnut the goddess of rain. The universe was enrapt by a vast mass of primordial waters. Shu and Tefnut plunged into the waters to explore its immensity. When Shu and Tefnut returned, Ra's joy was so intense that human beings were born from his tears. In turn, Geb the god of the earth, and Nut the goddess of the sky were born and thus the sky and earth were created. Ra's greatest offering, however, was the creation of the Nile River, around its shores men would edify a civilization glorifying the gods. Although, not exactly a culture of sea-faring men, this creation myth in which the gods form the universe out of primordial chaos seems to pick up right where Atlantis falls, disappearing into the depths of the sea within a single day. In Egyptian culture, the lotus had a mythological symbol of rebirth. One cannot help but think of the White Tree of Gondor, the tree of the king, which stands as a symbol of Gondor in the Court of the Fountain in Minas Tirith. Its value to the Númenóreans is great in that it symbolizes the <sup>5</sup>Alliance that once existed between Elves and Men. Many gifts were brought to Númenor, including a seedling of Celeborn, the White Tree that grew in the midst of Eressëa; and that was in its turn a seedling of Galathilion the Tree of Túna, the image of Telperion that Yavanna gave to the Eldar. And the tree grew and blossomed in the courts of the King in Armenelos. It was named Nimloth. Nimloth was the ancestor of what would become known as the White Tree of Gondor and was memorialized as a symbol of the line of Kings and Stewards of Gondor (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 40-41).

When Amandil hears the rumor of the evil purpose of Sauron and knows for sure that he will have his will with the King, Ar-Pharazôn, he recalls the tale of the Trees of Valinor to his son, Elendil, and Elendil's sons. This leads Isildur to a deed for which he is afterward renowned; he passes alone to the courts of the King and takes a fruit from the Tree. Just as Elendil and his sons, having escaped from the Downfall, come bearing a seedling of Nimloth, so does the sun god, Ra, the first pharaoh, emerge from a blue lotus that rises up from the primeval waters, founding a civilization unlike any other. <sup>6</sup>Elendil is noted to have said, once cast upon the shores of Middle-earth, "Out of the Great Sea to Middle-earth I am come. In this place will I abide, and my heirs, unto the ending of the world" (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 194). It is by the Great River Anduin (cf. Nile River) that they establish a realm in those lands called Gondor and Arnor. However, while Egypt flourishes, it is prophesied for Gondor that if the White Tree should perish, then

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 32 section *The Life of the Númenóreans – Of Sports and Pastimes*, under *The Edain Reach Númenor* in *The Fall of Númenor*.

<sup>6</sup> See section 3320 – *Foundations of the Realms in Exile: Arnor and Gondor. The Stones are Divided. Sauron Returns to Mordor* in *The Fall of Númenor*.

also will the line of Kings come to its end. It is only with the return of Aragorn, do we see the White Tree blossom. The Anduin crosses most of Middle-earth, flowing from its source in the Misty Mountains to the Great Sea, and the Nile is considered the longest river in the world, flowing from northeastern Africa into the Mediterranean. It is also worth noting that one of the priests who confronts Solon, before relaying the story of Atlantis brags about the superiority of Egypt, claiming that,

““Those who live in the mountains or in high and dry places suffer more than those living by rivers or by the sea; as for us, the Nile, our own regular savior, is freed to preserve us in this emergency. When on the other hand the gods purge the earth with a deluge, the herdsmen and shepherds in the mountains escape, but those living in the cities in your part of the world are swept into the sea by the rivers; here water never falls on the land from above either then or at any other time, but rises up naturally from below. This is the reason why our traditions here are said to be the oldest preserved—in our temples we have preserved from earliest times a written record of any great or splendid achievement or notable event”” (Johansen, 2008, pp. 13).

Quite the diss, that. While it could be argued, that Mordor does bear desert-like qualities, it is still a location protected from three sides by mountainous ranges.<sup>7</sup> Sauron’s choice of Mordor was likely based on its geographic location. “It was enclosed within a naturally defensive, three-sided and roughly rectangular wall provided by two great mountain ranges” (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 115-116). Like the places mentioned by the priest of Sais, Mordor is a mountainous, dry place with largely unfertile landscapes and dark, poisonous water from the rivers.

<sup>8</sup>The formation of Númenor and Atlantis is also equally telling. “From the sea extending across the middle of the whole island there was a plain, said to be the most beautiful and fertile of all plains, and near the middle of this plain about fifty stades inland a hill of no great size—Poseidon was attracted by her (Cleito) and he fortified the hill where she lived by enclosing it with concentric rings, alternately of sea and land, and of varying sizes, two rings of land and three of sea, which from the centre of the island he turned as if with a lathe and chisel so that they were at every point equidistant from each other, thereby making the hill inaccessible to man” (Plato, Edited by Johansen, 2008, pp. 102). In a diagram,

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<sup>7</sup> See Section c. 1000 – *Sauron, Alarmed by the Growing Power of The Númenóreans, Chooses Mordor as a Land to make into a Stronghold. He Begins the Building of Barad-Dûr in The Fall of Númenor.*

<sup>8</sup> A PowerPoint version of this was first presented at the Tolkien’s Society at Oxonmoot 2023, at St. Anne’s College in Oxford on the 3rd of September 2023 as part of a Webinar Strand.

viewers can see that this city contains an Acropolis within the Central Island, the first inner water ring followed by a smaller ring-island then a middle water ring, and a larger ring-island and finally encompassed by an outer water ring. While different in scope to the formation of Númenor, it does bear a striking resemblance to Minas Tirith, with seven concentric tiers cut on the hill culminating in the Citadel at the summit, 700 feet above the plain below. The battlement atop the citadel is described as being like a mariner in a mountainous ship, with each level walled, holding a gate, and with each gate facing a different direction. The winding path through the city therefore passes through tunnels in this 'keel' five times. Contrast this however with the formation of Númenor, a<sup>9</sup>land that resembles

“a five-pointed star, with a central portion some two hundred and fifty miles across, north and south, and east and west—these promontories were named Forostar (Northlands), Andustar (Westlands), Hyarnustar (Southwestlands), Hyarrostar (Southeastlands), and Orrostar (Eastlands). The central portion was called Mittalmar (Inlands)” (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 14).

The star here bears a symbolic meaning to the men of Númenor and their descendants which I will explore a little later. Although star-shaped in form, the central portion of Númenor, which includes Mittalmar and Armenelos captures the most populous region in a circle. Indeed, we can see this circular union repeated not only in the layout of Atlantis but in Minas Tirith. The Gondorians drew from their ancestors, who certainly had an Atlantean formation- a perfect circular union.

“Like Plato,” says Charles Delattre in his article dubbed “Númenor and Atlantis: a legacy of writing”, “Tolkien makes Númenor in its infancy a perfect, unified world, as seen especially in the Description of Númenor, a short exposition of systematic geography which contributes to setting up a geometrically ordered space which reflects the balance and harmony of the island. Just as Plato took care to methodically describe an arithmetically organized earth, Tolkien reveals, behind the image of a mountainous island, an ideal and oriented space: Númenor takes the form of a five-pointed star, likely to be inscribed in a circle, the center of which is a point which rises from the promontories to culminate with the Meneltarma, the Pillar of Heaven. The central region, a terrestrial space therefore, bears the curious name of Mittalmar, which refers to the German Mittelmeer, "Mediterranean", but whose meaning Tolkien reverses by translating it by Inlands, the "Inner Lands". The center of the island therefore bears a name which Tolkien affirms, through his translation, the perfect

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 32, *Section The Geography of Númenor – Of the Shape of Númenor* in *The Fall of Númenor*.



adequacy with its referent while resorting, to construct it, to its opposite, as if he wanted to make the interior terrestrial space the reflection of a lake or a sea enclosed between the promontories, which recalls the description of the Critias where land and sea interpenetrate until they merge. This perfect and paradoxical space is not empty, it is occupied by a nature that is just as curious” (Delattre, 2007, pp. 305-306).

It is this circular unifying formation of the island, a marriage of land and sea that we see what the ideal state of men should be. This is best exemplified within the tale of Aldarion and Erendis (the mariner’s wife). Aldarion loves above all else, the sea and it is the main cause of disagreement between him and his father, Tar-Meneldur. More sea voyages follow, against the wishes of his father, and in between them, he founds the Guild of Venturers. Upon meeting Erendis, Aldarion does not pursue her until later on, as he continues to follow the mariner life he much loves. When he finally courts her, it is Erendis who avoids the union, for she does not want to share Aldarion with the sea. A custom of Númenórean women typically involved a strong disinclination towards the sea and Erendis, in particular, loved her own region of Emerië. Only after many years, they were engaged, but as husband and wife, they did not manage to reconcile their differences. It could also be inferred that this tale can be interpreted as a metaphor for the geography of ancient civilizations and of the two clashing natures of mankind-to go out in pursuit of adventure or to stay at home in their native-born land. “This is not to ignore that Atlantis has blessings that give it the *appearance* of a utopia. At first the Atlantids certainly appeared to be virtuous because of the divine element they had inherited from their founder. As the divine element dwindled, however, their ability to withstand the corrupting influence of their wealth weakened” (Johansen, 2008, pp. xxix).

The motif of sacred worship, so intrinsically grounded in Ancient civilizations, can best be exemplified through sacred animals. According to the Larousse World Mythology, “It undoubtedly corresponds to practices quite common among primitive peoples regarding animals: believing them to be endowed with certain specific powers, these early men went in healthy fear of them, and this, in the natural course of things, led to veneration” (Grimal 26). These are best exemplified through the falcon/eagle and the cat. In Egyptian mythology, the sun god Ra was depicted as a man with the head of a lanner falcon and shared characteristics with the sky-god Horus. The god Horus was also represented as a falcon or a human with a falcon head. Both Ra and Horus represented the living king of Egypt. Birds, including vultures, ibises, and owls, were a big part of Egyptian culture and religion. The culture-wide association of gods with birds is partially explained as people’s perception that birds could fly and therefore be closer to the gods. The sight of a falcon soaring overhead near the sun would have

been a particularly striking scene. The pharaoh was believed to be not merely a powerful ruler, but the embodiment of the god, Horus. The job of Horus was to protect Egyptians in their daily lives, just like the pharaoh. In recognition of Horus's important role, people would decorate their tombs with falcons. Under the recorded dates of Kings and Queens of Númenor, readers will notice the Eagle effigy throughout. In the Chapter, *The Natural Life of Númenor*, under the section *Of Birds*, we are told how the eagles were all were held sacred to Manwë, and were never molested nor shot (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 22).

Furthermore, whenever a king ascended the mountain of Meneltarma, Pillar of the Heavens, no bird ever came there, save only eagles, and if anyone approached the summit, at once three eagles would appear and alight upon the rocks near the western edge; but at the times of the Three Prayers they did not descend, remaining in the sky and hovering above the people. They were called the Witnesses of Manwë, and they were believed to be sent by him from Aman to keep watch upon the Holy Mountain and all upon the land. Like the falcon, the eagles come to symbolize divine kingship, as the king was the earthly representation of Horus.

Another animal that Ra was believed to have taken the form of was a cat. The Egyptians devoted great honor to cats and they were considered sacred, having a meaningful role since their food was kept safe from rodent infestations. Bast, or Bastet, as the name went through various incarnations, was an Egyptian goddess who originally had the role of protecting the Pharaohs, depicted as having a woman's body with a cat's head. Bastet was the daughter of Ra, the sun god and she had followed Ra during the day in his solar boat. The inhabitants of the lower Nile depicted Bastet as a savage, lion-headed deity. Along with her change in appearance, she was also transformed into a peaceful and approachable deity. Families soon began to invite cats inside their homes, thinking that they brought with them the spirit of Bastet. They worshipped these cats because they hunted mice, snakes, and other pests that ruined their crops and perishable goods. "Cults of animals were common in Egypt. Some animals were considered sacred, and gods were frequently depicted with animal heads. One of these was Bastet, shown as a cat or with a human body and cat head—In the Late Period the animal cults were largely revived and large necropolis or animal cemeteries testify to the popularity of this cult" (Grimal, 1965, pp. 28). Along with her most common traits, she was also thought of as the goddess of the sun, which she inherited from her father. According to some versions, the goddess Bastet is linked with Sekhmet, the lion goddess. This goddess was violent and bloodthirsty but was tamed becoming a gentle, domesticated cat goddess. In other versions, Bastet and Sekhmet were sisters and Ra's daughters.

In *Unfinished Tales*, Queen Berúthiel of Gondor, the wife of King Tarannon Falastur, was described as being followed by cats. Unlike Bast, who was a nurturer and protector of all households, she was noted as being “nefarious, solitary, and loveless”. Berúthiel was a Black Númenórean, who was possibly from an inland city that was located to the south of Umbar. Berúthiel loathed the sounds and smells of the sea. She also hated the house that Tarannon had built below Pelargir on arches that stood in the water of the mouths of the river Anduin. As a consequence, she lived in the King’s House in Osgiliath instead. Berúthiel hated all colors and elaborate adornments and wore only black and silver clothing. She lived in bare chambers in the house in Osgiliath but decorated its gardens with tormented sculptures beneath cypresses and yews. Berúthiel loathed cats, but they became attracted to her for that exact reason. They followed her around, and eventually, she took advantage of them by enslaving and torturing them for her amusement. By contrast, in Egypt, doing harm to any cat was an act of sacrilege. The author of such a violent act could be punished with death. Of the Cats that Berúthiel kept as her slaves: there were ten of them: nine black and one white. She trained them to go on evil errands throughout the night to spy on her enemies or to terrify them, in order to discover the dark secrets of Gondor so that she knew the things that men wished to keep hidden. Berúthiel was able to converse with her cats or read their memories. Her cats were infamous among the Gondorians. All were afraid of them, did not dare to touch them, and cursed whenever they saw them.

Berúthiel was eventually exiled from Gondor and King Tarannon abandoned her on a ship with her cats. “The ship was last seen flying past Umbar under a sickle moon, with a cat at the masthead and another as a figure-head on the prow” (*Unfinished Tales*, “The Istari [Notes]”). The so-called ship that Berúthiel was last seen in bears a resemblance to Bast, following Ra in his journey to the Underworld. Berúthiel seemed to wield unnatural powers of dominion over her cats, powers of which likely came from her black Númenórean heritage. From her, readers see the horrors of the desire to control and spy upon others. Despite the erasure of her name from the Book of the Kings, Berúthiel and her cats were so notorious that they were held in the memory of Gondorians for centuries; Aragorn alluded to them more than 2,000 years after her exile. One of the more important cats in the development of the legendarium was Tevildo, the Prince of Cats. Mentioned only in early writings of *The Book of Lost Tales*, Tevildo was a demonic servant of Melko, who would eventually be replaced by Sauron. He is the principal antagonist in *The Tale of Tinúviel*. It was even believed in Egyptian culture that if a cat ran through the fire, the fire would be put out. While they appeared dead in the flames, having helped their residents escape the fire, they returned to life-hence the popular saying “a cat has nine lives”. Tolkien, notably was not a fan of cats. When a cat-breeder asked permission to

use names from *The Lord of the Rings* for her cats, Tolkien replied to Allen & Unwin:

I fear that to me Siamese cats belong to the fauna of Mordor, but you need not tell the cat breeder that.

—J.R.R. Tolkien, Letter 219 (dated October 14, 1959)

When a fantasy writer sits down to create an imaginary world, they often tend to draw on all sorts of influences. This includes different cultures, histories, and ideas. All of which come together to create a Secondary World. Númenor is a kingdom that places value not only on its mariner-life style but its descent from a line of kings. For the Atlanteans, “this palace they proceeded to build at once in the place where the god and their ancestors had lived, and each successive king added to its beauties, doing his best to surpass his predecessors, until they had made a residence whose size and beauty were astonishing to see” (Johansen 104). This calls to mind how each Númenórean king contributed to their way of life, whether through the Guild of Venturers, maintaining their friendships with the Elves, or carrying on the legacy of the Trees of Valinor and each trying to surpass their predecessors, one generation after another. In Gondor though, tombs are made more splendid than the houses of the living, and kings count the old names of their descent dearer than the names of their sons. This musing on heraldry is no different from Egyptian culture. According to the Larousse World Mythology:

“Ancient Egypt is the country most famous for its cults of gods and the dead. This preoccupation is reflected in the number of temples, tombs, statues and other works of art connected in one way or another with the local religion. The Egyptians were the most devout of men, for the whole atmosphere of their life was imbued with the presence of the divine. Even in modern times most of their sacred monuments still stand in the valley of the Nile” (Grimal, 1965, pp. 25).

While Atlas, the founder of Atlantis, has a long and distinguished line of descendants, with eldest son succeeding eldest son and maintaining the succession unbroken for many generations and with their wealth growing greater than that of the previous dynasty (Johansen 103), the whole valley and delta of the Nile, from the Catacombs to the sea, was covered with temples, palaces, tombs, and pyramids. A relationship exists in stories of ancient civilizations that juxtaposes current rulers with the past. The past invades the present with images of the splendor of kings of men who came before. Kings who have long been dead show up in the present. In *The Return of the King*, we see this echoed when Pippin accompanies Gandalf to Minas Tirith,

He (Pippin) looked into a great hall, which had rows of tall pillars. There were monoliths of black marble, which rose to great capitals carved in many strange figures. Nothing of woven material was seen in that long solemn hall; but between the pillars stood tall images graven in cold stone. Suddenly Pippin was reminded of the Argonath, and awe fell on him, as he looked down that avenue of kings long dead (Tolkien, 1955, Chapter 1, Book Five, *Minas Tirith* pp. 28).

Readers can also see the Egyptian influence in the Argonath and in several places in *The Lord of the Rings*. According to Juliette Harrison, in her article “Lord of the Rings and the Real World Places That Inspired Gondor”,

“The two enormous statues of Isildur and Anárion known as the Argonath, which stand either side of the River Anduin and which the Fellowship of the Ring pass on their journey, are similar to the Colossi of Memnon. These are two colossal statues of Egyptian Pharaoh Amenhotep III in Egypt that used to stand in several feet of water when the Nile flooded every year, before the completion of the Aswan dam in 1970 stopped the annual floods.

Later, Frodo and Sam come across an ancient statue of an old Gondorian king in the border country of Ithilien, with his head knocked off and lying on the ground. This sounds a lot like the Younger Memnon statue of Ramesses II, known as Ozymandias by the ancient Greeks, which inspired the 19th century poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous poem about ruin and destruction” (Harrison, 2023, pp. 4-5)

It is in this interplay between space and time, geography and surroundings that is at the heart of both Egyptian and Atlantean civilization. And it is here, where we also find the connection between Egypt and Atlantis through a great procession of kings. All arguments aside, Ignatius Donnelly's direct response to the question, “What proofs have we that the Egyptians were a colony from Atlantis?” derives from what would be considered an aspect of Western Civilization.

“We find another proof of the descent of the Egyptians from Atlantis in their belief as to the ‘under-world.’ This land of the dead was situated in the West—hence the tombs were all placed, whenever possible, on the west bank of the Nile. The constant cry of the mourners as the funeral procession moved forward was, “To the west; to the west.” This under-world was *beyond the water*, hence the funeral procession always crossed a body of water—All this is very plain: the under-world in the West, the land of the dead, was Atlantis, the drowned world, the world beneath the horizon, beneath the sea” (Donnelly, 1882, pp. 360)

Although it's uncertain if the funeral procession included mournful cries of “*to the west*”, one thing remains, the Egyptians certainly did not regard the funeral as a final goodbye. Almost no Egyptian ritual was depicted as often or as richly as that of the funeral. This stark image invokes the customs held by the Gondorians in honor of Númenor. This is best exemplified in *The Window of the West*, in Book Four of *The Two Towers* when Faramir and his men turn and face west, looking towards Númenor. They also look beyond to Elvenhome and that

which lies beyond Elvenhome. Even after the downfall, it is asserted that “the hearts of the Dúnedain were still set westwards; and they said: ‘Avallónë has vanished from the Earth and the Land of Aman is taken away, and in this present world of darkness they can never be found again’” (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 191)<sup>10</sup>.

The soul of the dead man was supposed to journey to the underworld by a “water progress”. This is especially the case for the sun god Ra and his journey to the afterlife, crossing the skies on his sun boat. He and his vessel plunge into the sea waters towards the underworld. It was based on a universal tradition that under “an immense ocean” in the “far west” there was an “under-world”. There are plenty examples of this as seen in the *Horizon Book of Lost Worlds*. “It is easy to see why the Egyptians adored the sun as the giver of life and saw in its progress the pattern of life perpetually renewed. Every night Re (Ra) died in the west and every morning he was reborn in the east. It was doubtless for this reason that the Egyptians buried their dead in the west; indeed one of the names for the dead was the ‘Westerners’” (Davidson, 1962, pp. 46).

The Dúnedain are notably called the Númenóreans, Kings among Men. They carried their classification, their racial pride, most notably in their buildings, monuments, and right to rule. The crowns and scepters represented power and protection. They also set the king apart from everyone else and conveyed his authority, both secular and religious. A scepter or staff is one of the most ancient symbols of authority. “It is written that ‘the scepter was the chief mark of royalty in Númenor’ from the reign of the First King to that of the Twenty-Fifth King and that it was lost with Ar-Pharazôn at the Downfall” (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 10). Another way in which Tolkien likened Gondor to ancient Egypt was in terms of how the Crown of Gondor bore similarities to the crown of the Pharaohs of Egypt. <sup>11</sup>“I think the crown of Gondor (the S. Kingdom),” he admitted to Rhona Beare in the letter, “was very tall, like that of Egypt, but with wings attached, not set straight back but at an angle. The N. Kingdom had only a diadem the difference between the N. and S. kingdoms of Egypt.” Tolkien compares the struggle of the North- and South-kingdoms of the Dúnedain toward unity with the efforts of the Egyptian pharaohs to unite Upper and Lower Egypt at the end of the fourth millennium BC. This comparison was made explicit in the author’s conception of the double crown of his Reunited Kingdom, for which he made a sketch.

The crown of Egypt or the pschent was the double crown worn by rulers in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians generally referred to it as sekhemty, the Two Powerful Ones. It combined the White Hedjet Crown of Upper Egypt and the Red

<sup>10</sup> See the Chapter 3319 – *Ar-Pharazôn Assails Valinor. Downfall of Númenor. Elendil and His Sons Escape*.

<sup>11</sup> See Letter to Rhona Beare (14 October 1958) (corresponds to Letter 211, on page 281).

Deshret Crown of Lower Egypt. The Pschent represent the pharaoh's power over all of unified Egypt, much like the Crown of Gondor and the Sceptre of Annúminas represented the King's power over both Gondor and Arnor. The Crown of Gondor, on the other hand, was also called the winged crown, White Crown, and Silver Crown. It was the ceremonial headgear of the Kings of Gondor, and was used as a symbol of the Kingship. It is said that the original crown was a plain Númenórean war-helm. However a later crown replaced it. This was described as being tall, jewelled and a winged helm, not unlike the helms of the Guards of the Citadel, but taller and with wings resembling those of a sea-bird wrought of pearl and silver. Contrast this then with the Pschent which bore two animal emblems: an Egyptian cobra, known as the uraeus, ready to strike, which symbolized the Lower Egyptian goddess Wadjet; and an Egyptian vulture representing the Upper Egyptian goddess Nekhbet. These were fastened to the front of the Pschent and were called the Two Ladies-referring Upper and Lower Egypt (cf. Gondor and Arnor).

"From the outset of history the Egyptians held that the pharaoh was a superior being," claims the Larousse World Mythology, regarding the divine nature and descent of the pharaoh, "on a higher plane than that of ordinary mortals: to them, the pharaoh was the earthly embodiment of Horus, the god-king, and he was also the protector of the original tutelary goddesses of the kingdoms: Nekhbet, the vulture-goddess of Upper Egypt, and Uadjet (Edjo), the cobra-goddess of Lower Egypt" (Grimal, 1965, pp. 42). The divinity described here is something otherworldly, rising above the rank of mere mortals. One might go so far as to consider the pharaoh as a god-king or a king among men. One of the ways cultures conjure up this divinity is in their ceremony and elaborate lifestyle. The most obvious example for the Númenóreans is seen in the <sup>12</sup>ceremony of the king:

"Near to the centre of the Mittalmar stood the mountain called the Meneltarma, Pillar of the Heavens, sacred to the worship of Eru Ilúvatar...For the summit contained a great multitude; but it remained untouched by human hands. No building, no raised altar, ever stood there" (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 27-28).

Here the king must ascend the mountain on foot followed by a great concourse of people. It is this act of projection that is taken as a sign that the ruler's right to rule is divine, just as the Pharaoh of Egypt would've projected himself. Beholders can witness this projection through great stone statues, elaborate tombs for kings and gold-clad pharaohs. "For the Egyptians worshiped Pharaoh as a god," asserts Grimal in *The Horizon Book of Lost Worlds*, "as the

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 32 section *The Life of the Númenóreans – Of Belief and Worship*, under *The Edain Reach Númenor* in *The Fall of Númenor*.



link between earth and heaven and the focus around which their religion revolved. He was the living son of Re (Ra), and the incarnation of the divine falcon who ruled the heavens, the god Horus who is shown above protectively enfolding Pharaoh Chephren in his wings” (Grimal, 1965, pp. 57).

The idea of belief and worship is closely-linked to architecture and how the architecture embodies the spirit of that culture. Like the Egyptians, the Atlanteans had “an altar of a size and workmanship to match that of the building and a palace equally worthy of the greatness of the empire and the magnificence of its temples” (Johansen 105). Even Sauron himself, is guilty of such <sup>13</sup>hubris as seen when he builds a temple of sacrifice in Númenor and later his fortress of Barad-dûr.

“Sauron raised a mighty structure, a ‘vast fortress of great power ... which suffered no rival, and laughed at flattery, secure in its pride and immeasurable strength.’ Barad-dûr represented ‘the dreadful menace of the Power that waited, brooding in deep thought and sleepless malice’” (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 116-117).

This sleepless malice refers to the Eye of Sauron, ever watchful and wreathed in flame. “In all cultures, eyes are believed to have special powers and are said to be windows of the souls. So Tolkien’s description of the evil Eye of Sauron gives us considerable insight into the Dark Lord himself: ‘The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat’s, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing’ (Day, 2019, pp. 50). The evil eye was a widespread superstition throughout history, recorded in ancient Greek and Roman texts as well as many religious scriptures, by which an individual, often a sorcerer, has the power to injure or harm by means of a simple, baleful, glance. In Ancient Egyptian mythology, there is the Eye of Ra which is a being that functions as a feminine counterpart to the sun god Ra and a violent force that subdues his enemies. As farmers, the people relied heavily on the divine for everything. “The two principal religious cults which helped to shape Egypt’s culture throughout her long history,” maintains Marshall Davidson in the *Horizon Book of Lost Worlds*, “were those of Re (Ra), the sun god, and Osiris, god of death and resurrection. They originated independently, and there was never any logical connection between them, except that both can be taken to symbolize birth, death, and renewal. The sun is an omnipresent force in Egypt. Every day, in that hot, cloudless sky, the fiery disk is seen rising behind the eastern hills, arching across the valley, and descending below the rim of the western desert” (Davidson, 1962, pp. 46). As a sun god, Ra wielded the strength and dominance

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<sup>13</sup> See Section c. 1000 – *Sauron, Alarmed by the Growing Power of The Númenóreans, Chooses Mordor as a Land to make into a Stronghold. He Begins the Building of Barad-Dûr in The Fall of Númenor.*

of the Eye of Ra; an instrument of power and vengeance. The Eye is seen as an extension of Ra's great power, but at the same time she is entirely independent. She represents his femininity. Her power behaves as a self-ruling and all-knowing entity who is incarnate of the goddesses: Hathor, Sekhmet and Bastet. In the Larousse World Mythology:

“The eye of the sun-god, which at times adopted the shape of Tefnut, the lioness, became violently angry with its master. The goddess (the word ‘eye’ is feminine in Egyptian) seized the sun-god and withdrew to the depths of Nubia meaning to stay there. After argument Onuris (meaning ‘He who brings back the Distant One’) sought her and, having calmed her with promises, brought her back triumphantly to This, where the eye returned to its proper place. This legend illustrates at best the alternating phases of the moon; but, like the other myths quoted above, it has also been connected with the eye of Horus” (Grimal, 1965, pp. 38-39).

The eye's violent aspect defends Ra against agents of disorder that threaten his rule. In *The Lord of the Rings*, however, this symbol was adopted to show Sauron's unceasing vigilance piercing perception, and was displayed on the weaponry of his servants, mainly the orcs. The color of the Eye of Sauron is also notably compared to that of a cat's eye. As the sun, the Eye of Ra is a source of heat and light, and it is associated with fire and flames. She embodies enormous violence but it is this violence that protects Ra against anything that may threaten his rule. What is interesting in Tolkien's tale is the reverse perversion of such a concept – mainly how Sauron maintains vigilance against his enemies.

The Egyptians often referred to the sun and the moon as the “eyes” of particular gods. The right eye of the god Horus, for instance, was equated with the sun, and his left eye equated with the moon. At times the Egyptians called the lunar eye the “Eye of Horus” and called the solar eye the “Eye of Ra”—Ra being the preeminent sun god in ancient Egyptian religion. Both eyes were represented by the *wedjat* symbol, a stylized human eye with the facial markings of the falcon that signified Horus.

“Incidental reference has been made to the eye of Horus, which was plucked out and then restored on the order of a court to the gods. This is an example of a myth built round two themes that were originally quite separate: the theme of the solar eye and the theme of the eye of Horus—But the god of Heliopolis, associated with the sun, also possessed an eye, the eye of Re (Ra). This eye, which was initially the morning star, was subsequently connected with Osiris after he had been brought back to life by his son. It was not until later that the two forms of the eye were regarded as the sun on some occasions, on others as the moon” (Grimal, 1965, pp. 38).

This duality of Sun and Moon or Morning and Evening Star is also present in the Realms of Exile. Firstly, there is the Light of Valinor made visible in the Two Trees of Silver and Gold. These were slain by the Enemy out of malice, and Valinor was darkened, though from them were derived the lights of sun and moon. It is an image that is also echoed in the <sup>14</sup>twin cities, founded by the sons of Gondor, Isildur and Anárion:

“Minas Ithil, the Tower of the Rising Moon, eastward upon a shoulder of the Mountains as a threat to Mordor; and Minas Anor, the Tower of the Setting Sun. In Minas Ithil was the house of Isildur, and in Minas Anor the house of Anárion, but they shared the realm between them and their thrones were set side by side of Osgiliath” (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 196).

Sauron notably captures Minas Ithil, and renames it Minas Morgul. It eventually symbolizes his return and the coming of a Second Darkness over Middle-Earth. The sun’s emergence from the horizon each morning is likened to Ra’s birth, an event that revitalizes him and the order of the cosmos. In ancient Egypt, the Pharaoh was often referred to as the “Morning and Evening Star”. It’s not a standard expression, but it is understood. By saying someone will be the sun and the moon (which refer to the “morning and evening star”), is pretty much saying that someone is the most important person on earth with divine qualities. “I am Egypt. I am the morning and the evening star. I am the living god, the living Horus.” This fits nicely into Egyptian political mythology where Upper and Lower Egypt and their unification were often associated with the being of the Pharaoh - in his title as “King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the morning and the evening star,” both Venus and Sirius. Notably, Elendil whose name in Quenya has the meaning of ‘Star-lover’ (one who loves or studies the stars) from the words *elen* (‘star’) and *–(n)dil* (‘friend, lover or devotee’) with the additional interpretation of ‘Elf-friend’, a common appellation among those Edain who had close-friendship with the Eldar, from *Eled* (‘star-folk’) in referencing the Elves” (Tolkien 51) carries a sword that shines “with the light of the sun and of the moon, and it was named Narsil” (Tolkien, 2022, pp. 207). Other ancient cultures likened their rulers to Venus.

Western civilization traces its roots back to Europe and the Mediterranean. It refers to the art, culture, and enduring ideas that emerged from the eastern Mediterranean basin in the centuries before the Common Era. The expansion of Greek culture into the Hellenistic world of the eastern Mediterranean led to a synthesis between Greek and Near-Eastern cultures. The Near-Eastern civilizations of Ancient Egypt, which came under Greek rule, became part of the

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<sup>14</sup> See section 3320 – *Foundations of the Realms in Exile: Arnor and Gondor in The Fall of Númenor*.

Hellenistic world. Indeed, in the case of *The Fall of Númenor*, far from being constructed in opposition to Greco-Roman culture, Tolkien's fiction explicitly feeds on its references by combining them with the medieval Anglo-Saxon world. Despite its minor importance in Plato's work, the Atlantis story has had a considerable impact on literature. Myth or not, Plato certainly was aware of the power of stories. The allegorical aspect of Atlantis was thus taken up by writers and theorists alike. Even if Ignatius Donnelly's hypothetical fringe theory seems far-fetched, it was still a concept that Tolkien would've been aware of in the Nineteenth Century. The myth of Atlantis certainly had an impact on him. His fascination with his island creation and its eventual fate owed its origin, in part, to a recurring nightmare that began in early childhood and continued into adult life. This recurring dream about a great wave—which he gave to Faramir as a sort of ancestral memory of the destruction of Númenor speaks to a greater desire of fighting for one's homeland—*loving that which the sword defends as opposed to it sharpness*—and honoring one's ancestors. In Tolkien's case, it refers to national identity, patriotism, and saving Great Britain from the brink of global warfare. In the late nineteenth century there was indeed a wave of nationalism that swept across Britain and Europe, concerning a heightened consciousness of national identity. These nineteenth century nationalists often used myths and folklore as a way of acquainting their people with a sense of unity and a historical past. For the Germans, they placed value on the Grimm's fairy tales, for the French, Charles Perrault, but for Britain the specific national agenda involved a potential homogenization of British culture (consisting of Arthurian myths, the Celtic past, and Greco-Roman influence), to promote and celebrate the empire. Tolkien was noted to have said, "I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country. It had no stories of its own ... not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands". This growing concern for national identity was partly a reaction to industrialization, and as a participant of the nineteenth century Tolkien certainly was a byproduct of his times, responding to issues such as industrialization and a concern for national identity. He's speaking of a need to remember an ancient civilization—his ancestry—from the brink of collapse. "He (Tolkien) appears to have believed that this ('Atlantis complex,' which took the form of a 'terrible recurrent dream of the Great Wave) was some kind of racial memory of the ancient catastrophe of the sinking of Atlantis,'" (Day 19). Tolkien felt rather than knew a deep association between the green fields here, the power of the sea to take things away, and the incomprehensible personal loss that followed. Certainly, to a Post-Modern reader, familiar with one of the deadliest global conflicts, one can sympathize. One of the things societies often do when faced with these conflicts is react. They react against by drawing on tradition, making very visible symbols of identity.

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